"Incorrigible enemies of Soviet power"

Polish Citizens in the Soviet Union, 1939-1942, in the light of Soviet documents and Polish witness' testimonies

by

Maciek Janicki

Department of History

McGill University, Montréal

June, 2007

A thesis submitted to McGill University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-38453-4
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-38453-4

Abstract

Between February 1940 and June1941, in four major deportations Soviet authorities moved Polish citizens to work-colonies in the Soviet interior and detained others in various prisons and camps. Based on war-time information, works on the deportations published in the West during the decades of communist rule in Eastern Europe and since reported figures of over 1.5 million deportees, of whom as many as half reportedly died in the USSR. These works held a prevailing view that Soviet intentions towards the deported Poles were genocidal. Recent work with Soviet archival materials has led Polish and Russian historians to revise the number of deportees to 320,000. This substantial reduction has received a mitigated response in the work of Western commentators. A review of published archival materials and of accounts left by witnesses demonstrates that both sets of sources are indispensable to an analysis of the deportations. It also shows that Soviet policies directed against the deportees were not genocidal in their intent and adds a dimension, that of the perpetrators, to the limited conceptualization afforded to the subject thus far. The study shows that under the control of the NKVD the deportations were economic and political components of internal Soviet policy in 1939-1942 and suggests that the Soviet infrastructure was incapable of supplying the resources necessary to fulfill plans set by Moscow. Moreover, the Soviet documentation offers a glimpse into the perpetrators' planning and execution of massive population displacement, thus taking the deportations outside of the realm of conjecture and placing them more firmly within the grasp of historical understanding.

Résumé

Entre février 1940 et juin 1941 les autorités soviétiques déplacèrent des citoyens polonais dans des colonies de travaux forcés à l'aide de quatre déportations majeures et placèrent d'autres en états d'incarcération variés. Se basant sur des chiffres datant de la seconde guerre mondiale les travaux qui traitaient sur les déportations rédigés en Occident durant les années communistes en Europe de l'est et depuis, citaient jusqu'à 1.5 millions de déportés, comptant des taux de mortalité qui auraient atteint 50%, et soutenaient que les intentions soviétiques envers les dépotrtés Polonais étaient génocidaires. Depuis l'ouverture des archives soviétiques les chercheurs russes et polonais ont révisé le nombre des déportés à 320,000. Les réactions des historiens occidentaux à cette réduction marquée ont été mitigées. Un survol des matériaux d'archives publiés ainsi que des témoignages de survivants révèle que ces deux sources d'information sont indispensables à une analyse des déportations. Une telle analyse démontre que les intentions soviétiques envers les déportés n'étaient pas génocidaires et amène une nouvelle dimension, celle des auteurs du crime, à la conceptualisation limitée à laquelle le sujet a eu droit jusqu'à présent. L'étude démontre que sous le contrôle du NKVD les déportations faisaient partie des stratégies économique et politique internes soviétiques en 1939-1942 et suggère que l'infrastructure de l'état était incapable de subvenir aux directives de Moscou. De plus, la documentation soviétique offre une vue d'intérieur de la planification et l'exécution de grandes opérations de déplacement de population et en ce faisant sort les déportations du domaine de la spéculation et les place plus résolument à la portée d'une compréhension proprement historique.

Table of contents

Preface

When I began research on this project my knowledge of the deportations of Polish citizens into the USSR was limited. My first encounter with the subject came years ago in the concluding remarks to an excellent historical novel. Kontra, by Jozef Mackiewicz, fictionalized the nonetheless very real story of Cossacks who had fought against the Red Army at the side of German forces and had later fled to Austria where they surrendered to the British. In a covert operation, the details of which are still sketchy, they were then handed over to the NKVD.[1] At the end of the book, Mackiewicz listed various Soviet crimes against humanity and talked of 1 million Polish deportees taken into the GULag by the NKVD. That I still remember looking at that page, at least a decade since, is eloquent proof that the figure carries an arresting quality. Over time, I was always aware that the deportations had taken place, but they were a very sketchy concept. A clearer picture emerged for me when PBS aired a 2001 British-produced documentary on the deportations titled "A Forgotten Odyssey." Through interviews with survivors, the film recounted the conditions of their deportation and exile. The film's aim was more commemorative than it was analytical and the production company's website still introduces us to the story

[1] The participation of a junior British officer in this repatriation was very publically denounced in 1987 by a British writer of Russian descent and led to years of litigation between the two. See: Ian Mitchell, The Cost of a Reputation: Aldington versus Tolstoy, The causes, course and consequences of the notorious libel case (London: Topical Books, 1996).

with a figure of 1.7 million deportees.[2] As an audio-visual record of witness' testimonies, the film is quite valuable, indeed. At this point I knew nothing about the recent finds of Polish and Russian researchers.

When I began to research the literature on the deportations, likely because of previous work on various aspects of genocide, what interested me most of all were the practical difficulties I imagined such a vast operation must have presented for the Soviet authorities. That is not to say that I disregarded the victims, but it always seemed to me that there was something quite abstract about the deportations when viewed solely through the eyes of the victims. As I suspect is the case with anyone who has not experienced such things first-hand, I found it impossible to grasp or visualize the reality of such events. I wanted to find out how such a thing is done, concretely, on the ground. Because when one stops to think about it, how do you forcibly move hundreds of thousands of people in a few months? How many and what kind of people and resources must be involved in effecting this? How cynical were the planning stages to an operation that would rip people from their homes, put them on cattle-trains and send them into forced-labour? My gut feeling was that if I was able to get at even approximate answers to these questions I could present a history of the deportations that would be more concretely tangible than that which the descriptions of suffering I had come across in the past were able to convey on their own. The sheer volume of published archival materials that I found and the quality of the conscientious

---

[2] Website at: <www.aforgottenodyssey.c#30A4F02> Accessed 15 June 2007.

work of historians working in the post-Soviet archives, which has reduced the earlier estimates of the numbers of deportees at least three-fold, greatly surpassed my expectations. I can only hope that I have used their work and the materials they have uncovered to good effect.

Having been born in communist Poland and having lived our own "exodus" to Canada years ago I was certainly well-schooled in Polish martyrology. Indeed, so much so that for quite some time I developed an aversion to researching Polish history because of the very romanticized quality of Polish national remembrance. I was, after all, studying to be an investigative historian, not a commemorator. Having now become conscious of the quality of the ever-expanding body of available materials on the period that saw the beginnings of communist rule in Eastern Europe has cured me of that aversion. And, on a very personal note, has, I think, at long last reconciled me with leaving. I can now historicize the event.

I would like to extend my thanks, first and foremost, to my thesis supervisor, Prof. Valentin Boss, whose patient tutelage, keen suggestions and moral support have helped me to steer this project to a fruitful completion. I also need to thank the staff of the McGill University Library's Inter-Library Loans office who helped me to secure sometimes elusive materials. Invaluable help in my research was provided by Mr. Stefan Wladysiuk, head librarian at the Polish Library of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences at McGill whose intimate knowledge of the Library's holdings helped me to locate some of the most

important materials that I used in this study. Many thanks must be reserved for the staff of the History Department at McGill with the particular mention of Karen Connors and Colleen Parish, whose advice guided me through many regulations and whose steady support in times of doubt I deeply appreciate. I also thank all friends and my sister, Monika, who gave me constant encouragement during the sometimes difficult process of research and writing. I also need to acknowledge Claudia Hurtubise, whose strength, perseverance and integrity taught me much. Finally and most of all I thank my parents, Wlodzimierz and Barbara, for having had the courage to pack their lives and their son into a small car twenty-six years ago and begin life elsewhere so that we could live in freedom. I dedicate this work to them.

Introduction

On 17 September 1939, in collaboration with the Nazi government of Germany, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east. The Soviet government declared that Poland had ceased to exist and, two weeks later, that Poland's eastern territories were part of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Between February 1940 and June 1941, in four massive operations, the Soviet authorities, employing the National Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del - NKVD), the Red Army and local Communist Party members, deported tens of thousands of people from those territories into the Soviet interior where they were exiled into various labour settlements supervised by the Main Administration of corrective-labour Camps (Glavnoye Upravlennye ispravitelno-trudovikh Lagerei - GULag) NKVD. All Polish citizens, including those who had been arrested outside of the scope of the deportations, were, at least in theory, subsequently amnestied by the Soviet government after Germany's attack on the USSR.

The deportations have long been a subject of grievance for Poles and, as such, have secured an iconic place in both *émigré* and post-Communist Polish historical writing and in the Polish national consciousness.[3] Since the earliest

[3] As one commentator has pointed out, there are fourteen different words or expressions meaning "forced migration" in the Polish language, though it has to be taken into account that eastward deportations had already been practised against Poles by Tsarist Russia. See: Dariusz Stola, "Forced Migration in Central European History," International Migration Review 1992 26(2): 327.

reports published in the West,[4] the body of work concerned with the subject has focused largely on the brutal conditions under which the deportations and subsequent exile took place, on the massive numbers of those deported and on speculatively high death-tolls among the deportees as proof of an attempt by the Soviet government to exterminate a substantial part of Polish society. Many commentators have termed the Soviet actions genocidal.

Until Soviet-era archives were opened to researchers in the late 1980's, the estimates for the number of people deported in the operations cited in the literature were rarely lower than 1 million. Even fairly recent work has cited figures as high as 1,750,000.[5] Given that Soviet figures indicated that 389,041 former Polish citizens were covered by the amnesty decree of 12 August 1941,[6] estimates for the number of Polish citizens who died as a direct result of their deportation ranged as high as 900,000.[7]

However, information which lay in former Soviet archives and which has been mined by Russian and Polish historians, now, for well over a decade, and the results of which have been made increasingly available to the public in recent years, show that the historiography of the deportations, especially in Western Europe and North America, has relied far too readily on figures compiled by

---

[4] See: "Documents relating to the Administration of Occupied Territories in Eastern Europe: The Soviet Occupation of Poland," (New York: Polish Information Center, 1941)
[5] See, for ex.: Alexandra Viatteau, Staline assassine la Pologne: 1939-1947 (Paris: Seuil, 1999)
[6] "Information on the numbers of former Polish citizens," 1 May 1944. In: Wojciech Materski, ed., Konflikty Polsko-Sowieckie: 1942-1944 (Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1993), 169.
[7] Examples cited in: Stanislaw Ciesieslki et al., Raport: Represje Sowieckie wobec Polakow i Obywateli Polskich (Warsaw: Osrodek KARTA, 2002), 19.

Polish war-time authorities in exile, on survivors' testimonies and on conjecture in its assessment of the deportations. This reliance has led to important numerical exaggerations of the human toll of Soviet actions directed against Polish citizens and has led prominent historians of the period toward flawed conclusions about the goals of the Soviet authorities in conducting the deportations. The contributions of these historians cannot be discounted wholesale, however, because they have rightly called into question the otherwise overlooked moral implications of the Western Powers' war-time alliance with the Soviet Union – it is a questioning that has not found a place in Western historical writing on the Second World War. Notwithstanding its flaws and lacunae, this historiography served to maintain the memory of what was an egregious example of criminal contempt for human rights.

Contrary to how some historians and members of the Polish public have reacted to the newly available data,[8] a downward revision of the figures of Polish casualties of Soviet repression does not impinge on the memory of the victims, nor does it alleviate the moral responsibility that can rightfully be assigned to past Soviet leaders. On the contrary, the more accurate a picture of past crimes against humanity that we are able to present, the more veridically the memory of the victims can be sustained and the more judiciously responsibility for their suffering can be assigned. To accurately present the causes, motivations, circumstances and consequences of the perpetrators' actions serves not only to

[8] See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport.

further historical understanding, but also can contribute to identify and to prevent similar present and future crimes.

The aim of this thesis will be to take account of available published archival materials and to examine the information they contain in the light of the witness testimonies that have in the past served as the substantial base for histories of the deportations. Aside from an attempt to present a clearer picture of the subject than has been done to date outside of Poland, I hope to highlight several problems inherent in an over-reliance on witness testimonies as sources of historical knowledge. I also aim to show that a documentary source-based treatment of the deportations and their consequences for the deportees serves as a case study in the inability of the Soviet infrastructure of the early 1940's to fulfill the goals set by central Soviet authorities. As well, it exposes the important extent to which the NKVD functioned not only as an organ of political policing, but also played an essential role in the implementation of central Soviet economic planning. The witness' testimonies, in turn, demonstrate that the course and consequences of NKVD operations were often quite removed from the plans and reports found in the documentation. Discrepancies between the two sets of sources imply that, notwithstanding central NKVD directives, the varied behaviour of low-level functionaries, deportation personnel and local NKVD agents had pivotal implications for the deportees' relative quality of life in exile and for their chances of survival.

Based on my interpretaion of the evidence, I argue that Soviet intentions towards the Poles were not genocidal, but were a practical demonstration of the conflation of the political and economic spheres that was inherent in Soviet Communism and was so with particular intensity under the rule of Joseph Stalin. The deportations aimed both to neutralize real and, in the eyes of Soviet authorities, potential enemies of Soviet power and to supply the Soviet war economy with what amounted to slave labour. That the deportees suffered physical and emotional trauma and that many died is indisputable. I stress that aside from analytical considerations, this paper is clearly a study in tragic social engineering and in the unyielding willingness of Joseph Stalin's administration to inflict suffering on its subjects in order to attain ideological goals.

1. Background

Poland and Polish foreign relations to 17 September 1939

Poland had once been a territorial, political and economic force in Central Europe. But, weakened by internal power struggles between the crown and the landed nobility, by the second half of the eighteenth century it had become easy prey for the Prussian, the Hapsburg and the Russian Empires. In three successive partitions, the three powers erased Poland as a political entity.

It was only after the fall of the three partitioning empires in the First World War that Poland regained its independence at Versailles as the Second Republic, although the borders established for it then were quite different and more easterly than they are today. In terms of present-day borders, the Poland of 1918-1939 covered, roughly, the eastern half of Poland and the western halves of Ukraine and Belorussia. Although inter-war Poland was nominally a democracy, the political scene was dominated by Josef Pilsudski, leader of the National Democratic Party, *de faco* dictator and head of the armed forces. Pilsudski was a staunch anti-communist and a Russophobe. For Pilsudski's government, ensuring Polish dominance in the Eastern territories became a political and military priority, especially given that ethnic Poles made-up only about a third of the population in those territories.

Pilsudski's political clout had been secured when he led the Polish Army to a victory over the Red Army in the Polish-Soviet War fought in 1920-1921. The Soviet forces had advanced as far as Warsaw, but Pilsudski's army turned

the tide and on 20 March 1921 Poland and the USSR signed the treaty of Riga, which guaranteed Poland's eastern border.[9] In the following years, Pilsudski aimed to stabilize Poland's situation and repeatedly approached Poland's neighbors with offers of non-aggression treaties. After many negotiations, a Polish-Soviet non-aggression treaty was signed in June 1932, and a parallel German-Polish pact in January 1934.[10] Pilsudski died in 1935, but his successors pursued similar policies.

Perhaps ironically, for years Poland's relations were better with the USSR than they were with the rest of Europe. By the end of the decade Poland had become quite isolated, and it was only after Germany occupied Prague in March 1939, that Great Britain and France signed mutual-assistance treaties with Poland. The spring of 1939 saw a gradual Soviet-German *rapprochement*, and by the end of June 1939 Germany's Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, informed Soviet representatives in Berlin that "Germany [could] come to an understanding with Russia as to the fate of Poland."[11] That understanding was sealed on 23 August 1939 by von Ribbentrop and the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov when they signed a treaty of non-aggression between the two powers. The treaty contained a secret protocol composed of three articles that dealt with territorial questions of interest to both

---

[9] Pilsudski had also fought against Ukrainian and Lithuanian forces in his pursuit of eastern territories.

[10] For a detailed treatment of inter-war Polish politics and foreign relations, see: "Czesc 1: 1918-1939" in: Andrzej Albert, Najnowsza Historia Polski, 1918-1980 4th ed. (London: Wydawnictwo Puls, 1991).

[11] Albert, Historia Polski, 270.

parties. Article II stated that "in the event of a political and territorial re-arrangement of areas belonging to the Polish state"[12] the contracting parties agreed on a frontier line and resolved to settle any disputes between them by means of friendly agreements and agreed that the maintenance of an independent Polish state could "only definitely be determined in the course of further political developments."[13] On 1 September 1939 Germany declared war on Poland under the pretext of a Polish attack on German border positions. The Polish forces were vastly overmatched. By mid-September the German forces were clearly winning, and many Polish units began a planned southerly retreat towards Hungary and Rumania, where they expected to receive Allied materiel.[14]

At 3AM on 17 September Moscow's Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs handed Poland's ambassador to Moscow, Waclaw Grzybowski, a note informing the Polish government that the Red Army was about to cross the Polish border in order to protect the Ukrainian and Belorussian populations from the chaos that resulted from the fall of the Polish government in Warsaw.[15] The Polish government was reconstituted in exile, in London, under the former Speaker of the Senate, now President, Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz who named General Wladyslaw Sikorski as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief.[16]

---

[12] Albert, Historia Polski, 272.
[13] Albert, Historia Polski, 273.
[14] Krzysztof Jasiewicz, et al., Okupacja Sowiecka (1939-1941) W Swietle Tajnych Dokumentow (Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1996), 11.
[15] Polish Embassy in Washington, Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1939: Official Documents (Washington: s.n., 1943), 95-96.
[16] The Polish Government in Exile functioned, nominally, until 1990, when it ceremonially handed over its power to the first post-communist government in Warsaw.

Poland's Eastern territories on 17 September 1939

Poland's eastern territories were part of Poland by virtue of Josef Pilsudski's military conquests. The plan proposed at Versailles for Poland's eastern border was based on the Curzon Line, which was, roughly, contiguous with the eastern border of present-day Poland. The borders agreed upon by Poland and the USSR in the treaty of Riga in March 1921 set the border approximately 200km east of the Curzon Line. This is not to say that Poland could not lay a measure of legitimate claim to the territories. On the 201,000 km^2 (approximately two-thirds the size of present-day Poland) of Polish territory occupied by the Soviet Union the population stood at 13,199,000, of whom 5,274,000 were ethnic Poles.[17] There were 4,529,000 ethnic Ukrainians, just over a million each of Jews and Belorussians, and the remainder were Germans, Russians, Lithuanians, Czechs and an Orthodox peasantry who referred to themselves as "locals" and had little interest in nationality.[18]

In the words of one historian, economically and culturally, it was the "backward half of a backward country."[19] 81% of the population was rural. Two-thirds of existing buildings had no plumbing or electricity. Illiteracy ran at an average of 25%, going as high as 50% in some areas.[20] The Polish administration

---

[17] Piotr Eberhardt, Polska Granica Wschodnia, 1939-1945 (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1993), 26.
[18] Eberhardt, Granica Wschodnia, 49.
[19] Jan T. Gross, Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia, 2nd ed. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press: 2002), 3.
[20] Gross, Revolution, 5.

discriminated against minorities,[21] and there was resentment, particularily in the rural regions, among the Ukrainian and Belorussian populations because Pilsudski's government had pursued a policy of settlement under which veterans of the Polish-Soviet war, as well as some civilians, were granted land, or were allowed to buy state-owned land at preferential prices in the Eastern territories. Even among a salient poverty, the Jewish population was conspicuously poor.[22]

However, urban centers such as Lwow, Bialystok and Wilno led a decidedly pluralist socio-cultural life as evidenced by the linguistic diversity and the varying political inclinations of periodicals published in the main cities.[23] In short, eastern Poland was generally poor and the Polish administration was not overly well-disposed towards its non-Polish citizens, but the towns and cities were nevertheless at least embryonic hubs of cosmopolitan and pluralist tendencies. From a Communist perspective, eastern Poland was a prime example of decadent bourgeois administration. For the Soviet Union, the area presented a strategic opening on Europe, in particular on Germany, and the ideological justifications for its Sovietization were readily available.

---

[21] Jews, in particular, were excluded from the civil service, the army and school-teaching; they also paid higher taxes than did Poles and were ineligible for unemployment benefits. See: Peter D. Stachura, Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 88.

[22] Gross, Revolution, 6.

[23] Gross, Revolution, 6-8.

The Soviet Invasion

When the Red Army crossed into Poland on 17 September 1939, it met with minimal resistance. The bulk of Poland's army had either gone underground or were still fighting German units to the west. By the evening of the 17th, the head of Poland's military, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, ordered a full retreat south towards Hungary and Rumania. By this time, however, Polish communication lines were so badly broken that many unit commanders acted on their own.[24] The following two weeks saw something resembling civil war in the eastern-Polish territories. Polish units fought against the Red Army and against Ukrainian partisans.[25] The Polish border patrol turned to partisan attacks on Soviet units. Some Polish troops retaliated violently against civilians who welcomed the Red Army. These retaliatory actions, which were often brutal, were joined by Polish volunteers from various towns and villages, thus adding to an atmosphere of fratricidal war between former neighbours. [26]

According to Jan T. Gross, Polish charges of overt communist sympathies on the part of the Ukrainians, Belorussians and Jews grossly misconstrued the motivations of those groups. Many Ukrainians and Belorussians welcomed the Soviets as emancipators,[27] while Jews saw the Red Army as a protective force

---

[24] Wladyslaw Anders, An Army in Exile, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1949), 5-6.
[25] There were nearly half a million Polish troops in the eastern territories at the time of the Soviet invasion, although some had started to retreat south, and some had been demobilised as early as the day following the invasion. See: Jasiewicz et al., Okupacja Sowiecka, 12.
[26] Gross, Revolution, 19-21.
[27] Gross, Revolution, 25.

before the German danger, especially since some localities had already experienced a short but repressive German occupation. Jews also welcomed a respite from the prevailing chaos because some Polish army units as well as civilian militias had instigated pogroms.[28] Polish citizens who were not ethnic Poles of Roman-Catholic denomination were not withouit legitimate greivances against the governemnt of the Second Republic.[29]

But reactions to the new authorities varied widely and cut across ethnic lines. For the civilian population, as well as for local administrators, the resulting confusion was compounded by the ambiguity of the Red Army's intentions. Some units marched into towns preceded by bands playing Polish patriotic songs.[30] Gross also points to a generational divide on either side of which the young were generally better-inclined towards the Soviet occupiers, while the older segments treated the new arrivals with suspicion, if not outright terror. Those who had fought in the Polish-Soviet war were especially apprehensive of Soviet revanchism.[31] Certainly, the realities of Soviet collectivisation just across the border were not a secret in the area and many peasants hid their stocks and grain; by the spring of 1940 rumours of impending collectivisation prompted mass-killings of cattle among the peasantry.[32] Many people fled towards

---

[28] Gross, Revolution, 31-32.
[29] Wojciech Sleszynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 1939-1941: Propaganda i Indoktrynacja (Bialystok: Agencja Wydawnicza Benkowski; Bialostockie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2001), 55.
[30] Gross, Revolution, 22.
[31] Gross, Revolution, 33-35.
[32] BSSR NKVD Report No. 01011, "Special information on the mass killing of cattle in the Stolpeck region." In: Jasiewicz, et al., Okupacja Sowiecka, 107.

German-occupied Poland. Others who expected that their inter-war station within the Polish administration would now put them in danger attempted inconspicuously to move, at least temporarily, to other towns or villages.[33]

The atmosphere of civil war and fear was localized, however. In some localities the Red Army was greeted by civic authorities.[34] According to varied witness testimonies reported by Gross, the warm welcome was sometimes genuine, sometimes staged out of fear and sometimes well-prepared.[35] In one account, the departing Germans, who had briefly occupied the southern regions around Lwow, instructed the local population to greet the coming Red Army with triumphal arches and flowers.[36] Although there is no reason to doubt that some of the manifestations of warm welcome were quite genuine, the ceremonial character of the Red Army's entry into many towns had been organized by covert NKVD units.[37]

It is quite possible that the general confusion was a consequence that Soviet authorities had planned or, at least, hoped for, as it greatly facilitated the quick and relatively easy takeover.[38] Most of the civilian population likely

---

[33] Zbigniew Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka Wladza (1939-1942) (London: Polish Cultural foundation, 2001), 16-21.
[34] Account of Witold T. In: Jan T. Gross, War through Children's Eyes: The Soviet occupation of Poland and the deportations, 1939-1941 (Stanford California: The Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1981), 194.
[35] Jasiewicz, et al., Okupacja Sowiecka, 15.
[36] Gross, Revolution, 30.
[37] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 49-50.
[38] On 4 November 1939, the Lwow Polish-language Communist daily Czerwony Sztandar [Red Banner] reported that Molotov claimed only 737 dead and 1,862 wounded Red Army soldiers in the two-week campaign. See: Gross, Revolution, 17.

welcomed stability, no matter who was at its source.[39] An additional element in the often peaceful and sometimes festive entry was that 17 September was a Sunday and most people, especially in smaller towns and in villages, were assembled at churches and dressed in their Sunday's best.[40]

The initial impression that the arriving Red Army made on the population was not that of an organized occupying force. It seems as well that regular Red Army soldiers were unclear as to their own purpose. They carried large amounts of cash, possibly to distribute to the local population.[41] They could also be violent, just as elsewhere they were calming; they incited violence here, prevented it there. Some even warned people about the coming regime.[42] The overall impression that comes through in witness testimonies is that of a bedraggled, ill-fed, ill-clad and ill-equipped army.[43] In conversations with the population the phrase most often heard then was that in the Soviet Union there was "plenty of everything,"[44] although they spoke with the local population only minimally, earning themselves the nickname of "the silent army."[45] Yet the striking contrast between word and deed was that they bought up consumer goods *en masse*. Watches were especially prized, but really anything and everything seems to have been an attraction, especially food such as pastries and

---

[39] Gross, Revolution, 20.
[40] Gross, Revolution, 28-30.
[41] Gross, Revolution, 28.
[42] Gross, Revolution, 40-42.
[43] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 297.
[44] Gross, Revolution, 29.
[45] Gross, Revolution, 45.

sausage. Many testimonies report that bicycles elicited particular interest.[46] A glimpse of life outside the Soviet Union evidently made an effect on the soldiers.[47]

These were people who were simply awed by the most common of consumer goods. Their obvious hunger, both physical and material, coupled with their un-washed and obviously poor appearance (some didn't have boots, but rags, on their feet) was summed-up in the testimony of a 10-year old Polish boy who called them, simply, "pitiful."[48] One commentator has argued that the image of Soviet citizens presented in witness' testimonies was, at least in some measure, coloured by the Poles' psychological need to substantiate their resistance to Sovietization.[49] But Polish communists, too, shared similar assessments and were bitterly disappointed by the materialistically voracious attitude of the occupying army which they had expected to be the vanguard of socialist thought and action.[50] This was not the view taken by the local Polish communist newspaper Nowe Widnokregi [New Vistas] which in January 1941 described the awe that the arriving force had inspired in the people.[51]

---

[46] Account of Antoni D. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 109.
[47] Gross states that a high desertion rate prompted a decree banning the sale of civilian clothes to regular Red Army soldiers, but does not cite the document. See: Gross, Revolution, 49.
[48] Account of Stanislaw H. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 68.
[49] See: Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 305.
[50] Interview with Celina Koninska, winter 1980. Cited in: Gross, Revolution, 50.
[51] Gross, Revolution, 49-50.

The Soviet administration of the occupied territories

The first steps towards Sovietization brought sudden, but relatively small-scale changes. High-ranking officials were removed from their posts, but most of the mid- and low-level personnel were left in place until replacements arrived from the Soviet interior.[52] At the village level, where local administration was governed by councils, the councilors were replaced outright[53] and council elections were organized and closely supervised by Soviet personnel to ensure that Soviet-sponsored candidates were elected.[54]

The new authorities encouraged the formation of citizen militias to maintain order immediately after the invasion. However, they added to these militias former criminal prisoners whom they had released from prisons with the likely aim of terrorizing the general population. The Red Army also overtly sanctioned intra-civilian revenge. Referring to Polish landowners, a Soviet commander reportedly declared to "do with them as you will" [55] to an assembled militia. While at first the Soviet administration used in this manner those who had already mobilised and those who stepped forward to volunteer, these groups were later purged.[56]

---

[52] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 55.
[53] Gross, Revolution, 51.
[54] Gross, Revolution, 54-55.
[55] Gross, Revolution, 36.
[56] Gross, Revolution, 51-52.

The Soviet authorities overtly encouraged the rural population to appropriate land from churches and from larger land-owners,[57] but given the general conservatism of the countryside, the response was not overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The lukewarm reactions were at first countered with propaganda and, when that failed to rouse the revolutionary spirit, outright threats of arrest were leveled against those who failed to participate in the appropriation of land.[58] In the rural districts, the Soviet authorities seemed to favour particularily the poorest segments of the population as well as common criminals whom they had released from jail.[59]

After a short initial period of calm after the invasion, the new authorities slowly began to replace the prevailing social system with the Soviet model. But the methods and manners of implementation varied. In the cities, high-level administrators, clergy, policemen and school principals were the first to be arrested. Witnesses reported instances of random street round-ups in which those whose hands bore no evidence of wear from manual labour (whom the Soviets derided as Beloruchki [white hands]) were singled out for particularily harsh treatment.[60] Children were expected to work from the age of 16 and those who did not risked being put in corrective-labour enterprises, such as nickel-plating.[61]

---

[57] Sovnarkom BSSR Declaration "On the confiscation of landowners' property," 28 November 1939. In: Jasiewicz, Okupacja, 75.
[58] Gross, Revolution, 39-40, 62-66.
[59] Gross, Revolution, 54-55.
[60] Gross, Revolution, 43-45.
[61] Testimony of Marian K. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 199-200.

However, the overall picture of the first weeks of the occupation is one of relative calm coupled with an undercurrent of general confusion about the direction that the new administration would take. This atmosphere tensed gradually with increasingly overt signs that that the new authorities were not well-disposed towards the general Polish population, although this attitude seems to have been evident earlier in the countryside than in the cities. However, control over the staffing of local levels of administration was not always stringently controlled. In mid-November1940, in a tellingly-titled missive, the NKVD signalled its dissatisfaction with the continuing presence in various local committees of Poles who had ties to the former administration.[62]

In administration, the Soviet authorities appointed to the newly vacant posts people who were unsuited to perform the functions with competency and even seemed indifferent to the loyalty of their appointees. Refusal to perform assigned tasks was simply countered with threats of arrest. Forced compliance involved everyone in the workings of the system and made citizens into implicit collaborators. In one example of this arbitrary administrative system, after having dismissed the town administration at Kowel, a Red Army commander arbitrarily picked two deputies from among the city employees, brought one to the mayor's chair and said simply: "You, sit down and rule!"[63] Other changes to the pre-war system can be described as a general Sovietization, most acutely felt in schools

---

[62] Bialystok NKVD Special Report "On the infestation of the soviet and cooperative apparatus by the socially alien element in the Sapockin region," 16 November 1940. In: Jasiewicz, et al., Okupacja Sowiecka, 73.
[63] Gross, Revolution, 53.

which were reformed according to the Soviet system in the first weeks of January 1940.[64] There were instances of resistance to the new regime but they were relatively small-scale acts, such as as clandestine religious education,[65] or the refusal to comply with minor ordinances that affected everyday habits.[66]

In Gross' view the Soviet administration successfully prompted "the induced self-destruction of a community."[67] And he sees this destruction of old social bonds most clearly in the elections to the National People's Assemblies of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia that took place on 22 October 1939. The elections were announced on 6 October and over the next two weeks the population was faced with an inescapable salience of propaganda.

As many as 15,000 people worked at the preparation of the elections.[68] Instructions circulated to Party workers in mid-October set out the slogans that were to be carried by pre-election propaganda: establishment of Soviet power, entrance of the occupied territories into the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs, confiscation of landed property and nationalization of banks and large enterprises.[69] Rallies and speeches were organized and invariably produced sworn declarations of the assemblies' unequivocal intent to join their Ukrainian and Belorussian brethren in political union with the socialist republics.[70]

---

[64] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 449.
[65] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 447.
[66] Gross, Revolution, 139.
[67] Gross, Revolution, 70.
[68] Sleszczynski, Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 220.
[69] Panteleimon Ponomarenko, Secreatry CC CP(b)Belorussia, 12 October 1939. In: Jasiewicz, et al., Okupacja Sowiecka, 171.
[70] Gross, Revolution, 75.

Speakers were appointed, mainly from among teachers, to deliver propaganda speeches. Again, refusal to participate was not tolerated. Teachers were also conscripted to canvass their districts in order to draw up detailed voting lists.[71] Workers often were kept for hours after work for ideological lectures, which to many must have seemed absurd in the face of the increasingly difficult economic and material situation.[72]

Gross theorises that the conscripted propagandists were all the more diligent in their tasks since if they were vocally opposed by their audience, they feared being exposed as unwilling participators and so worked all the more assiduously while being essentially alienated from the population. It was this erosion of the social fabric of the mutual bonds of trust that permitted the Soviet administration to establish a system of terror in which, potentially, the most terrifying person was one's own neighbor or co-worker – no one could afford to be seen as reluctant to collaborate, and so everyone was made complicit in a system of mutual policing. In this sense, even though the elections had no meaning in essence, neither for the population nor in any functional political sense, Gross quoted Marshall McLuhan to say that "the medium was the message"[73] – the fact that the population as a whole was made in one way or another complicit in the ratification of the new regime was what mattered most.

Voter participation was enforced and even when voters were not overtly watched when they cast their ballots, all votes were numbered (some even had to

---

[71] Gross, Revolution, 77.
[72] Gross, Revolution, 80-82.
[73] Gross, Revolution, 86.

be signed) and could be traced back to individuals. In districts where the Soviet candidates were not elected, the organizing committees changed the tallies to produce the desired result – although, interestingly, a dozen districts failed to elect the prescribed candidate.[74] For Gross, the vote itself was the final step in the breaking of old social bonds because in complying with the vote, "all are shown to each other in an act of betrayal for fear of sanction."[75] One witness remembered that it was like "going to a funeral to drop a handful of dirt into the casket of a dead friend."[76]

The newly constituted National Assemblies convened for the first time on 26 October. The main items on their agendas were the nationalisation of industries, the confiscation of land and goods and unification with the Soviet republics. On 1 November delegations from the assemblies petitioned the Supreme Soviet for inclusion into the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs.[77] Afterwards, the degree of Soviet control over social life was quickly accentuated and soon moved from tacitly involving the population in its own subjugation to mass arrests and, eventually, the outright removal from the land and the cities of whole segments of the population.

---

[74] Gross, Revolution, 90-99.
[75] Gross, Revolution, 113.
[76] Gross, Revolution, 113.
[77] Gross, Revolution, 108.

2. Repressions

Until Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations were temporarily restored in August 1941, Soviet authorities employed various manners of repression against hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens. Beginning in February 1940, four major deportation operations removed some 320,000 Polish citizens into the Soviet interior. The deportees were placed, for the most part, in either punitive or administrative exile, that is, in northern work colonies, or in sovkhoz and kolkhoz farming settlements. Additionally, at least another 155,000 Polish citizens were detained in various manners of captivity on Soviet territory at various times during that period. Operations aimed at securing the Soviet Union's western border displaced at least another 110,000 Polish citizens towards the east. As I will argue below, contrary to the assessments of many commentators, there was no single-minded Soviet plan to physically destroy the deported Polish citizens. What comes through in the documents, rather, is a glimpse into the failure of Soviet bureaucracy to meet goals that were arbitrarily established by the higher echelons of Soviet power. That orders coming from Moscow disregarded the value of individual human life should surprise no one. What is more surprising, is that local administrators, at the oblast or region levels,[78] were concerned with the welfare of the deportees to a degree sufficient to prompt them to demand additional resources from Moscow in order to provide

[78] The Soviet administrative division of oblast may be roughly translated as "county." Oblasts were divided into "regions."

a semblance of normalcy in the deportees' every day lives – although we cannot know whether their motivations were altruistic or self-serving. Local administrators may well have had the fulfillment of quotas first and foremest in mind – quotas that a diseased, half-starved work-force was pitifully unable to fulfill. Thousands died and most suffered, both physically and emotionally.

I. Archival evidence

The historiography of Soviet repressions against Poles and Polish citizens has only recently begun to fully benefit from wider access to archival materials. Already in the early 1990's both Polish and Russian researchers began to publish documents dealing with Polish-Soviet relations. Some of the most fruitful work to date has been conducted by Polish historians affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and the Warsaw-based KARTA foundation.[79] Under PAN's aegis several volumes of archival materials in the series Z Archiwow Sowieckich [From the Soviet Archives] have been published since the 1990's. In 1998 an extensive collection of documents dealing with the Soviet occupation of Belorussian territories was compiled by Poland's Ministry of

[79] KARTA was born of several organizations that functioned clandestinely in Poland in the 1980's. KARTA is, in part, concerned with the documentation of recent Polish history. One of the fruits of the organization's efforts and collaboration with Russia' Memorial Society is the Index of the Repressed, a searchable database of victims of Soviet repressions. The Index currently lists over 221,000 individuals including biographical information. KARTA's website, with limited English content, can be accessed at: <http://www.karta.org.pl/Default.asp?jezyk=2> accessed 15 June 2007; Memorial's website can be accessed at: <http://www.memo.ru/eng/index.htm> accessed 15 June 2007.

Internal Affairs and the National Archive of the Belorussian Republic,[80] and in 2000 KARTA released a report (amended in 2002) that synthesised the documentary evidence of Soviet repressions that had been accumulated up to that point. In 2003, Poland's Institute for National Memory[81] working in conjunction with Poland's Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossiskoi Federatsii – FSB) released a Polish- and Russian-language volume containing 170 Soviet documents relating to the deportations.[82] The volume is the most extensive and important publication of archival materials on the subject to date, and represents the most fertile public contribution to the history of the deportations yet published. The documents, nearly all carrying the annotation "Strictly Secret," show with an unprecedented depth of detail how the deportations were planned and carried-out. These documents serve not only to present a more complete picture of the deportations than has been done to date outside of Eastern Europe, but also allow for a study in the functioning, the power-structure and the omnipresence of the NKVD apparatus within the Soviet Union in 1940-41. Perhaps most importantly, the NKVD materials help to clarify a dimension of the

---

[80] See: Wladimir Adamuszko, et al. eds., Wydarzenia I Losy Ludzkie: Rok 1939. Vol 1 of Zachodnia Bialorus, 17 IX 1939 – 22 VI 1941 (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1998).

[81] The Institute is, in part, concerned with the collection and publication of archival materials relating to its mandate as the Commission to Prosecute Crimes against the Polish Nation. See the Institute's website, with some English content, at: <http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/> accessed 15 June 2007.

[82] Grzegorz Jakubowski et al., eds., Deportacje obywateli polskich z Zachodniej Ukrainy I Zachodniej Bialorusi w 1940 roku. (Warsaw: Instytut Pamieci Narodowej – Komisja Scigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu: Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnetrznych I Administracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej; Moscow: Federalnaia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2003.)

deportations that in the past has been consigned to inference and conjecture – that of the perpetrators. It should be kept in mind that the term "repression" was a euphemism that does not reflect the varied and often brutal nature of the means of social-engineering that it purported to describe. The repressed included those arrested, deported and murdered. KARTA has identified three broad categories of repressed persons - prisoners of war, imprisoned civilians and deportees.

a) Prisoners of war

According to Polish researchers, the most accurate estimate of the number of Polish army personnel detained as prisoners of war by the Red Army after 17 September 1939 is 240,000, of whom 115 thousand were either quickly freed or, in some cases, executed by the Red Army, although it is impossible to say how many this category would have included.[83] The remaining 125,000 were handed over to the NKVD and interned in Lithuania.

Through 18 October 1939, the NKVD released 42,400 of these prisoners and through 23 November 1939 handed over another 42,492 to the Germans who, in turn, handed over to the NKVD 13,757 Poles of whom the officers and police personnel were detained and the remainder released. On 10 November 1939 the head of the NKVD, Lavrenti Beria, issued a directive that stipulated the fate of Polish prisoners of war detained in Lithuania who had been residents of Eastern Poland at the time of their capture. First, they were to be transported onto

[83] Stanislaw Ciesieslki et al., Raport: Represje Sowieckie wobec Polakow i Obywateli Polskich (Warsaw: Osrodek KARTA, 2002), 7.

Belorussian (that is, Soviet) territory. Regular soldiers and junior officers were to be released to return home, after being briefed on their duties as Soviet citizens.[84] Officers, as well as military functionaries and policemen were to be transferred to internment camps. As for those who were allowed to return home, the NKVD of the appropriate oblasts was to control their arrival at the addresses they had specified as their place of residence and to issue warrants for the arrest of those who failed to report.[85] KARTA has estimated that the number of prisoners of war detained by the NKVD at the end of 1939 was around 40,000.[86]

Of that number, 14,736 officers, policemen, prison guards and foresters (many of them members of former border patrols) were detained in three special camps established in the Ukrainian SSR at Starobielsk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov. Beside 395 known survivors and 211 others who are unaccounted for, all prisoners detained in the three special camps (as well as 7,305 others detained in regular prisons), were shot in April 1940 on Beria's orders.[87] Their mass graves were discovered by German soldiers in July 1941 and the Nazis exploited the murders for anti-Soviet propaganda purpouses, while the Soviet government claimed for years that the Germans themselves had killed the Poles. The murders

---

[84] NKVD Order No. 001377: "In the matter of actions relating to the release into the USSR of soldiers of the former Polish Army interned in Lithuania." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 640-641.
[85] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 642-643.
[86] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 7.
[87] In the first days of March 1940, Lavrenti Beria addressed a note to Joseph Stalin saying that since all the prisoners of the spacial camps "are hardened and inveterate enemies of Soviet power, NKVD USSR considers it indispensable [that they be given] the highest measure of punishment – shooting." Beria's recommendations were reproduced word for word in an order signed by Stalin on 5 March 1940. See: Ewa Wosik, ed. Katyn: Dokumenty Ludobojstwa (Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1992), 27.

and the attendant political wrangling became known as the "Katyn Affair" (after the Katyn forest where Polish officers' graves were first discovered) and became a cause célèbre for *émigré* Poles and a symbol of Soviet oppression for many Poles in communist Poland. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev officially acknowledged the murders in 1990.[88]

Of the prisoners of war remaining in the custody of the NKVD, 15,500 were put in work camps near Lwow where they built roads, and most of the rest were consigned to mine iron ore.[89] Another 4,767 Polish prisoners of war were arrested in the Baltic Republics after those states were annexed by the USSR in June 1940, and were held in internment camps in Lithuania. On 6 July 1940 Beria ordered that they be transferred to camps in Belorussian territory and those in the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel through the Generals were to be kept separate from the others. The appropriate NKVD divisions had to ensure that the prisoners were put under "chekist operational control."[90]

When Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941, the NKVD prisons and work camps were evacuated and their population moved into the Soviet interior. Some prisoners were executed and others died along the way, either out of exhaustion, sickness or from occasional attacks by German aircraft. In all,

---

[88] Later, on 14 October 1992, a special envoy sent by Russian President Boris Yeltsin handed over to Polish President Lech Walesa a file containing 42 documents pertaining to the murders of the Polish officers, including the order described in note 87, above. See: Wojciech Materski, ed. Katyn: Dokumenty Ludobojstwa, 7.

[89] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 9.

[90] NKVD Order No. 00806: "In the matter of the transportation to NKVD USSR prisoner-of-war camps of soldiers and policemen of the former Polish state interned in Lithuania." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 648-649.

between October 1939 through the evacuation of the camps in July 1941, approximately 2,300 Polish prisoners of war (not including those detained and executed in the special camps) died while in the custody of the NKVD. This number includes some 1,328 who "went missing"[91] during the evacuation of the Lwow camp complex.

b) Imprisoned civilians

Individual arrests were carried out by the NKVD on the basis of information already in its possession before the war and on the basis of what information was gathered during the occupation.[92] Those targeted for arrest represented the political, organizational and cultural Polish elite. Particularily targeted were veterans of the Polish-Soviet war and politically active anti-communists, although many Polish communists, too, were arrested.

Russian researchers have calculated that during the occupation, a total of 107,140 people were arrested by the NKVD in the occupied territories.[93] Among the prisoners formally accused of crimes, the largest group - 43,464 people - were those charged with illegally crossing the border. The second largest group - 24,739 - were those charged with anti-Soviet activities under Article 58 of the penal code of the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs.[94] 7,305 prisoners were shot in

---

[91] It is not known how many escaped, were executed, or were killed by German bombers. See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 12.
[92] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 12.
[93] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 13.
[94] Article 58, which dealt with treason and counter-revolutionary activities, was broadly used by the NKVD to accuse its detainees of anti-Soviet activities. Its definition of such activities was so

April 1940 following Beria's directive of 5 March. That still leaves some 30,000 prisoners for whom there are no records of specific charges.

38,927 prisoners were sentenced during the occupation. Of them, 1,208 received death sentences and the rest were sentenced to at least 5 years of prison. Although Soviet sources show large discrepancies in their own estimations of the number of Polish citizens in camps and in prisons by August 1941, the highest numbers are on the order of 70,000 to 75,000. As well, it is impossible to determine how many of the prisoners ended-up in the corrective labour camps of the GULag, but Ciesielski et al. estimate that given the state of knowledge (in 2002) it was "no more than 40,000."[95]

c) Deportees

Of the various forms of repression applied by the Soviet authorities against the population of the occupied territories, the largest in scale were the deportations of Polish citizens into the Soviet interior in 1940-1941. The deportations were effected in four massive operations in February, April and June-July 1940 and in May-June 1941. Before researchers gained access to the relevant archival materials, estimates of the number of deportees had, since as early as 1940, hovered around one million and, often, were higher. The Soviet

---

vague as to be all-encompassing. See, for ex.: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation (New York: Harper & Row, 1974-1978)

[95] Older estimates ranged up to 450,000 Poles in the GULag. See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 14.

documentation presented below has led to a substantial downward revision of these figures.

The deportation of settlers and foresters, February 1940

The first deportation targeted Polish settlers, that is those people who had either received parcels of land under Pilsudski's programme of rewarding veterans of the Polish-Soviet war or those who had otherwise migrated to and settled on Eastern lands. The preparations for the first deportation had already begun with a note, dated 10 October 1939, from Beria to the NKVD chiefs in the Belorussian and Ukrainian occupied territories, Lavrenti Tsanava and Ivan Serov, respectively. "Taking into account the fact that [the settlers were members of] a military-police agency of the Polish government and are still a major base of counterrevolutionary activity," Beria ordered Serov and Tsanava to identify all Polish settlers in their jurisdictions, to "without delay arrest those settlers whose enemy activities" were known, and to put the rest under constant surveillance.[96]

The decision to deport the settlers was ratified by the Council of People's Commissars (Soviet Narodnykh Komissarov - Sovnarkom) USSR on 5 December 1939. The Sovnarkom resolution ratified five NKVD propositions: 1) that all Polish settlers and their families in the occupied territories be deported and put to forest work; 2) to arrest all those whose anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary activities, past or present, were documented; 3) to instruct

[96] NKVD Directive No. 793. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 40-41. That this order was issued so soon after the takeover suggests that at the highest echelons of Soviet government the deportations were planned well in advance of the invasion.

the NKVD to identify by name all settlers and to produce inventories of their farming implements, which they would take with them, and to organize places of eventual settlement; 4) to inventory all substantial farming equipment and livestock, which would remain in place and 5) to set the date for the completion of the operation for 15 February 1940.[97]

Pursuant to this decision, on 19 December Beria instructed Serov and Tsanava to complete the identification of all settlers "without publicity and without revealing its purpose."[98] The areas inhabited by the settlers were to be divided into "operational sectors,"[99] in such a manner that each would encompass 200-300 families. In each sector an "operational troika" would be constituted. The troikas were to set out detailed plans for carrying out the deportation of the population of their sector and submit their plans for approval by Serov and Tsanava.

Beria also set out the sequence in which the deportations were to be carried out. The troikas could recruit deportation personnel from among all levels of NKVD agents, Red Army soldiers, local officials and the militias.[100] From the recruits, the troikas were to form three-man "operational groups"[101] each one of whom would conduct the deportation of two or three families. Aside from the

---

[97] Council of People's Commissars USSR Resolution No. 2010-558ss. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 712-713.
[98] NKVD Directive No. 5648/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 47-49.
[99] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 47-49.
[100] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 50-51. [operatsivnyie rabotniki militsii] Likely in reference to the civilian militias described above.
[101] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 50-51. [operatsivnie gruppi]

operational groups, each sector had to be supported by a reserve of two functionaries and fifteen Red Army soldiers.

The operational groups were instructed to arrive at the settlers' homes at dawn and inform the head of the family of their imminent deportation. A search had to be conducted in order to confiscate any weapons and an inventory of the family's belongings made, after which the family along with permitted belongings were to be conducted to designated collection points,[102] such as schools, which were to hold no less than 5 families each. From there, the deportees were to be conducted in small columns towards a designated train station. As they approached the station they would be joined by other columns from other collection points. The deported families were to be taken to the station by their own means of transportation (in most cases, horse-drawn carts or sleighs,) which subsequently had to be returned to local authorities. If the head of a family was too sick to travel, the deportation of the whole family was to be postponed; if another member of the family was ill, the family's deportation had to be carried out and the sick individual would be sent to join them once healthy.

Once the deportees were delivered to the train station, the train commander had to collect their identification papers and check them against a prepared list of those who were marked for deportation on that transport. Any discrepancies were to be duly noted for further investigation. The train commander at that point assumed responsibility for all the deportees on his train

---

[102] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 52-53. [sbornyie punkti]

and for their delivery to the designated destination. Particularily dangerous[103] settlers were to be arrested and their families deported without them.

Serov and Tsanava were informed that the action had to be carried out simultaneously in all the oblasts of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia. They were to immediately plan out all necessary steps to prevent any "counterrevolutionary" disturbances during the deportation, not only on the part of the settlers but also among the general population.[104] The prepared plans were to be forwarded to the Central Committees of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Communist Parties.

At some point between 19 December 1939 and 7 January 1940 Polish foresters were added to the deportation lists, because on 7 January, Serov reported to Beria that "in accordance with [Beria's] directive"[105] he was overseeing the listing of all settlers and foresters in the Ukrainian SSR, and that he was continuing efforts to identify settlers who had moved to cities.[106] Soon after, the NKVD had a complete accounting of those marked for deportation. Including settlers and foresters, they totalled 127,454 people.[107]

On 19 January the Politburo of the Ukrainian Communist Party, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, accepted the plans drawn up by the operational troikas. The Politburo decreed that settlers and foresters of Ukrainian descent also were

---

[103] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 54-55. [Osobo zlostnih)
[104] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 54-55.
[105] The directive Serov referred to has not been located. See: "Note containing numerical data on the households of settlers and foresters in the Western oblasts of the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs." [undated; after 7 January] In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 61-63.
[106] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Report No. 26. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 56-57.
[107] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 61-63.

subject to the deportation,[108] as were all settlers and foresters who owned 1.5 to 2 hectares of land, and those who had benefited from any advantages bestowed by the former Polish state. The Politburo also ordered that those families who did not have clothes suited to winter conditions, should be provided with such items, which were to be, where possible, procured from the belongings of rich families.[109] Foresters and settlers not marked for deportation were to be recruited to help in the operation, on the condition that they first be "accurately verified."[110] The troikas were further instructed to ensure that the leaders of the operational groups who would be conducting the deportations become familiar with the areas for which they were responsible. The stationmasters of the appropriate train stations were made responsible for ensuring that the necessary volume of wagons were in place and that transports would leave on time. The Politburo laid full responsibility for the proper and timely completion of the action on the First Secretaries of the Oblast Communist Parties and the chief officers of the Ukrainian NKVD.[111] On 26 January Beria informed Serov and Tsanava that the action was to take place on 8 February,[112] that the deportees were to be loaded onto the transports in such manner that there would be 30

---

[108] Extract of Protocol No. 18, Central Committee CP(b)U Politburo session, 19 January 1940. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 66-67. It is not clear who were the Ukrainian settlers. A plausible explanation would be that they were Ukrainians who had served in Pilsudski's army and had benefited from the subsequent land-grants.
[109] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 66-67.
[110] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 68-69.
[111] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 68-69.
[112] Beria to Merkulov, Serov. NKVD USSR Telegram No. 22, 26 January, 1940, 10AM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 72-73. No available documents indicate why or when the decision was made eventually to conduct the deportation on 10 January.

people per wagon and that Narkomput would supply transports composed of 60-65 wagons each.

On 29 January Serov and Vsevolod Merkulov, Beria's deputy, criticised the operational troikas for submitting only approximate numbers of people recruited for the action, which, in any case, they considered insufficient. They instructed the troikas to conduct an exact accounting of the personnel at their disposal and to make the necessary adjustments in recruitment. The detailed numbers were to be supplied the next day, while a final report on the completed preparations had to be delivered by 2 February.[113] This last requirement must have been completed ahead of schedule, because on 1 February Serov informed Beria that a total of 39,562 people would take part in the action in the Ukrainian SSR.[114]

Also on 1 February, Beria informed the NKVD captains of 22 oblasts in the Soviet interior that settlers from Ukraine and Belorussia would be sent to the areas under their jurisdictions where they would be used in the forestry industries. Operational groups of NKVD functionaries had to be formed, whose responsibilities would include the transport and feeding of settlers on their way from the disembarkation points to their places of settlement, as well as the

---

[113] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Directive [unnumbered]. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 76-79. Merkulov must have been despatched to supervise Serov because many of Serov's subsequent reports to Beria were countersigned by Merkulov.

[114] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Report [unnumbered]. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 80-81. Serov also attached an oblast by oblast breakdown of the recruited personnel, including details on how many recruits in each oblast were provided by the NKVD, the Red Army and other Soviet organs.

provision of settlers' living quarters.[115] The outstanding points in Beria's directive ordered that the networks of informers in the places of work where the settlers would be used had to be well verified, that suspect and incompetent personnel be purged and that a daily flow of information would be necessary to keep track of the attitudes of the settlers. As well, the operational groups were to question informants who had been placed among the settlers during transport. Settlers who during transport had been "unmasked" as people holding anti-Soviet attitudes were to be immediately investigated. Showing either a measure of cynical inducement or genuine paranoia, Beria instructed his subordinates to keep in mind that among the settlers there may be agents and provocateurs of the former Polish government and foreign intelligence services.[116] Exhibiting a similar mind-set, Serov, on 2 February, ordered Red Army commanders in the Ukrainian SSR to heighten guard at strategic locations, such as power stations and telephone offices, on the day of the action[117] as the counterrevolutionary element could take advantage of the action to conduct anti-soviet activities.[118]

The same day Serov addressed extensive instructions to the operational troikas on the final preparations for the deportations, including the interesting points that recruits used by the operational groups were to be briefed at such a time that they could arrive at the deportees' homes at dawn and that credible

---

[115] NKVD USSR Directive No. 435/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 92-93. This is the earliest available document in which the term "special settlers" [spetspereselentsev], designating the deportees, appears.
[116] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 92-93.
[117] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Directive No. 383/SN. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 98-99. Here, still given as 8 February.
[118] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 98-99.

pretexts had to be found to gather designated personnel at the briefing points.[119] The recruited personnel, then, it seems, were not told ahead of time what they were being recruited for, nor, possibly, that they had been recruited at all. In a striking example of the bureaucratic banality with which internal NKVD orders treated the operation, an injunction to secure sufficient numbers of weapons was coupled with a reminder that clean sheets of paper and pencils had to be provided to each operational group.[120] Each group had to be composed of an NKVD functionary, a party member and a Red Army soldier. There followed several instructions as to the transport and preparedness of all personnel with the added remark that the recruited personnel be warned not to wander around the streets of small towns and not to walk around in groups so that their presence would remain inconspicuous. The order ended with the stern injunction that the operation could not be treated lightly, as if somehow things would fall into place on their own. It had to be carried out with precision, rationally, without publicity or panic and in strict observance Beria's directives. Responsibility was explicitly placed on the operational troikas.[121]

The operation was begun on 10 February, although there are no available documents that show a reason for changing the prescribed date of the 8th. The first available report came from Bogdan Kobulov, chief officer of the Main Economic Administration (Glavnoye Ekonomicheskoie Upravlennie – GEU) NKVD and was addressed to Beria. Kobulov reported that both in the Ukrainian

[119] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Directive No. 384/SN. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 102-103.
[120] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 102-103.
[121] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 106-107.

and Belorussian SSRs the action began at 7AM and was proceeding well. The only incidents to be reported, were that in the Tarnopol oblast about 80 peasant women had pleaded with NKVD functionaries not to carry out the deportations, and one of the deported settlers bit an NKVD functionary on the hand. As well, owing to the temperature of minus 30 degrees centigrade, there were individual cases of frostbite among Red Army soldiers.[122]

At 2:50 PM on10 February Tsanava informed Beria that as of 11AM 8,692 people had been taken from their homes in the Belorussian SSR and that 1,800 of them had been loaded onto transports, along with descriptions of several minor incidents, such as that one deportee refused to open his door, which had to be forced in.[123] Over the next two days, Serov and Tsanava forwarded similar reports regularily to Beria. they included information on the numbers of deportees who had been taken from their homes and how many had been loaded onto transport trains. As well, they included various minor incidents, such as attempted escapes and failed individual attempts at resistance, notes on the attitudes of the general population and inventories of weapons that had been confiscated. By midnight on 10 February 108,838 people had been taken from their homes and a total of 51,967 people had taken part in the action in the

---

[122] GEU NKVD USSR Report [unnumbered]. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 112-113.
[123] NKVD Belorussian SSR Operational Report No. 1. Tsanava to Beria, Telegram No. 666, 10 February 1940, 2:50PM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 116-117.

Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs.[124] The deportations continued through the night.

On the morning of 11 February[125] Merkulov informed all operational troikas in the Ukrainian SSR that they had to supply precise information on the results of the operation no later than at noon the same day. Among the fourteen categories of information demanded by Merkulov were the numbers of people who were marked for deportation, how many had actually been deported, how many had evaded deportation, how many were left behind owing to illness, how many weapons and pieces of "counterrevolutionary literature" had been confiscated and how much money had been appropriated.

Both Serov and Merkulov provided Beria with a steady flow of information throughout the day. They could not provide all the necessary numerical assessments because information from distant oblasts was slow to arrive. At some point[126] on the 11th, Serov informed all senior NKVD officers of Ukrainian oblasts that, according to projected numbers, a preliminary accounting had revealed many people missing from the transports. Serov ordered that immediate actions be undertaken to find the reasons for the discrepancies and to instigate all measures necessary to apprehend those who had evaded deportation or who had escaped during the action and to ensure that those left behind because

---

[124] Stepian Mamulov, secretary NKVD-MVD USSR, "Information on the settlers." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 152-153.
[125] V. Merkulov, No. 496/SN. [No time given in document]. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 164-165.
[126] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Directive No. 497/SN. [No time given in document]. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 190-191.

of illness were well guarded and despatched towards their families' places of exile as soon as possible. Serov ordered that, in order to gauge the attitudes prevailing among the general population, especially Poles, the activities of agents should be so directed as to produce an appropriate report in three days.[127]

Reports dated 12 February detailed the numbers of deportees loaded onto specific transports and their time of departure from the stations. Serov also forwarded to Merkulov a lengthy report on the deportations, according to which on 10 February at dawn all operational groups had simultaneously begun the action, as planned. By the end of the day most deportees had arrived at the embarkation points. Serov also reported that "provocative" actions against the deportations had taken place, such as that a settler's sister had appeared during his eviction and had begun to weep. After 10 minutes the local church's bell began to ring and, subsequently, the 65-year old bellman was apprehended.[128] After outlining several such "provocative" incidents, Serov assured Merkulov that the appropriate actions were being taken in connection with each one.

The attitudes of the surrounding population and the statements of some deportees were also taken into account. A resident of the village of Kowenice praised the Soviet government's actions against the settlers.[129] In another village, some peasants declared that the Polish settlers had for ten years drunk their blood.[130] In yet another, the villagers said that Poles had stolen all the best land

---

[127] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 190-191.
[128] NKVD Ukrainain SSR Report No. 504/SN. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 212-211.
[129] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 214-215.
[130] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 216-217.

from the Ukrainians.[131] Several Polish bystanders were reported as having displayed critical attitudes towards the deportation, such as that it was a cold winter and the uncaring Bolsheviks were forcing people from their own homes.[132] The deportees reactions - their "anger and confusion," in Serov's words - were evident in statements such as: "[...] I know that we are being deported because we were the pillar of the Polish government. Soviet power treats people like barbarians,"[133] or: "We are being deported because we are Poles, and they want to put Ukrainians in our homes. Even though Soviet power claims that all nationalities are equal, it's only words, in reality it only takes care of Ukrainians."[134] Various categories of people who had been scheduled for deportation but did not figure in the final accounts, aside from escapees, were the sick and people who for various reasons had been away from home at the time of the deportation. At least 70 people had willingly joined their families in the transports after having returned to empty homes.[135]

In Serov's assessment the operation had been conducted "earnestly, in a chekist manner."[136] In order to effect a definitive conclusion to the deportation, Serov had ordered the formation of special operational groups of NKVD agents who were to strictly observe doctors' assessments of the ability to travel of those whose sickness had provided temporary exemption from deportation, actively

---

[131] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 216-217.
[132] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 216-217.
[133] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 218-219.
[134] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 218-219.
[135] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 220-221.
[136] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 220-221. [seriozno, po-chekistski]

search for escapees, and regularily check new arrivals in towns and cities, arresting all settlers and foresters.[137]

After two days of overwhelmingly positive reports, hindrances to the smooth running of the operation begin to appear in the NKVD records. At 1 o'clock in the morning on 13 February, Tsanava reported to Beria that at three stations a total of 8 transports had not departed because there were no available locomotives, and that further delays would complicate food supplies.[138] Because some settlers and foresters were still in hiding and because some of them had left their children in the care of neighbours, Tsanava asked Beria for permission to isolate those children under the supervision of the NKVD and to commission trains so that every five days transports could be organised bearing those escapees who had been found and reunited with their children.[139]

By 6AM on 14 February, 128,845 people had been loaded onto a total of 99 transports.[140] By the same hour on the next day, the total had reached 133,707.[141] On 17 February reports began to come in from senior NKVD officers of the GULag sections in various oblasts where the transports had arrived. Each one identified specific transports and gave the exact numbers of those disembarked. The accounting was accurate to the point that the case of even one

---

[137] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 223. Serov also included a copy of his detailed instructions to NKVD officers on the conduct of these operations.
[138] NKVD Belorussian SSR Operational Communiqué No. 1. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 228-229.
[139] Tsanava to Beria, NKVD Belorussian SSR Telegram No. 722, 13 February 1940, 5:05PM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 232-235.
[140] Kobulov, "Information on the movement of transports of special settlers from the Western oblasts of Ukraine and Belorussia." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 236-237.
[141] Kobulov, "Information on the movement of transports of special settlers from the Western oblasts of Ukraine and Belorussia." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 250-251.

missing person was investigated.[142] On 22 February Beria directed all senior NKVD officers in charge of receiving deportees to ensure that sufficient armed guard be provided at disembarkation points, during transport to settlements and at the places of settlements in order to prevent escapes. In case of attempts at escape, weapons were to be used, and the escapees arrested.[143]

A report from Archangelsk oblast, dated 25 February, disclosed that most of the deportees did not have appropriate footwear or warm clothes and that some were even barefoot. Coupled with a shortage of fuel for the transport vehicles, it was impossible to complete the transfer of the deportees to their settlements.[144] One child had died and the causes were being investigated. Two days later, again in Archangelsk oblast, the belongings of a transport of settlers had been misdirected - belongings were loaded onto separate wagons - and the train, which had continued further had to be recovered.[145] Cases of sickness, most often typhoid and scarlet fever, were noted; when there were several cases in one wagon, the whole wagon was quarantined. On 8 March Lieutenant Mikhail Konradov, chief officer of the Department of Work Exile-Settlements (Odtel Trudovoi Poselenya - OTP) GULag NKVD, reported to Beria that all 97[146] transports of deportees had arrived at their disembarkation points.

---

[142] OTP GULag NKVD USSR Special Report No. 3, "In the matter of the arrival and unloading of transports of special settlers." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 260-261.
[143] NKVD USSR Directive No. 71. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 266-267.
[144] OTP GULag NKVD USSR Special Report No. 8. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 280-281.
[145] OTP GULag NKVD USSR Special Report No. 10. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 288-289.
[146] OTP GULag NKVD USSR Special Report No. 16. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 328-329. Reason for discrepancy (see: *n.* 140) unknown.

While the deportees were arriving at their places of exile, the effects of the deportation were being felt in the Belorussian SSR. On 25 March Tsanava reported that "the counterrevolutionary element"[147] was taking advantage of the deportations to spread panic among the population in order to prompt the killing and selling of cattle, as well the selling of other property. Rumours were circulating to the effect that another deportation was planned, provoking attempts to sell property and to escape abroad on the part of the families of former members of "military-fascist"[148] organizations, and among kulaks, merchants and teachers. NKVD BSSR had identified 100 families who were preparing to escape.

The initial semblance of an orderly and well-executed operation began to give way to a reality quite divorced from the precise planning that had preceded the deportations. On 11 April Konradov reported that 137,817 deportees had arrived at their designated places of exile. Contradicting Serov's positive assessment of the operation, Konradov quite openly stated that in many cases the deportations had been conducted in negligent fashion and with disregard for basic procedures.[149] Some families had not been given enough time to prepare and had arrived at exile settlements without proper footwear, clothing or linens. Moreover, personal goods had not been identified and much time was lost on

---

[147] NKVD Belorussian SSR Special Report, "On the mass killing and selling of livestock and other property on the territory of the Western oblasts of the Belorussian SSR." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 336-337.
[148] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 336-337. Tsanava referred specifically to the organizations Strzelcy and Krakusi, both of which were inter-war paramilitary organizations engaged in the military training of young men.
[149] OTP GULag USSR Report. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 340-341.

searching through the baggage wagons. The deportees' personal documents were in an "absolutely unsatisfactory state."[150] For example, questionnaires filled out during the deportation were often unsigned and listed family members who were not living in the deported household during the action. In many cases families had been separated and their members sent to different oblasts. One Emilia Bauer had been taken while visiting a family of settlers; since the purpouse of her visit had been a skiing holiday, she had arrived in exile with nothing but the ski suit she was wearing.[151] In one transport there were 9 families composed entirely of children because their parents had been left behind. Certain families had arrived in exile in possession of papers explicitly exempting them from deportation. One deportee turned out to be an NKVD functionary in charge of agricultural supplies.[152]

Highlighting a possible conflict between the concerns of GULag NKVD and the more political concerns of central NKVD planning, Konradov complained that many of the deportees were unfit for work, either because of advanced age or disabilities. However, plans had been put in place to set up "auxiliary enterprises"[153] so that these people could be employed. Konradov considered it indispensable that NKVD Ukrainian SSR and BSSR and the NKVD sections of oblasts that had received the deportees promptly clarify the various discrepancies. By 6 August Konradov assessed that among the 139,299

---

[150] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 340-341.
[151] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 342-343.
[152] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 342-343.
[153] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 346-347

deportees, 66,158 were fit for work and that 74.5% of them were used accordingly. No reason was given for the unemployment of 16,835 people who were fit for work.

In 1939-1941 there were close to a million special-settlers of varied national origin settled in the northern oblasts of the USSR. The overall statistical data for those who were fit for work and those who did work[154] closely resembles that given for the Poles, suggesting that NKVD criteria for the February deportation (that is, including the children and elderly) was not an unusual method of action within the Soviet system of repression.

The deportation of prostitutes and the families of repressed persons, April 1940

On 2 March 1940, Sovnarkom USSR adopted eight resolutions relevant to the "protection of the national border in the Western oblasts of the U[krainian]SSR and BSSR"[155] which had to be carried out within a time-frame of two months. First, with the exception of several larger towns, the population living within 800 meters of the Western border was to be deported, and the area "cleansed"[156] of all vacated buildings. Second, the NKVD was instructed to deport to the Kazakh SSR, for a period of 10 years, all members of families of "former officers of the Polish Army, policemen, prison guards, gendarmes,

---

[154] See: Otto J. Pohl, The Stalinist Penal System: A statistical History of Soviet Repression and Terror, 1930-1953 (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997), 62.
[155] CPC USSR Resolution No. 298-127. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 716-717.
[156] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 716-717.

intelligence personnel, former [large] landowners, manufacturers and high functionaries of the former Polish state" in the number of 22-25 thousand families.[157] Third, all prostitutes registered by the former Polish police and who were still engaged in prostitution were to be deported as well. Fourth, all people who had arrived in the Western oblasts of Ukraine and Belorussia after "the beginning of military actions in Poland"[158] were to be forbidden from residing within 100km of the border for a period of five years. Moreover, all those who had registered their intention to be repatriated to German-occupied territories, but who had not been accepted by German authorities were to be deported to "northern regions"[159] of the USSR and were to be used in "forest work and other industries."[160]

On 7 March 1940 Beria addressed an extensive directive to Serov and Tsanava informing them that NKVD USSR was ordering the deportation of the families of people detained in prisoner of war camps and prisons in the Western oblasts of the Ukraine and Belorussia (as per the Sovnarkom resolution outlined above.) The deportation was to be completed by 15 April. Serov and Tsanava had until 30 March to identify all people subject to deportation under the above-mentioned categories. The term "families" designated wives and children, as well as parents and siblings if they lived in the same household. Again operational troikas were to be formed from NKVD personnel and they, in turn,

---

[157] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 716-717.
[158] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 718-719.
[159] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 718-719.
[160] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 718-719.

had to once again recruit people to staff operational groups who would each carry out the deportation of 2-3 families.[161] Each family member was allowed to bring possessions not exceeding 100kg in weight. Unlike during the February operation and probably because the families of officers were considered more likely to attempt escape, deportees were to be transported to train stations by means arranged by the NKVD.[162]

The deported families could designate people to whom they would entrust the liquidation of assets left in place; the trustees were allowed ten days following the deportation to complete the liquidation and were to hand over the money thus obtained so that it could be forwarded to the deportees' places of exile. Other details of planning closely resembled those given for the deportation of settlers and foresters. As well, Serov and Tsanava were instructed to use the experience gained in the first deportation to prevent the "mistakes and shortcomings"[163] of the February operation.

The property of settlers and foresters had been essentially confiscated by the state, following the steadfast Soviet revolutionary policy of confiscation and redistribution of land. The property of the officers' families was curiously considered as remaining in their possession after the deportation. A likely explanation for this difference is that one of the ancillary reasons, or convenient results, for deporting the settlers and foresters was to ingratiate the Soviet authorities to the Ukrainian and Belorussian populations and to the poorer Polish

[161] NKVD USSR Directive No. 892/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 356-357.
[162] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 356-357.
[163] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 360-361.

peasantry. Since the settlers were archetypal "exploiters," a redistribution of their property was a prime occasion to demonstarate the practical benefits of the Soviet revolution. The officers' families, however, were being deported without their most able-bodied adult males and were thus deprived of an important contribution to their overall income. It is possible that in allowing these deportees to liquidate their assets Beria was acknowledging their particularily difficult economic prospects. In any case, this was certainly a curious concession.

On 20 March Beria ordered Simeon Burdakov, senior Major of National Security (Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) Kazakh SSR, to prepare for the arrival of 25,000 deported families counting, approximately 75,000-100,000 people. Additionally the deportation would include 2,500-3,000 prostitutes. All deportees were to be handed out passports with the annotation that these were valid only in the oblasts to which they had been deported. As well, they were to be infiltrated by informants.[164] By 7 April, the NKVD was in possession of more precise figures. Of the categories of detainees enumerated in Beria's directive of 7 March, 8,486 were held in camps, 4,701 were in prison and 3,150 had escaped.[165] Their families, marked for deportation, totalled 53,752 people. Among them were 36,521 Poles, 7,216 Belorussians, 6,600 Ukrainians and 2,325 Jews. In smaller numbers were Russians, Germans, Lithuanians and others.[166]

---

[164] NKVD USSR Directive No. 1042/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 366-367.
[165] NKVD USSR "Information on the number of deportees from the Western oblasts of the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 394-395. Total:16,337. The count included heads of families only.
[166] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 396-397.

Unlike with the first deportation of February 1940, we are not in possession of documents that would illuminate the preparation and execution of this second wave in as much detail. However, we know that the operation began with a roundup of prostitutes on 9 April. Beside those who managed to evade the NKVD, some of these women were able to avoid deportation if they had married, or were pregnant, or because of illness. In the Belorussian SSR, of the 916 prostitutes identified by the NKVD, 179 were either exempted or had escaped.[167] Within the scope of the deportations described in this paper, this episode is a rather unusual instance of what I would term moral social cleansing. Then again, within the Soviet ideological framework, morality as such was not part of the revolutionary lexicon. The standard by which all citizens were judged was that of revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary intention and action. In this sense, even though the Soviet view of sexuality encouraged a kind of social-realist attitude of free love, prostitutes were un-Soviet in that they bartered sex for money. It was likely, at least in ideological terms, not a question of sexual morality, but of a trade that functioned outside of state control and was, thus, counterrevolutionary by definition. A similar logic was applied to private merchants who were termed "speculators."

On 12 April Tsanava informed Beria that all personnel and transport equipment necessary to deport the families of prisoners was in place. The transports had been provided with the necessary medical personnel and bread-

[167] NKVD USSR "Results of the action concerning prostitutes." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 408-409.

stands had been set up at the stations. The families could, thus, at least purchase some nourishment. This was a different tactic than the one employed during the February deportation when rations were provided by the NKVD, but had turned out to be insufficient.

The deportation began on 13 April and moved more quickly than had the February deportation, because by 9AM 8,173 people had been loaded onto trains.[168] By noon, it was 22,995.[169] Tsanava reported that during the deportation of an escaped policeman's family, the policeman himself was found hiding in a closet. He was arrested and his family deported.[170] In the oblasts under Serov's jurisdiction, more dramatic scenes had unfolded. In Lwow, an officer's wife had thrown herself from a first-storey window; another officer's wife had slit her throat with a shaving blade; a wife and daughter collapsed and died during their eviction – suicidal poisoning was suspected.[171] By 6PM 43,263 people were embarked onto transports. By midnight, it was 53,970, that is over 200 more than the original projections.

In all the deportations, the projected numbers never quite matched the actual numbers of deportees, being either lower or higher, and the discrepancies varied from oblast to oblast. This highlights well the problem of any final and

---

[168] GTU [Glavnoye Transportnoye Upravlennie] NKVD USSR "Information on the proceeding of the embarkation of special settlers on railways in the Western oblast of Belorussia and Ukraine." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 414-415.
[169] GTU NKVD USSR "Information on the proceeding of the embarkation of special settlers on railways in the Western oblast of Belorussia and Ukraine." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 420-421.
[170] NKVD Belorussian SSR Operational Report No. 1. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 416-417.
[171] NKVD Ukrainain SSR Operational Report No. 1. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 424-425.

precise accounting of the victims of Soviet repression. A case in point is that by 14 April 1940, the NKVD's accounting of the deportations showed that 62,330 people (20,344 families) had been subject to the deportation,[172] that is, nearly ten thousand people more than the projected numbers submitted to Beria only a week earlier. However, it is not a far-flung hypothesis to say that because even these numbers were a good deal lower than those that had been stipulated by the Politburo decision of 7 March (22-25 thousand families,) either on the orders of Beria, or those of Serov and Tsanava, NKVD officers of lower rank had extended the criteria for deportation so that more people could be subject to it. It is likely that the quota set by Moscow was a more important objective than the clinical precision of the action in its stated aim to remove "the anti-Soviet element."

Since the families were being consigned to Kazakh kolkhozes for a designated period of ten years, it is doubtful that their numbers were based on economic considerations, as may more plausibly have been the case with the settlers and foresters who were sent to work in specific industries. In any case, the discrepancy demonstrates that orders from Moscow were not based on realities on the ground, but were taken in a more arbitrary fashion. It also demonstrates that NKVD personnel were constrained by some semblance of legality, or at least an adherence to specific criteria in identifying the enemies of

[172] NKVD USSR "Information on the arrests of the family members of anti-soviet elements." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 452-453. Of those who were targeted for deportation, 99.1% had been in fact deported in the Belorussian SSR and 87.6% in the Ukrainian SSR.

the state, since the number of people deported in this operation fell short of the Politburo's demands.

On 14 April Serov reported that in the Ukrainian SSR, 11,670 families had been slated for deportation, but, during the action, it turned out that 330 of them had been "unjustly"[173] entered onto the lists, 207 were temporarily exempted because of illness, 319 were "absent," while 487 had escaped.[174] In all, of the 35,326 people marked for deportation from the Ukrainian SSR, 3,994 were not included in the final count. Serov reported here that one person had died, which, again, does not square with his own account of the previous day when he had reported at least three deaths. In Tsanava's Belorussian SSR, of the 26,699 planned deportees, 1,587 were for one or another reason not deported by the end of 14 April, the second day of the operation.[175]

Tsanava also reported that the attitude of the general population was positive and that many people had voluntarily helped NKVD agents in locating certain families.[176] This would seem to bear out Gross' view that personal grievances, or even simply the desire for better living quarters, were frequently at play in accounts of civilian collaboration with the NKVD. Motivations certainly varied, however. One may have been a convinced communist who considered these families to be a real threat to Soviet power. Ukrainians and Belorussians

---

[173] NKVD Ukrainian SSR Operational Report No. 7. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 458-459.
[174] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 458-459. It is unclear how the NKVD determined which families were simply absent and which had escaped, but simple questions put to neighbours may have been sufficient for the NKVD's purposes to separate the categories.
[175] Tsanava to Beria, NKVD Belorussian SSR Telegram No. 1640, 15 April 1940, 12:05AM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 464-465.
[176] Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 466-467.

may have felt a good deal of resentment towards the old Polish authorities and these families certainly represented the social, military and, in some cases, economic elites of the inter-war administration, but Tsanava did not report on the nationality or social standing of the collaborators. At the same time, we must consider that either local NKVD personnel or ranking officers may have had a stake in reporting that everything was well. If everything was going smoothly, then their responsibilities were being duly fulfilled. And it must be noted that Beria had admonished Serov and Tsanava that the conduct of the first deportation had not been quite satisfactory.[177] Most of the 50 transports, counting 2,245 wagons[178] carrying 59,557 people[179] had arrived in the Kazakh SSR by 3 May, while two transports carrying 2,983 people were still in transit.[180]

Meanwhile, the women deported as prostitutes were sent to the Uzbek SSR and, after over a month of travel, they still had not arrived at their places of exile. On 2 May, a transport carrying 750 women had arrived at Farab in the Kazakh SSR and they had been transferred onto a boat which took them to their exile along the Amu-Daria river. On 19 May the Uzbek NKVD reported that they had still not reached their places of exile, and that transports carrying the remaining 2,250 women had not yet arrived in the Uzbek SSR. The deported

---

[177] NKVD USSR Directive No. 892/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 360-361.
[178] GTU NKVD USSR "Information on the proceeding of the embarkation and movement of transports of special settlers on railways in the Western oblasts of Belorussia and Ukraine." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 484-485.
[179] GTU NKVD USSR "Information on the movement of transports of special settlers from the Western oblasts of Belorussia and Ukraine." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 520-521.
[180] GTU NKVD USSR "Information on the movement and unloading of transports of special settlers from the Western oblasts of Belorussia and Ukraine." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 544-545.

women's complaints were noted. During 23 days of train travel they had not been allowed to step down from the train once. Moreover, the wagons were badly ventilated and the women had lacked sufficient water and food. The chief officer in charge of the transport, Barashkov, had explained to Captain Meyer of the Uzbek NKVD that he had not been given instructions as to the treatment of the women and had therefore treated them as prisoners, whose rights were far more restricted than those of exiled deportees.[181] Barashkov also blamed the provisions shortage on insufficient supplies, but, as Meyer noted, no additional provisions were sought at stops along the way.[182] The women also had not been provided with adequate medical attention, which resulted in their generally poor physical condition. The transports that were still in transit were directed to correct these "irregularities"[183] At stops longer than 10 minutes, the deportees were to be allowed a walk and "bread, cigarettes, eggs and other articles [were to be purchased] from the deportees own resources."[184]

Unfortunately, no reports from the transports carrying the families deported on 13 April are available. A single note, dated 5 June 1940, from lieutenant Bolshunov of OTP NKVD, informed his superior Nasedkin that between April and June, 60,182 people had been settled as special exiles in the Kazakh SSR. Half of them were either children or were elderly, while thirty percent were adult women. "The employment of such a group is an

---

[181] NKVD Uzbek SSR Report No. 12847. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 552-553.
[182] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 552-553.
[183] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 554-555.
[184] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 554-555.

extraordinarily difficult thing,"[185] Bolshanov complained to Nasedkin, "the larger part have been settled in kolkhozes where up to this time they remain without work. In certain districts there have been incidents in which the deportees gather in groups around regional NKVD offices and demand work. Escapes are ever more frequent. [...] We ask that the problems be resolved as quickly as possible."[186]

The emptying of the Western border strip, April 1940

As described above, Sovnarkom USSR had also adopted a resolution to deport the population inhabiting an 800 meter-wide strip along the Western border. This deportation was different from the others both in whom it targeted and why and in the situation of the deportees after their deportation. It encompassed not ideologically-defined categories of people, but those who were unlucky enough to live in a designated area, in the event, mostly peasants of various ethnic backgrounds. As well, they were deported to locations relatively near their homes and were not subjected to the same limitations of movement and employment as were the exiles.

All the available documents relevant to this deportation deal almost exclusively with disturbances in one village. It is unclear on what date the operation began, but by 16 April there were certain complications. On that day General Vasili Osokin, commander of NKVD border forces in the Kiev district,

---

[185] NKVD Kazakh SSR Memorandum No. 10591. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 560-561.
[186] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 560-561.

reported to Grigorii Sokolov, his superior in Moscow, that in the village of Chorocowa "under the influence of kulak and priest agitators [villagers were] putting up a resistance against the deportation."[187] To wit: people had gathered "at the back of the village and were not preparing to leave."[188] On the 16th, twenty five agitators, that is Communist Party members, had arrived in order to explain the necessity of the deportation and were greeted with hostility. A group of 300 peasants armed with axes and rakes "flung themselves"[189] at the agitators and wounded two of them. A Red Army unit dispersed the group and its commander attempted once again to explain the situation, but the peasants refused to hear him out. An order had been given to arrest the instigators.

Serov reported the incident to Beria along with the further development that the group of peasants had moved into hills near the village where another group of party workers attempted to coax them to submit to the deportation order, but with the only result that some of the agitators were beaten-up.[190] In the village of Hoshchuk, "the anti-Soviet element"[191] had incited some villagers to attempt to cross the border into German territory. Eleven people were arrested and two had managed to escape. In the village of Sokoliki four peasant homes had been set on fire by "saboteurs."[192]

---

[187] Vasisli Osokin, Commandant of GUPV [Glavnoye Upravlennie Pogranitsnih Voisk] NKVD Kiev Region to Grigorii Sokolov GUPV NKVD USSR, "Dispatch." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 654-655.
[188] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 654-655.
[189] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 654-655.
[190] Serov to Beria. NKVD Ukrainian SSR Telegram No. 988, 17 April 1940, 5:43AM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 658-659
[191] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 658-659.
[192] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 658-659.

Serov later reported that some of the villagers in Chorocowa had emerged from hiding, but had demanded that their deportation be handled by the army "because they [did not] trust civilians."[193] Serov blamed the incident in part on the lack of clarity in the explanations given by the first group of party workers who had arrived in the village and on the imprudent conduct of the operation by the local Oblast Party Committee. Villagers were given twelve hours to prepare to leave - "evidently"[194] not enough time, in Serov's opinion. The local Second Secretary had told Serov that the villagers were "particularily backwards, uncultured"[195] and difficult to deal with. A further hindrance to the operation was that often the local Communist sympathisers were deported first, "in order to give the example,"[196] but this tactic then left party workers without anyone who could exert influence on the villagers. Moreover, Ukrainian nationalists had previously "conducted anti-Soviet activities"[197] among the population.

On 19 April Beria reported these incidents to Stalin, with the information that all relevant NKVD divisions had been ordered to despatch "operational-chekist" groups to the problem regions, "with the aim of arresting the counterrevolutionary element and not allowing resistance to the deportation."[198] On the 20th Serov informed Beria that six "bandits"[199] who had fomented the

---

[193] Serov to Beria, Merkulov. NKVD Ukrainian SSR Telegram No. 995, 17 April 1940, 7:40PM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 662-663.
[194] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 664-665.
[195] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 664-665.
[196] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 664-665.
[197] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 664-665.
[198] NKVD USSR Report (Beria to Stalin.) In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 670-671.
[199] Serov to Beria. NKVD Ukrainian SSR Telegram No. 1017, 20 April 1940, 6:15PM. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 672-673.

resistance offered at Chorocowa had been identified and that ambushes had been set-up in their homes in order to arrest them. An operational group was sent to the village in order to "liquidate the band."[200]

This episode suggests that peasants may have been less pliable to Soviet control than were people of more urban backgrounds. It also demonstrates that this deportation was carried out without the strict controls that attended the other operations, and that instead of NKVD personnel, it was entrusted to local party workers. The deportees did not represent, by definition, a hostile element. That such acts of group resistance did not occur (or seem not to have occurred) during the other deportations suggests that people who are aware of the political causes and implications of acts of repression directed against them may be more susceptible to submit to such acts. This may seem a paradoxical conclusion, but a politically conscious population reacts to political acts as being part of political changes. A new regime, which they expect to be repressive, is installed and the fact that repressive actions follow suit only confirms what was expected, even if the expectation was of a more abstract nature than the very tangible consequences of being personally affected by such political actions. The existential references of a peasant population, on the other hand, are first and foremost tied to the land and the homestead and any governmental acts that aim to disturb that connection may awaken instinctive revolt. When one's life is defined by the place where one lives, separation from the place is outside of what

---

[200] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 674-675.

defines life. For a politically conscious population such changes are also traumatic, but the expectation that precedes them serves to normalize the event. On the other hand, in this deportation, whole communities were threatened, not just individual family units. The resistance offered at Chorocowa may well have been the result of strength found in numbers. In any case, while keeping in mind the limitations of the sources at hand, the incidents reported at Chorocowa may offer clues to the factors that either motivate or inhibit resistance to acts of mass political repression.

It is difficult to say how many people this deportation displaced, but NKVD documents show that 35,541 households were deported from the border strip.[201] Based on the numbers of households given for other deportations and how many individuals they represented, we can estimate that each household held, on average, three people – although it is possible that peasant families were larger than urban ones. If we accept three people per household as a minimum average, however, this deportation must have displaced at least 110,000 people. KARTA does not consider the people displaced by this deportation to have been repressed because they were not subjected to limitations on their freedom in their places of settlement, which, often were not far removed from their former homes.[202] We have no information, however, on the effects this displacement had on their lives.

---

[201] NKVD USSR "Information on the numbers of deportees from the Western oblasts of the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs of the contingents outlined below." 6 August 1940. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 684-685.
[202] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 18-19.

The deportation of "bezhentsy", June-July 1940

The Soviet term "bezhentsy" has its root in the verb "to run" and has variously been translated as refugees or displaced persons (DPs.) It designated people who had crossed the Soviet border, in either direction, or who had demonstrated their intent to do so. In effect, the deportation targeted people who had escaped the German occupation. 84,6% of those deported in this operation were Jews.[203] The decision to deport "to the Northern regions of the USSR" all those falling under the bezhentsy category in the western oblasts of the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs was adopted by Sovnarkom USSR on 2 March 1940, in the same decree that ordered the deportations described in the previous two sections. On 7 March, Beria issued a directive to identify all bezhentsy in the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs. During the identification process, NKVD agents had to note the individuals' place of residence on 1 September 1939, the date of their arrival on Soviet territory and list all relatives living in "Poland, Germany or the USSR."[204]

On 10 June 1940, Beria informed Serov and Tsanava that in accordance with the 2 March decision all bezhentsy whose repatriation requests had not been granted by the German government[205] were to be deported on 29 June. A new

---

[203] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 17.
[204] NKVD USSR Directive No. 2372/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 568-569. Beria's reference to Poland surely meant the *Generalgouvernement*.
[205] During the spring of 1941 joint German-Soviet commissiions were formed on both sides of the border in order to register people who had been displaced by the war the previous Fall and who wished to return to their homes. Many people attempted to register with German

identification process was to be immediately begun, "under the pretext that it was necessary in order to issue Soviet passports."[206] Serov and Tsanava were to complete the identification by 23 June and to present the results, along with the necessary transport requirements to the First Secretaries of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Communist Parties, Nikita Khrushchev and Panteleimon Ponomarenko.[207] Serov and Tsanava were, once again, exhorted to use the experience gained in the previous deportations.

There are, unfortunately, no available reports dealing with the details of the planning and the execution of this deportation – although the general instruction from Beria was that it should be carried out along the same lines as had been the February deportation of settlers and foresters.[208] Aside from the three documents described above, twenty-three others are available – they are all lists of numbers of those deported, in transport and, eventually, settled in exile, along with the occasional mention that no incidents had taken place. By the end of July, Kobulov reported on the numbers that had been scheduled for deportation and those that had in fact been deported. Interestingly, prior to the deportation the estimates had given 70 thousand bezhentsy, but Kobulov reported

---

commissions on Soviet territory in order to escape to what they suspected were better conditions, whether they had actually crossed the border or not. German reports show that through June 1940 approximately 66,000 people crossed the border into the USSR, but as many as 164,000 had filed repatriation claims. See: Daniel Bockowski, Czas Nadziei: Obywatele Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w ZSRR I opieka nad nimi placówek polskich w latach 1940-1943 (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 1999), 82.

[206] NKVD USSR Directive No. 2372/B. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 566-567.

[207] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 568-569.

[208] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 568-569.

that 90,511 had been deported.[209] The difference seems to have come from the NKVD's method of estimation that relied on the number of targeted families or households in order to estimate the number of individuals. Kobulov made explicit the category of solitary individuals, which accounted for 17,124 people – that number nearly covers the discrepancy between the estimate and the actual number of deportees. However, a report from lieutenant Sveshnikov of OTP GULag NKVD, dated 6 August 1940, reported that 76,246 bezhentsy had been settled in exile in fourteen Northern oblasts of the USSR.[210] The discremancy with Kobulov's figure, above, does not necessarily represent a gap in the documentation. Those not accounted for by Sveshnikov may have been settled in other oblasts.

The deportation of "anti-social elements", May-June 1941

Documentary sources for this deportation are still exceedingly scarce and none were included in the collection published by the Russian FSB and the Polish IPN. What is available comes to us from "Specjalna Teczka Stalina" [Stalin's Special File], one of the earliest publications of Soviet documents on deportations of Polish citizens to the Soviet Union. It appeared in 1994 in Zeszyty Historyczne, a historical quarterly published by the Polish Literary

---

[209] Kobulov NKVD USSR, "July Operation." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 632-633.
[210] Sveshnikov OTP GULag NKVD USSR, "Register of republics, krais and oblasts to which the special settlers-bezhentsy were transported (based on transport lists)." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 634-635.

Institute in Paris since 1962. Aside from a short introduction the article was composed entirely of 76 documents found in NKVD and other archives that were prepared by Russian historian Nikolai Bugai who was at the time Senior Researcher at the Institute for Russian History at the Russian Academy of Sciences.[211]

This deportation encompassed a wide variety of people of various nationalities, not only in Western Ukraine and Belorussia, but also in the Baltic republics and Moldavia.[212] A 14 May 1941 directive from the Central Committee of the Communist Party outlined nine categories of people subject to deportation: 1) active members of counterrevolutionary organizations and their families; 2) former policemen and prison guards "with confirmed compromising materials."[213]; 3) former large landowners, merchants, manufacturers and "high functionaries of former bourgeois governments"[214] and their families; 4) former officers; 5) families of those sentenced to death for counterrevolutionary activities; 6) people repatriated from Germany; 7) bezhentsy from "former Poland, who had refused Soviet citizenship"[215]; 8) criminal elements; and 9) prostitutes. As had been done to the bezhentsy, this deportation sent its victims to "Northern regions."[216]

---

[211] Nikolai Bugai, "Specjalna Teczka Stalina," Zeszyty Historyczne 107 (1994): 78
[212] Central Committee CP(b) and CPC USSR Resolution No. 1299-526. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 107.
[213] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 108.
[214] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 108.
[215] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 108.
[216] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 108.

This deportation was also quite different from the others in that it took place in several waves. On 22 May 1941 a first operation was carried out in Western Ukraine that sent between 11,000-12,400 people to Novosibirsk, Omsk, Kazakhstan and Krasnodar.[217] On 12-14 June deportation operations were carried out in the Baltic states and in Moldavia. On the 19th, 20,000-24,000 people were taken from Belarus.[218] Altogether, this wave of deportations took between 86 and 91 thousand people. Since it touched a varied spectrum of people, it is difficult to establish how many Polish citizens it exiled, but KARTA reports their number to be a roughly estimated 40,000.[219] Aside from the instructions cited above we have no other documents dealing explicitly with the people deported in this operation.

Conditions in exile

Most of the available documents that offer a glimpse of Polish life in exile are reports from the local administrators under whose jurisdictions the deported Polish citizens were placed. The recurrent and striking characteristic of these reports is their open admission that local resources were insufficient to appropriately house, feed and employ the deportees. As such, they suggest that the central NKVD, although there was an economic component to extracting what amounted to slave labour from the deportees, was first and foremost

[217] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 17.
[218] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 18.
[219] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 18.

concerned with cleansing the Soviet Union's western territories of people who it considered dangerous to the Soviet regime. However, it is just as plausible that Beria and his immediate subordinates were ignorant of real conditions and that, in any case, responsibility for delivering results was placed entirely on local NKVD offices. The reports also suggest that, at least in the minds of local administrators, political concerns were subordinate to the establishment of some sense of normalcy in the lives of the deportees under their jurisdictions.

In April 1940, the Executive Committee of the Krasnodar Soviet declared that the "deployment" of special settlers in various forestry industries was "absolutely unsatisfactory"[220] and named individual local administrators who had failed to "create for [the deportees] normal conditions of life."[221] By late June, the situation had not improved.[222] An internal NKVD report of 15 May 1940 showed that the conditions created by the influx of the settlers and foresters deported in February 1940 were compromising plans to accommodate the bezhentsy slated for deportation in the following months. The National Commissariat of Forests (Narkomles) and the National Commissariat of Non-Ferrous Metals (Narkomtsvetmet) were supposed to receive 20,000 families but in the existing conditions could hope to accommodate no more than 11,000.[223] On 31 May Sergeev, chief of Narkomles, complained that Narkomles' incapacity

---

[220] Executive Committee of the Krasnoyarsk Council of People's Deputies Resolution, 21 April 1940. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 93-94.
[221] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 94.
[222] Note from the Director of penal-administrative institutions of the Krasnoyarsk Krai, 23 June 1940. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 102.
[223] Deputy Commissar NKVD USSR, W. Chernyshov to the vice-chairman of CPC USSR, A. Vyshinskii. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 95.

to receive the planned numbers of deportees was chiefly due to the NKVD'S insistence that families be settled in groups of no less than 100 in any one settlement which precluded the possibility of supplying them with adequate living space. Instead, Sergeev suggested, families should be allowed to settle in groups of 30, which would alleviate the overcrowded conditions. Sergeev also asked that Narkomles be granted an additional 15 million rubles to be able to adequately prepare for the planned influx.[224] In January 1941 reports from Archangelsk oblast addressed to Andrei Vyshinskii, vice-Chairman of Sovnarkom USSR, were lamenting the conditions of life of the special settlers. 57,000 had arrived as a result of the previous year's deportations.[225] Among them were at least 400 families none of whose members were fit for work. Most of the children were not attending school. Medical services were insufficient. The average living space was on the order of 1.5-2 meters per person, which made the isolation of the sick nearly impossible. "In order to create normal conditions," the report asked that nearly five million rubles be invested in building additional housing, schools and medical facilities.[226] In July 1940 V. Potemkin, Commissar of National Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), reported to Vyshinskii that even though on 3 March the order had been given to "without delay enroll the children of deportees in nearby schools and educate them in the

[224] Sergeev, Narkomles to the vice-chairman of CPC USSR, A. Vyshinskii. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 97.
[225] Ivanov, Section Director NKVD USSR to A. Vyshinskii, 25 January 1941. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 92.
[226] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 93.

Russian language,"[227] in many oblasts the schooling facilities were woefully inadequate and, as a result, large numbers of deported children were not receiving any education. On 20 July 1941 Sovnarkom RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) decreed that all deported children in the Archangelsk oblast were to be enrolled in educational institutions by 1 September. The decree was also aimed at correcting the lack of various amenities, although its order that 150 new hospital beds be supplied[228] seems a rather light remedy given the number of deportees in the area.

In an undated (after May 1940) note to Stalin, Beria reported that of 59,351 deported settlers and bezhensty who were fit for work, 10,725 were not "exploited"[229] because Narkomles had failed to supply tools and clothing in adequate numbers. As well, certain settlements were removed as far as 15km from places of work, to which the exiles had to walk on foot. In Altai Krai, "in all the special settlements," barracks had not been prepared for winter: no furnaces had been built and window panes had not been set in place.[230]

Life in exile was not as harsh, however, for some of the deportees. On 21 August 1940, a report arrived at the desk of Andreii Andreyev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, entitled "In the matter of the demoralizing influence on work discipline in kolkhozes of kulaks and bourgeois exiled to the Kustanai Oblast in the Kazakh SSR." Drawn up by Kheilo, a party

---

[227] Potemkin to Vyshinskii, 9 July 1940. In: Bugai, "Teczka,"
[228] CPC RSFSR Resolution No. 456/12. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 101.
[229] Beria to Stalin, Molotov, NKVD USSR Report. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 103.
[230] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 104.

member who had been on delegation in the Kustanai Oblast, the report struck a plaintive note on the situation of Polish exiles. Some had been assigned to the houses of kolkhozniks without the occupants' consent. Kheilo claimed that some kolkhozniks had welcomed the Poles so generously that their own children were short of milk. Some deportees were even being housed in the homes of kolkhoz functionaries.

"In the majority of cases" Kheilo continued, "in the kolkhozes the bourgeois and kulaks do nothing."[231] Most of them had arrived with sufficient money and clothing, and some were receiving sums of up to 3,000 rubles, likely from relatives. "They buy their food from the kolkhozniks, but do not want to work and no one forces them to do so."[232] An officer had been deported along with his orderly, who was still making coffee, polishing boots and lacing them for the officer. When the NKVD moved the orderly to another kolkhoz, the officer refused to remove his boots for a week and when his feet swelled, he removed them and refused to put them back on for another two weeks.[233] In another kolkhoz, deported prostitutes were refusing physical work "and demoralizing the youth."[234] Some of the deportees had been assigned to secretarial work in national institutions "where diversionary actions on their part [could] not be excluded."[235] Kheilo considered the very fact that deportees were

---

[231] Deputy Director Agricultural Department CC Cp(b), N. Itskov to Secretary CC CP(b), A. Andreev. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 688-689.
[232] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 688-689.
[233] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 688-689.
[234] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 688-689.
[235] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 688-689.

allowed to settle in kolkhozes was dangerous because they could exert influence on the kolkhozniks and suggested that the Poles be put to, among other occupations, road construction, "employing absolute measures of enforcement."[236]

The deportees did have some measure of recourse to Soviet institutions. On 20 March 1941 Beria's deputy, Kobulov, circulated instructions to all local-level NKVD offices on dealing with deportees' claims. Kobulov mentioned two types of requests. First, some families had been separated during the deportation and Kobulov charged OTP NKVD with finding a "resolution to the problem."[237] Second, some deportees had applied to be allowed to emigrate. The only conditions which allowed for a review of such a claim were that the deportees were in possession of foreign passports (except those issued by Poland,) or if foreign embassies had filed claims on their behalf. Otherwise, the NKVD automatically informed the claimant that the application was refused.[238]

An interesting insight into the place that the deportees occupied in Soviet economic planning is contained in a note from A. Undasynov, President of Sovnarkom Kazakh SSR addressed to Sovnarkom USSR.[239] Undasynov's report concerned Poles who had been deported in 1936 from areas just to the east of the inter-war Polish-Soviet border and we do not know whether the deportees of

---

[236] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 690-691.
[237] Circular Letter NKVD USSR and NKGB USSR No. 56/2. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 696-697.
[238] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 696-697.
[239] Chairman CPC Kazakh SSR, A. Undasynov to CPC USSR. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 106. This document concerns deportees sent to Kazakhstan in 1936.

1940 were faced with the same conditions, but it is instructive nonetheless.Undasynov's note outlined the debt that deportees settled in kolkhozes owed to the state - that is, they were saddled with the monetary cost of their exile. The cost of homes, public buildings, schools and hospitals was treated as a loan that the state had granted to the deportees, in this case 10,980,000 rubles spread among 6,833 families in 28 kolkhozes, which worked out to some 111,000 rubles per kolkhoz.[240] However, the revenues generated by each kolkhoz in 1940, amounted to, on average, a mere 155 rubles. But, continued Undasynov, since the deportees had not been compensated for the homes from which they had been deported, the Soviet state should take on itself 50% of the debt that each family owed for its home in exile, and allow five years for the repayment of the remainder of the debt, which meant that over that period each household would have to pay approximately 100 rubles per year.[241] As we find out from a report of 1 January 1941 on the deportees' situation in the Komi ASSR, special settlers were paid between 3-6 rubles per full day of work.[242]

---

[240] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 106.
[241] *Ibid.* In: Bugai, "Teczka," 106.
[242] Department of correctional-labour colonies Komi ASSR Report, January 1941. In: Bugai, "Teczka," 107.

II. In the light of witness' testimonies

If the section just concluded carries a somewhat mechanical tenor, it is certainly a reflection of the detachment that examining the deportations through the documentation of the perpetrators inevitably conveys. The witness' testimonies that I am about to discuss convey a decidedly more immediate quality of experience. Interestingly, many are, in their own way, also emotionally detached from the events they describe. But it is their matter-of-fact descriptions of fear, hunger, dislocation and death that make them all the more poignant. It is small wonder that the work of historians who immersed themselves in these sources was given a dramatic quality in which the precision of facts and figures became secondary to the human tragedy of Soviet social engineering that they conveyed.

Published survivors' testimonies have a varied authorship. They were written by men, women and children; ethnic Poles, Jews and others. Some were written as diaries during the authors' exile. Many were written by children immediately after their evacuation to Iran (See: "Amnesty and the Anders evacuations," below.) Others yet were put down just a year or two after their authors' arrival in the West while others come from long ago memories put to paper after many years had passed since the events they described. Some are as short as a few sentences of detached description, while others fill whole books and are coloured both by emotional reflection and social, political and historical

insight. Some come from barely literate peasants, while others were penned by professional writers and members of government. Given their varied authorship, it is a sign of their fundamental value as a historical source base that they all converge to paint a unified portrait of the deportations and of life in exile.

The testimonies have certainly not been ignored by historians. Indeed, until the release of Soviet documentation, much of the historiography was largely based on the testimonies of survivors. An obstacle to providing any measure of fresh insight into the testimonies is the difficulty of avoiding repetitiveness – that is, both in the sense of what many commentators have written about them already, and in that they are, as a body of evidence, repetitive. Certainly, it is their overall homogeneity that suggests their reliability as a source, but aside from pointing out that they show that the exiles led a miserable existence, are there broader, deeper conclusions to which we can draw on the basis of the information they offer, especially in juxtaposition to NKVD documentation?

Just as with the published Soviet materials, a caveat is in order here. I did not have access to repositories of testimonies, and relied, therefore, on collections published by those who did, which has forced me to tacitly accept their editorial objectivity. Whether, and in what proportion, there exist testimonies that describe better, or otherwise different, conditions may only be verified by research in the archives. Longer testimonies published in the form of books do not contradict the published collections, however, and can serve as a counterweight to any skepticism. But it is worthwhile to consider that the authors

of these books wrote them precisely because of the hardships they endured. It is possible that those who experienced less onerous conditions were not motivated to publish their memoirs.

The deportation operations

In the testimonies, the deportation operations appear a good deal more haphazard than what Serov and Tsanava reported to Beria. To begin with, Beria's instructions stipulated that deportees should be given 30 minutes to prepare to leave their homes, and none of the NKVD reports filed during the deportations suggest that the operational groups detracted from this instruction. From the testimonies, however, it seems that people were allowed anywhere from ten minutes[243] to two hours[244] to pack. As well, the quantity and nature of what people were allowed to bring varied to an important degree and this seems to have depended on the attitudes of the operational groups who effected the deportations. Some were quite intransigent and even brutal, while others openly sympathised with their charges or could be bribed into allowing more time for gathering essentials.[245]

The character of the treatment that the deportees were subjected to depended to some degree on the composition of the operational groups. Those

---

[243] Account of Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka. In: Tadeusz Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2004), 18.
[244] Jan Belina, "Ucieczka z kopalni." In: Komisja Historyczna Zarzadu Glownego Zwiazku Sybirakow. Wspomnienia Sybirakow. vol. 6, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Pomost, 1992), 32.
[245] Account of K. S. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 139-140.

testimonies that mention NKVD men coming to the door give the impression that they were rather stringent in their handling of the deportation instructions.[246] Red Army soldiers appear to have been the most pliable, while groups composed of local militia members were most often described as those whose attitudes were brutish. Although these characterizations may be broad, their accuracy is plausible. That NKVD personnel followed instructions closely is not surprising. Red Army soldiers are often described by deportees as having been relatively sympathetic.[247] As for the militias, they were often composed of people whose motivation to enroll had been one of retaliation against Polish economic and political dominance in the inter-war period. Given a sanctioned position of direct and unequivocal power over the Poles in a particularily vulnerable moment, the militias' attitudes may well have taken on a markedly aggressive tone. These are only passing observations based on the overall impression left by the testimonies available for the purpouses of my research and would require a more exhaustive examination in order to be substantiated. Nevertheless, the variety of attitudes displayed by the operational groups was great, and functionaries of all stripes could be either ruthless or downright helpful.[248] As well, it must be stressed that in many of the memoirs the categories of deportation personnel are often not easily distinguished. That there is no trace of the varying attitudes in the available NKVD documentation is not proof that they were not reported. Serov

---

[246] Magdalena Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich Bezdrozach: Wspomnienia z Zeslania 1940-1942 spisane w 1943-45 (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1974), 9-10.
[247] Irena Szukalewicz-Krzeminska, "...Chociaz dzieci przywiozlam w zdrowiu." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow, vol. 5., 130.
[248] Irena Golebiowska-Jablonska, "...Za co?" In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow, vol. 6., 202.

had already specified in his instructions for the February deportation that the operational groups were to be formed of one NKVD agent, one Red Army soldier, and one Party worker, but the witness testimonies suggest that Beria's subsequent injunction that various mistakes made in February be corrected in the second deportation referred, at least in part, to the composition of the operational groups. At least some of the testimonies that relate the second deportation suggest that Beria's instruction were more closely followed in April.[249]

The arrival of the operational groups as well as the subsequent searches as they were laid out in Beria's instructions are not markedly contradicted by the testimonies. Many people report being told no more than that they were being moved to "another oblast."[250] Some families, especially those of imprisoned officers, left better prepared for the trip than others because they had anticipated their deportation.[251] One family's heirloom jewellery was inserted into bread dough that was baked and later carried onto the transports and into exile.[252]

A detail present in many of the testimonies that contradicts both Beria's instructions and subsequent reports from Serov and Tsanava is the time of the knock on the door. Many mention two or three o'clock in the morning,[253] while both Beria's instructions and subsequent reports state that the operation should and did begin at dawn. That is perhaps not a detail of great import, but suggests

---

[249] See, for ex.: Account of Wieslaw R. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 65-66.
[250] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 8.
[251] Anna Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu: Wspomnienia z lat 1939-1946 (Wroclaw: Biblioteka Zeslanca; Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1993), 17.
[252] Wesley Adamczyk, When God Looked the Other Way: An Odyssey of War, Exile and Redemption (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 25-26.
[253] See, for ex.: Account of Marysia Pienta. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 21.

discrepancies nonetheless. If the testimonies are accurate, we may guess that local NKVD functionaries wanted to ensure a timely completion of their task and elected to begin early, although it may well have been a tactical move designed to catch people all the more off-guard by waking them in the middle of the night.

It is a curious aspect of the conditions imposed on the deportees, and one that points to ambiguous intentions towards them on the part of the Soviet government, that people were allowed to send and to receive letters and packages in their places of exile. For example, several weeks after the first deportation, postcards began to arrive in Tarnopol from Komi and Archangelsk with descriptions of work in forest colonies.[254] Some people wrote short letters on postcards and dropped them surreptitiously at stops during the transport in the hope that passers-by would pick them up and deposit them in mailboxes.[255] As well, some of the transports waited several days before leaving the embarkation points and there are accounts of Soviet soldiers passing food parcels from family and friends on to the deportees during the wait.[256]

It is at the writers' descriptions of the transports that we come across the first serious discrepancies between the testimonies and the documents. Beria's instructions stipulated that each wagon should hold thirty people, although it is unclear whether that number referred only to the adults. The testimonies mention as many as 128 people in one wagon,[257] or as few as 20.[258] It must be noted that

---

[254] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 7.
[255] Marta Byrski, Ucieczka z Zeslania, (Paris: Editions Spoptkania, 1986), 27-28.
[256] Przysiezniak, Freedom Lost and Found, 48-49.
[257] Account of Marian K. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 70.

the deportees left in relatively small wagons on trains that ran on European-sized tracks, but were then transferred into larger wagons on the larger Soviet-gauge rails. It is not clear whether the transfer was always effected in the same manner, but one witness describes how on the Polish train there were 28 people in her wagon, while after the transfer into Soviet wagons, they were 63.[259] Undoubtedly, when accepted unquestioningly, the higher numbers seemed to support the exaggerated estimates of the overall number of deportees that were present in the older historiography.[260] Some authors have questioned the accuracy of the NKVD convoy troops' accounting of the number of people on the transports, but many of the testimonies recount frequent, sometimes daily, head-counts.[261] More recent research has shown that the numerical discrepancy may be accounted for, at least in part, not by a higher overall number of deportees, but by insufficient supplies of wagons for each transport and by the fact that the larger Soviet rails had, in some cases, been laid down as far as the embarkation points.[262] If this discrepancy between the two sets of sources is thus resolved, it does bring up another point. That is, orders issued by the high echelons of Soviet bureaucracy were in essence detached from the real capacity of the USSR's resources to fulfill demands and did not take into account the progress in the installation of Soviet-dimension tracks in the occupied territories.

---

[258] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 15.
[259] Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu, 18.
[260] See, for ex.: Gross, Revolution, 196.
[261] Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu, 21.
[262] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 57.

The NKVD did not, however, document the conditions in which the deportees were transported. Food rations were below sustenance-level. In many cases, for the duration of the trip, people were given little more than boiled water thickened with flour. On those transports where people and their belongings had been loaded into the same wagons, the situation was often better as some families had packed preserved or frozen meat, sometimes enough to feed their whole wagon.[263] There was a serious dearth of drinking water.[264] Many accounts mention children sucking frost off nails, while in others deportees devised such measures as lowering a bucket on a rope to gather snow as the train moved so that it could be melted. Beria's instructions for the February deportation had called for the wagons to be equipped with furnaces, but what emerges from most accounts is that these were either absent, or were not provided with fuel.[265]

The most salient feature of the transports is a prevalent lack of means of elementary sanitation. In most testimonies, it is apparent that the only provisions for natural human needs were holes cut into the middle of the floor in each wagon,[266] although some testimonies mention that these had to be fashioned by the deportees themselves,[267] while others describe children defecating and urinating directly on the floor while adults waited to be let out at periodic stops to relieve themselves. One testimony describes relatively more sanitary accomodations: a hole had been cut into the wall of the wagon and fitted with "a

---

[263] Account of Ryszard Rzepczynski. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 21.
[264] Byrska, Ucieczka z Zeslania, 36.
[265] Account of Jozefa Pucia-Zawada. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 23.
[266] Zbigniew Kotowski, "Glodne Stepy." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow, vol. 6., 243.
[267] Account of Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 18.

sloped wooden trough" that led outside and lye was provided as a disinfectant.[268] Here, again, a variety of treatment is evident: certain testimonies talk of people not being allowed off the trains at all.[269] In others, one or two people would be allowed to gather fire-wood, water or food under escort,[270] while on other transports all deportees were allowed to exit the wagons daily for short periods. With the lack of sanitation, sickness set in easily, although in the February 1940 deportation the frigid conditions likely inhibited the spread of microbes that were bound to be present given the unsanitary conditions.

While still on the Polish side of the border, some transports were followed by members of the local population who distributed food among the deportees.[271] On other trains, once on Soviet territory, it was, to the amazement of the deportees, the local population that begged them for food.[272] At least one testimony offers a clue to the fate of the provisions that the transports were supposed to carry: "Russian soldiers who have jumped down from the train walk along the wagons offering to sell us tins of crab-meat, ham, fruit and also sweets [...] the food which has been supplied for us, is sold to us by the crew of the train."[273]

---

[268] Roman Przysiezniak, Freedom Lost and Found (Toronto: University of Toronoto Press, 2003), 47.
[269] Account of Stanislaw R. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 56.
[270] Teczarowska, Deportation into the Unknown, 33.
[271] Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu, 18.
[272] Irena Szukalewicz-Krzeminska, "...Chociaz dzieci przywiozlam w zdrowiu." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow. vol. 5. 130.
[273] Danuta Teczarowska, Deportation into the Unknown, (Braunton, England: Merlin Books, 1985), 31.

Aside from the four major deportations, a steady trickle of Polish citizens moved East. Those who had been temporarily exempted from deportation were eventually sent to their families' places of exile. Others were forcibly recruited into the Red Army. As well there were some who voluntarily moved to the Soviet interior, either to join their families or to seek work.[274] Zbigniew Siemaszko, who had been absent from home during his family's deportation, wrote, with others, a group letter to Stalin to ask that he be allowed to join his family in exile after he had been detained under local militia guard for five months.[275] He was put on a passenger train in mid-July 1940 which included various members of families that had been deported in the February and April operations. During the first leg of the trip they were allowed to mingle with the local population and to purchase food during stops, but conditions worsened markedly once the train was east of the Urals and food was harder to come by.[276] Even after a trip made in relatively good conditions, the passengers began to experience serious digestive problems.[277] After several stages of travel, Siemaszko arrived in Semiyarsk and was left to his own devices, but managed to find his family.[278]

There is some evidence that the deportees showed occasional defiance in varying degrees. Some escaped during stops when they were allowed out of the

---

[274] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 92.
[275] Zbigniew Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka Wladza (1939-1942), (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 2001), 54-56.
[276] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 59.
[277] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 59.
[278] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 60.

wagons.[279] Several testimonies report that people sang Polish patriotic songs and religious hymns.[280] In one episode that seemed to bring particular satisfaction to those deportees who witnessed it, the contents of a chamber pot were dumped through one of the wagon's windows onto the head of a guard.[281] If the overall picture of the deportees' mood is one of cooperation in the face of harsh conditions, several testimonies do show that, especially as the trip lengthened, attitudes became increasingly tense and a competition for the means of survival began to replace mutual solicitude: "People in our wagon are changing into animals and changing very rapidly [...] with each day there is a little more bestiality and power of the fist."[282]

One of the NKVD reports cited above states that whole wagons of deportees were quarantined at the disembarkation points if a number of people on the same wagon were sick. I have not come across any testimonies that would mention such measures. Once disembarked, the deportees faced various conditions. Some were taken to their settlements in trucks[283] or in horse-drawn sleighs or carts,[284] while other groups had to walk long distances in deep cold in order to get to their places of exile.[285] The trip sometimes lasted as long as a week in -30°C.[286] These examples come from accounts of the first deportation.

---

[279] Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu, 21.
[280] Byrski, Ucieczka z Zeslania, 38.
[281] Przysiezniak, Freedom Lost and Found, 63.
[282] Teczarowska, Deportation into the Uknown, 31-33.
[283] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 22.
[284] Account of Tadeusz Pieczko. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 56.
[285] Account of Wladyslaw Jarnicki. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 65.
[286] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 34-35.

That accounts relating to the other deportations (which were effected in milder weather,) on the whole, do not make a point of describing this stage of the trip may go some distance in substantiating my hypothesis that, as a body of evidence, the published memoirs are incomplete because conditions that were not onerous either have not prompted their public commemmoration, or were not recounted in the published memoirs or were excluded from publication by the editors of anthologies.

Conditions in exile

The deportees' descriptions of their life in exile show most clearly just how incomplete a picture of the whole episode the available documentation is able to draw on its own. While some testimonies describe relatively tolerable conditions, most are a picture of outright misery, both physical and psychological. There are few available Soviet documents that mention the deportees' poor living conditions, but we may use those I have mentioned above in juxtaposition to what the deportees have written. Reports mentioned the lack of "elementary means of life" such as basic food stuffs. But what did this mean in the deportees daily lives?

The reports show that the wages that workers earned were barely sufficient to survive, particularily for those who were expected to reimburse the Soviet state for the cost of their exile. This information barely begins to shed light on the real conditions in exile. The deportees were paid per workday

[trudodni].[287] The fulfillment of a work day was predicated not on hours worked, but on quotas, or norms, that had to be filled. From what we may gather in the witness accounts, these quotas were such that they often required more than one 12-hour day of work to fulfill, sometimes by more than one person.[288] Thus the number of work-days for which each working deportee was paid required far more work than the term 'work-day' might imply. As well, the deportees could be docked as much as a quarter of their salary for periods as long as six months for such transgressions as arriving late for work on a single occasion.[289] Many accounts describe how local NKVD officials later arbitrarily reduced the number of work-days that had in fact been completed.[290] (Moreover, the economic relevance of the work accomplished by the deportees is put into question by testimonies that describe work projects whose only apparent goal was to put people to work, such as digging ditches and covering them up several days later.[291]) Thus the real financial situation of the exiles was far more dire than the NKVD documents would suggest. Here again the attitudes of individuals within Soviet apparata had great influence on the relative improvement or decline of the deportees' conditions of life.

One of the salient preoccupations of the witness testimonies is the struggle for food: "We talk and think about nothing else except food."[292] The

---

[287] Account of Kazimierz Zolyniak. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 183.
[288] Account of Elzbieta P. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 176.
[289] Account of Stanislaw J. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 84.
[290] Account of Jadwiga B. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 76.
[291] Account of Janina Zebrowski-Bulmahn. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 76.
[292] Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 49.

only food that was provided to the exiles was bread in varying quantities. Those who worked received between 600g and a kilo per day, while those who were not able to work were allotted about half the workers' rations, or less. A slogan oft-repeated by local NKVD was "u nas kto ne rabotaet tot i ne kushaet"[293] [here, who does not work, does not eat]. It is useful to consider that a round loaf of fresh white bread that one may buy at a baker's shop today weighs approximately 800g. However, this reference is misleading in an attempt to assess the volume of sustenance that the deportees received because, as many of the testimonies attest, the bread they were given was most often undercooked and thus was quite humid and weighed far more than a well baked loaf. Thus a daily ration could sometimes amount to no more than a slice of bread for someone who did not work.[294] Moreover, during the latter half of 1940 and through the spring of 1941 bread rations gradually declined, so that workers could get as little as 400g per day.[295]

But much depended on local conditions. If a family was lucky enough to be placed in a more affluent kolkhoz, and had taken a good deal of money out of Poland, they could get by relatively well. Zbigniew Siemaszko's mother was employed at office work and was able to buy a small $4m^2$ hut.[296] The report that mentioned local inhabitants welcoming the deportees into their homes is

---

[293] Account of Nikodem U. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 154.
[294] Milewski Family Memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 80.
[295] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 88.
[296] In the Kazakh kolkhozes, dwellings were built of sun-dried bricks made of animal-dung and straw. Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 71.

corroborated in several testimonies.[297] Elsewhere, dwellings of $6m^2$ could house four families.[298] Evidently these can hardly be considered living quarters and their primary function was that of crowded sleeping spaces.

The degree to which conditions varied depended on the attitudes of local authorities and those of the local population, as well as on the availability of wild-growing vegetables and fruits that could be harvested clandestinely[299] and on the ability of the exiles to smuggle food-stuffs out of the various state stores and enterprises at which some of them were employed. However, even those who managed to procure a satisfying amount of daily calories suffered from malnutrition because of the lack of vitamins and fats in their diet, since most nourishment, no matter the quantity, consisted of starches. In some settlements there were mess-halls in which the deportees could purchase food, but given what they earned, the cost was prohibitive: "two people had to work to buy one serving of soup which consisted of a small piece of fish and a few groats."[300]

The majority of accounts of life in exile refer to the selling of nearly all material family possessions in order to earn additional money. And it is a sign of the lack of consumer goods available to even the local populations that basic items of clothing could be bartered for relatively large amounts of food.[301] Other testimonies report that little was obtained by barter because the local population

---

[297] Sobota, W Stepach Kazachstanu, 28.
[298] Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 25.
[299] Jozefa Bialowas-Sniezawska, "Mamljutka." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow. vol. 5., 88-89.
[300] Account of Stanislaw B. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 144.
[301] In one account, a men's suit fetched 64kg of flour, 32kg of wheat 100kg of potatoes and 30kg of pork meat. See: Dubanowiczowa, Na Mongolskich, 93-94.

had, themselves, very little food.[302] In addition, work was not always available. Those who were deported to work in organized work-colonies at least had the assurance of earning something. It was likely the women and children deported in April 1940 who faced the hardest conditions. They were spared the deep freeze of forest work in Komi and Archangelsk, but in Kazakhstan they were placed in kolkhozes where their status was markedly inferior to that of the local population and where they were not guaranteed work. Moreover, all these families were missing at least one adult male whose work would otherwise have represented a large proportion of the family income. It is in their accounts that examples of clandestine ways of earning money and finding nourishment are most frequent. As well, winters were particularly difficult in the kolkhozes, because often there was no work to be done, and food was at its scarcest: "In the winter it came to this, that we sat around hungry. Hunger, cold, poverty, lice – and bare vegetating."[303] Although most families were kept together during the deportation and were settled in exile together, family members often had to find work some distance away from their settlements and remain there for long periods of time.

A family's ability to feed all its members depended largely on how many of them could work. In Siemaszko's family, three out of its four members (mother and two teenage sons) could work and so as a unit they earned enough to survive, though even their diet consisted largely of meager bread rations and

---

[302] Account of Jadwiga B. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 76.
[303] Account of Zdzislaw Jagodzinski. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 188.

water mixed with flour.[304] Aside from selling everything they owned in order to secure some income, some of the deportees managed to earn a little money by collecting wild-growing fruits, such as berries and selling them to the kolkhoz kitchens, but the pay they received in return was a mere pittance and tragically insufficient to secure sustenance-level rations.[305] Siemaszko and his brother got jobs preparing animal skins for leather – the skins often came with some parts that could be turned into soups at home.[306] Relief could also come in the form of occasional food packages and money-transfers from family members living in either German- or Soviet-occupied Poland.[307] One child deportee reported that she enjoyed going to kolkhozninks' funeral wakes because there one would always find tables laid out with food.[308]

The reports of Soviet representatives cited above mentioned the lack of adequate schooling facilities and they give a clue to the nature of their pre-occupation with the remark that the deported children ought to be learning Russian. Children's testimonies show that their education in exile was far more propagandistic than it was pedagogical. Many testimonies mention the following scene: the teacher would stand in front of the class, look skyward and say, or get the class to say: "Dear God, give us some candy," after which nothing happened. The teacher would then say: "Dear Stalin, give us some candy" at which point

---

[304] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 76.
[305] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 41-42.
[306] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 82.
[307] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 40.
[308] Jozefa Bialowas-Sniezawska, "Mamljutka." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow. vol. 5, 87.

candy was dropped through a hole that had been drilled in the ceiling.[309] In one account, pupils were taught that the American government had built a dam in the ocean in order to disrupt the Gulf Stream in an attempt to deplete the Soviet Union's fish-stocks.[310] Many parents opted to educate their children at home, especially since the food gained from older children's work was often indispensable for survival. But the ideological stringency of local officials was not homogeneous. In one account the local "overseer" asked an old Polish woman to christen his newborn child, but not to tell his atheist wife, who, unbeknownst to him, had already made the same request.[311]

Death, disease, illness and un-treated injuries are recurring elements in the testimonies, as are parasitic insects, especially in the accounts of those deportees who were settled in communal barracks. Overall, it is clear that the available Soviet documentation is utterly devoid of information on the real conditions in which the deportees lived. Neither does the documentation offer clues to the myriad attitudes that the deportees were confronted with when dealing with representatives of various Soviet organs. The Soviet documentation suggests that the overall planning, organization and execution of various directives was a tightly-run affair, but this seems to have been a veneer and one that is made thinner by the reports emanating from various Soviet organs which criticise the handling of the deportations and exile. In reality, the Soviet state of the early 1940's was incapable of producing the effects desired by higher levels

[309] Account of Henryk S. in: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 88.
[310] Account of Miezcyslaw P. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 141.
[311] Account of Anna Mineyko. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 72.

of government and this reality was hidden by the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, likely for fear of being blamed for the shortcomings. Moreover, the people who staffed the bureaucratic echelons of Soviet administration were not a unified mass that single-mindedly carried out orders and directives. Instead, we are left with the picture of people who attempted to remain invisible in their positions, but since at any one level the resources at hand were insufficient to fulfill prescribed norms, the level immediately below was always given the task of making up for the inadequcies of the system. Even a child could see that "no one [was] sure of his position. One day the director of the brickyard is arrested, the next day the driver of that very brickyard becomes the director."[312]

[312] Account of Julian M. in: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 103.

3. Amnesty and the Anders evacuations

The Poles' status underwent a sudden and dramatic transformation shortly after Germany invaded the USSR on 22 June 1941. The Soviet government opened negotiations with the Polish government in London and on 30 July Polish Prime Minister, Wladyslaw Sikorski, and the Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maiski, signed an agreement that allowed for the release - the wording of the agreement stipulated an amnesty - of all Polish citizens held in Soviet territory.[313] The Agreement also called for the formation of a Polish Army in the USSR and Sikorski named General Wladyslaw Anders, who had been in Soviet captivity since the first days of fighting in September 1939, as the Commander-in-Chief.

On 9 August 1941 the chief NKVD officers of all republics, regions and oblasts of the USSR were directed to compile lists of all "former Polish citizens"[314] residing under their jurisdictions. The identification of each individual had to show the date and place of birth and the "date and manner of arrival"[315] in the USSR. Because of practical difficulties diplomatic relations were officially resumed only on 12 August[316] On that day Mikhail Kalinin and Aleksandr Gorkin, members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet USSR, forwarded to Beria the following concise order: "Grant amnesty to all Polish

---

[313] The wording of the agreement caused a schism in the Polish government in London as Sikorski was roundly criticized for not demanding more concessions from the Soviet government and for having agreed to the word "amnesty." See: Albert, Historia Polski, 355.
[314] Circular Letter GURKM [Glavnoye Upravlennie Raboche-Krest'ianskoi Militsii] NKVD USSR No. 186. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 700-701.
[315] *Ibid.* In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 702-703.
[316] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 181-182.

citizens imprisoned at present on Soviet territory as prisoners of war or on other adequate grounds."[317]

As soon as Polish diplomats arrived in Moscow in August 1941 work was begun to establish a functioning Polish embassy in the USSR. The embassy's first concerns were to recruit, from among the deportees, people who could act on its behalf to establish the number of Polish citizens on Soviet territory and, subsequently to guarantee shipments of food, medicines and personnel to the main Polish concentration points. In order to allow for their freedom of movement, amnestied Poles had to be issued with temporary amnesty certificates which functioned, essentially, as vouchers to be exchanged for Polish passports. That this was a massive undertaking which challenged the Polish embassy's resources is evident from a note dated 19 November, in which Merkulov, Beria's deputy, decreed that since the Polish embassy had been unable to issue passports to all Polish citizens, the temporary certificates issued at the time of release were to be honoured past their initially prescribed three-month duration.[318]

The NKVD kept voluminous notes on the attitudes of the Polish officer corps and, for the year following the amnesty, the published documentary record is far more revealing of the situation of the Polish army in the Soviet Union than it is of the fate of the civilian deportees. However, the views of high-ranking members of the Polish military on the situation of civilian Polish citizens in the USSR had pivotal repercussions for Polish-Soviet relations. In turn, the manner

[317] Presidium of The Supreme Soviet Decree, "In the matter of the granting of amnesty to Polish citizens imprisoned on the territory of the USSR." In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 704-705.
[318] Circular Letter NKVD USSR No. 290/K. In: Jakubowski et al., Deportacje, 708-709.

in which Soviet authorities dealt with the formation of Polish units on Soviet territory had important implications for the fate of tens of thousands of civilians.

In late November 1941, Beria reported to Stalin on the attitudes of Polish officers in the Soviet Union. Beria recounted "anti-Soviet" statements made by several officers, among them General Boruta-Spiechowicz, who was reacting "morbidly" to the "lack of elementary means of life" of released Polish citizens.[319] General Anders, however, was seen as impressed by Stalin's personal power, and willing to accept a Soviet Poland. Moreover, Anders had asked to be informed of anti-Soviet attitudes among the Polish officer corps and often reiterated to his officers and soldiers that recent Polish-Soviet relations had to be forgotten. Subsequently, Stalin ordered that Anders be briefed on the anti-Soviet sentiments reported by Beria. Two points must be made. First, the NKVD infiltrated the Polish officer corps well enough to be able to relate conversations held in fairly intimate circles. Second, given the further development of events, clearly Anders was aware of this and feigned an attitude that he felt would inspire the Soviet authorities' confidence in him.

On 25 December 1941, Stalin signed an order that set the size of the Polish army in the USSR at 96,000 and ordered also that they be fully provisioned. In a 14 March 1942 note to Stalin, Beria reiterated his positive view of Anders, but warned that the "anti-Soviet camp"[320] had gained new ground. Newly arrived contingents of released Polish soldiers had revived talk of Polish

[319] Report NKVD USSR No. 2935/b. In: Wojciech Materski, ed., Armia Polska w ZSSR, 1941-1942 (Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1992), 25.
[320] Report NKVD USSR No. 380/b. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 53.

life in the camps and prisons and of those who had not been yet released. As well, Polish officers were aware of the "difficult material situation"[321] of Polish citizens.

Indeed, the amnesty did not mean instant salvation for the deportees.[322] That the deportees' life in exile was an experience in misery is beyond doubt, but it is a sad irony that after being released by the amnesty decree their living conditions worsened markedly. Indeed, it seems that the period after the amnesty saw more deaths among the deportees than had their time in captivity.[323] In some exile settlements, the Poles were not informed of the amnesty until months had passed.[324] Their departure was not actively aided and was in some cases hampered by the local authorities under whose jurisdictions they had been placed and who were not eager to part with large contingents of their work-force.[325] Moreover, once informed, they were essentially left to their own devices. The Soviet state was no longer bound to provide the meagre material and victual support that had been afforded them thus far. In Komi and Archangelsk oblast those who left their places of exile concentrated in the larger cities in the hope of

---

[321] *Ibid.* In: Materski, Armia Polska, 55.
[322] The two sets of sources that allow a glimpse into what "the difficult material situation" of the amnestied Poles meant are the survivors' testimonies and reports from various Polish representatives that flowed into the embassy and were passed on to London. I did not have access to these reports and had to seek recourse in secondary sources. By far the most balanced work on the organization and functioning of the embassy to date has been done by Daniel Bockowski, a historian affiliated with the Historical Institute at the Polish Academy of Sciences who has published on various aspects of Polish-Soviet relations during World War II. See: Daniel Bockowski, Czas Nadziei: Obywatele Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w ZSRR I opieka nad nimi placówek polskich w latach 1940-1943 (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 1999).
[323] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 20.
[324] Account of Janina Zebrowski-Bulmahn. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 95.
[325] Account of Sergiusz M. in: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 94.

contacting Polish officials. Their destitute situation, however, resulted in large numbers of homeless, unemployed people who resorted to begging and stealing to survive.[326] Many others temporarily stayed on at their exile settlements in the north, often being offered better wages by the local administrators,[327] although the attitudes of local officials towards the amnestied Poles who remained in their places of exile varied as widely as they had before.[328] Conversely, in the south, that is in the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs, those who initially moved to the cities found better conditions than those who remained on kolkhozes, which were overburdened by the demands of the war effort.[329]

As has been pointed out by Zbigniew Siemaszko who was a deportee and who has researched and written on the deportations extensively, Poles' reactions to the amnesty may be broadly categorized according to the situation of various groups at the time of their release from exile. The settlers deported in February 1940 moved southward en masse, while the families in Kazakh kolkhozes tended to remain in place, at first. Most of the settlers' families had not been separated, they wanted to move towards a warmer climate and, because they had lived exclusively in isolated work-colonies, expected that freedom would mean better living conditions; the deportees in Kazakhstan wanted to wait to be reunited with their husbands and fathers and, since they had lived in close proximity with regular Soviet citizens, knew well that their quality of life was not bound to

---

[326] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 190-191.
[327] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 191.
[328] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 213.
[329] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 191.

improve immediately if they left their settlements.[330] While most testimonies report that news of the amnesty evoked joyful, if at first disbelieving, reactions, the deportees' attitudes could also be mitigated by a sense of apathy about future prospects.[331] They had no assurance that their new-found freedom would permit them to improve their situation.[332]

In any case, the autumn of 1941 saw a massive migration of amnestied Poles towards various large cities, the great majority of whom directed themselves southward since already there were rumours of a Polish Army forming in the south and amnestied Poles arrived in various oblasts in the Turkmen, Tadjik, Kirghiz, Uzbek and Kazakh SSRs.[333] Beria himself reported to Stalin in November 1941 that all the Poles who were on the move should be directed to Uzbekistan.[334] Those who left first were better off than those who waited, because the early autumn provided relatively comfortable traveling conditions[335] and because initial NKVD instructions had stipulated that deportees were to given 15 rubles for each day of travel, train tickets to their chosen destinations, as well as clothing, if their own was inadequate. However, already on 26 August, these instructions were rescinded.

---

[330] Siemaszko, Pod Sowiecka, 101-102.
[331] Piotr Michalewicz, "Nie prywykniesz – podochniesz." In: Wspomnienia Sybirakow. vol. 5, 67; Account of Ryszard Rzepczynski. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 88.
[332] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 50.
[333] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 225-226.
[334] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 207.
[335] These initial instructions were quickly retracted, either because the NKVD could not, or would not, afford to pay for all Poles' train tickets, or because Soviet authorities quickly realized that this initial largesse went against its interests. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 195

A mass of people[336] were moving more or less towards the south, but with little knowledge of the geography, few resources on which to live and during a time when the rail system was monopolized by the demands of war. For many, the post-amnesty journey was worse than had been the preceding exile.[337] For those who had to travel long distances, the trip sometimes took months. Most of those who made the journey did so by whatever means of transport were available to them and those who succeeded in reaching Polish concentration points did so by employing various means of transport at different stages of the trip. Some of those who had access to south-flowing waterways made at least part of their journey on makeshift rafts.[338] Groups rented, bought and even commandeered[339] barges and boats. Some walked hundreds of kilometers[340] or begged lifts on trucks or carts. Some made part of the journey by camel.[341] For some others, the trip could be more carefully planned, especially if they were in touch with family members who were part of the Anders army forming in the south and if they had adequate financial resources.[342] The Soviet authorities became increasingly hostile towards the traveling masses of deportees and,

---

[336] Based on partial information from the Komi SSR and a report of 1 November 1941 drawn up by Beria, Bockowski estimates that at least 30%, that is some 70,000, of those who were deported to northern settlements made, or attempted, the journey south. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 197.
[337] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 199.
[338] Account of Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 82.
[339] Account of Eliezer H. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 228.
[340] Account of Janina Zebrowski-Bulmahn. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 96; Account of Francziszek O. in Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 82.
[341] Account of Maria Borkowska-Witkowska. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 88.
[342] One family were informed by telegram that their trip to rejoin their officer father had been arranged by the Polish consulate; they also had received money transfers from other family members of up to 1,000 rubles. See: Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 77.

according to reports received at the time in London, the NKVD sometimes actively prevented the deportees from obtaining food.[343] Adding to the desperate conditions was the already exhausted physical state of many deportees and the easy spread of sickness in unhygienic and crowded conditions on the trains. The journey was psychologically exhausting as well since, aside from the dispiriting effects of sickness and death, many families were separated during their travels.

For most, the bulk of the journey was made by train. If the conditions on the deportation trains were difficult, post-amnesty train travel was worse. Hygiene was still an unattainable ideal. Lice were omnipresent and water was in direly short supply. While some deportees succeeded in securing relatively clean wagons, others travelled in cattle-cars which had obviously served their original use only shortly before since the filth and stench left by animals made the trip nearly insupportable.[344] The unhealthy conditions were exacerbated by the deaths of fellow passengers whose bodies could not be properly disposed of during the unpredictably short stops. In some cases people found no other alternative but to throw the bodies from the trains.[345] Many were robbed of their possessions, even their shoes.[346] On the deportation transports in 1940 food supplies had been below sustenance-level, but now the deportees had no supplies of provisions at all and had to make do with what they managed to find, buy or beg along the way. At stops, excursions to find food sometimes ended in the separation of

---

[343] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 202.
[344] Account of Tadeusz S., in Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 53.
[345] Account of Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 83.
[346] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 79.

families when those who were trying to collect wild-growing fruit could not regain their trains if it started moving unexpectedly.[347] The already chaotic, overcrowded and insalubrious conditions were made worse when the mass of migrating deportees mixed along the way with refugees from the front and released prisoners who were going to join the Red Army.[348]

During the winter travel was particularily difficult and those who could found work along the way. It is important to note that for the Poles who gathered in the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs the eventual evacuations were not inevitable outcomes. Those who managed to make their way to the south still had to work in order to eat, and many were forced to continue to barter whatever possessions they had left in oder to survive. Several reports mention the boiling of grass to make soup and the consumption of dog-meat.[349] Many families separated voluntarily as men joined the army, while the rest of the family had to live by their own means - some were given small plots of land in sovkhozes which afforded an opportunity to grow their own food. [350] In some cases, people were forcibly settled in kolkhozes after arriving in large towns without any place to go.[351]

The conditions that greeted those who had left northern exile settlements to come south were a bitter disappointment. The arid climate of the central-Asian republics was different, but not necessarily better, than that of Komi or

---

[347] Account of Sabina Kukla. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 80.
[348] Milewski Family memoir. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 78.
[349] Account of Hanka Swiderska. In: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 48.
[350] Account of Vala Lewicki. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 80
[351] Account of Wisia Reginella. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 93.

Archangelsk. Among the physically drained arrivals, diseases, which had been inhibited by the cold in their places of exile, spread easily.[352] Many could not even find the most basic shelter, not to mention paying work, and became homeless beggars. In Uzbekistan the situation was particularily grave as the Poles added to masses of refugees from the war front and all felt severe food shortages that were partly caused by Moscow's policy of forcing Uzbek kolkhozes to cultivate cotton at the expense of food-stuffs.[353] Private fishing in local rivers was forbidden so that the fish-stocks could be shipped to the front.[354] The situation reached such a critical point that 36,500 Poles were forcibly moved from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan in late November 1941 – although this deportation became a fiasco when protests from Polish authorities convinced Moscow to abandon the plan in mid-stride, turning many people back to Uzbekistan where their homes, such as they were, had already been occupied by others. [355] It seems that at this juncture Soviet authorities were desperate to find solutions to problems of under-nourishment and over-population in the south and Moscow issued increasingly unrealisable orders and decrees. In December, Kirghiz and Uzbek authorities were directed to settle and employ within their jurisdictions 21,500 Poles who were, in essence, living in train stations in Kazakhstan.[356] Overall, by the spring of 1942, the deportees' situation was

---

[352] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 203.
[353] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 207.
[354] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 232.
[355] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 208.
[356] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 209.

precarious to the point where some began to commit petty crimes so that they could be imprisoned and, at least, guaranteed shelter and nourishment.[357]

The main concentration centers towards which the Poles gravitated were Djalal-Abad, Yangi-Yul, and Samarqand. Conditions in the southern towns were woeful for the Poles who were already weakened, sickly and malnourished and few of whom had immediate prospects of improving their financial situation. Members of military families could join Polish military camps, but the conditions in these camps were less than elementary: "tens of thousands of tents pitched on a wide muddy plain."[358] Given that even in the southern republics winter temperatures dipped below zero and that the Polish army had been supplied with only light tents, and insufficient provisions,[359] at the beginning of 1942 the Polish soldiers' situation was barely better than that of the civilians, a fact that Anders used in his argumentation to convince Stalin that an evacuation was necessary.[360]

An at once tragic and salutary circumstance befell many children who were placed in the temporary Polish orphanages by their families.[361] In the orphanages the children were guaranteed food and shelter and, perhaps more important in the parents' decision, at the beginning of the Spring of 1942 rumours were already circulating that orphanages would be evacuated to Iran along with Army.[362] The level of desperation that prompted parents to make such

---

[357] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 233.
[358] Account of Vala Lewicki. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 80.
[359] Anders, An Army in Exile, 86.
[360] Anders, An Army in Exile, 86-87.
[361] Account of Tadeusz Pieczko. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 86.
[362] Account of Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 84.

decisions is particularily well encapsulated in the comment of one deportee: "We were at the end of our lives."[363]

Many survived only because of the relief offered by the Polish embassy and its many representatives in the field. Through the embassy various Polish organizations, such as the Polish Red Cross, many orphanages and the military youth organization, Junacy, functioned between 1941 and 1943 in the Soviet Union with a total staff of some 3,000 people.[364] Given that during this period Polish citizens in the USSR arguably suffered more than at any other time, the embassy's effectiveness and importance may be disputed. However, Bockowski has argued that the subsequent break in Polish-Soviet relations was caused not so much by the German finds of Polish officers' graves at Katyn, but by the ideological incongruity of the Poles' receiving aid in the form of material goods and food-stuffs that were not available to Soviet citizens[365] - especially in light of the fact that only months earlier these people were considered enemies of the state and had been, at best, second-class citizens.[366] The testimonies of those who came under the direct protection of one of the embassy's delegations reported that they even had "too much food."[367]

Given the hardships experienced by Polish citizens in the Soviet Union, an inescapably important episode, yet one that remains strangely unexamined,

---

[363] Account of Sabina Kukla. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 87.
[364] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 316.
[365] During its tenure, the Embassy allotted 3,478 tons of material help including food and clothing. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 357.
[366] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 380-381.
[367] Account of Stanislaw J. in: Gross, War through Children's Eyes, 86.

though always mentioned, in the historical literature, were the evacuations to Iran of both military personnel and civilians in March-April and August-September 1942. It would be exceedingly interesting to know how such an operation was mounted and executed. What is clear, is that the evacuations were engineered by Anders against the objections of Sikorski and the Polish ambassador to Moscow, Stanislaw Kot. On 17 March 1942 Stalin received a report on statements made by Anders the previous day that suggested that if the provisions shortages could not be met to the Poles' satisfaction, the surplus of people in the army would have to be transferred to Iran.[368] On 18 March Stalin met with Anders and agreed to evacuate 44,000 Polish troops.[369] On 31 March Beria forwarded to Stalin a report from the Marshal of the Red Army, Gyorgii Zhukov, that Anders was planning to recruit into the Polish Army "all Polish citizens inhabiting the USSR."[370] Zhukov's opinion was that Anders should be informed that additional recruitment would be conducted only when those Polish units already formed on Soviet territory went to the front.

After having obtained concessions from Stalin that allowed for the removal of civilians along with the army, Anders received a telegram on 26 March from Ambassador Kot asking him to stop the spread of news of the evacuation as such news had prompted large-scale migrations of Poles. Kot also told the Soviet deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyshinskii, that Anders'

---

[368] GRUGSh [Glavnoye Razvediovatelnoe Upravlennie Generalnovo Shtaba] Red Army Report No. 50219ss. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 77.
[369] Molotov to Soviet Ambassador to London, A Bogomolov, Telegram No. 1141, 21 March 1942, 7:30PM. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 79
[370] NKVD USSR Report No. 549/b. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 89.

plan to evacuate to Iran went against the wishes of the Polish government.[371] That was followed by a message from Sikorski's deputy, Gen. Klimecki, which informed Anders that the inclusion of civilians in the evacuations went against the wishes of both the Polish and the British governments.[372] Instead, Anders gave orders that "any Pole who reported should be included in the military transport, and all nurseries and orphanages," because, in Anders' view, "any Pole who did not leave Russia then would probably never do so."[373] Sikorski then attempted to politely remove Anders from his post by offering him posts either in London or in the Middle-East, which Anders refused. Sikorski also informed Anders that "for reasons of high policy the troops have to stay in Soviet Russia."[374] Clearly, Anders' efforts were aimed at evacuating as many people as he could to Iran and it is just as clear that his priorities were far removed from those of the diplomatic representatives of the Polish government in London.

The first evacuation was completed on 3 April 1942. 42,254 people were evacuated, among them 12,155 civilians.[375] A second evacuation was already in the works, however. Anders continued his efforts to bring as many civilians as possible under the army's cloak and, in July, was informed by Soviet authorities that his request to evacuate the remainder of the army stationed in Uzbekistan

---

[371] Excerpt from the diary of the vice-Commissar for External affairs USSR, A. Vyshinskii, 24 March 1942. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 85.
[372] Anders, An Army in Exile, 101-102.
[373] Anders, An Army in Exile, 102.
[374] Anders, An Army in Exile, 109.
[375] NKVD USSR Report No. 583/b. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 91.

had been accepted.[376] On 31 July 1942 Anders telegrammed Stalin asking him to renew the recruitment of Polish citizens.[377] The second evacuation took place at the end of August 1942. It was larger and allowed more civilians to leave the USSR than had the first. Of the 69,917 evacuees, 28,814 were civilians.[378]

Finding details on the organization of the evacuation remains a difficult task, but it seems that Iranian fishing vessels were procured by the British to bring the Poles from Krasnovodsk in Kazakhstan southwards on the Caspian Sea to Pahlavi in Iran. Although the evacuations were formally limited to military personnel along with their families and various children's groups, many others managed to get on the boats either by simply cramming on-board, or through the good-will of soldiers.[379] The conditions on the ships were similar to, if not worse than, those that the deportees had experienced on their train journeys in the Soviet Union, but the trip was thankfully short. Nevertheless, some witnesses reported that dead bodies were thrown overboard during the crossing.[380] Most of the civilians were placed in refugee camps near Teheran while the Army went on to fight in Italy. After this exodus many of the former deportees settled in Australia, Canada and the United States and small Polish communities sprang up in Iran, India, Lebanon and South Africa.

---

[376] Anders, An Army in Exile, 112.
[377] Anders to Stalin, Telegram No. 2464, 31 July 1942. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 105.
[378] Consul General USSR at Pahlavi, M. Koptelov to Stalin, Telegram No. 8105, 7 September 1942, 1:05PM. In: Materski, Armia Polska, 107.
[379] Account of Irena Okulicz-Kozaryn. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 90.
[380] Account of Sabina Kukla. In: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 87.

4. Those who stayed behind

It is still far from clear how many of all those deported and imprisoned were in fact released after the amnesty. Many people could not manage to make the trip to the collection points and only some of those who did were included in the evacuations. Another obstacle to presenting anything like a final tally of those who were released, those who died and those who eventually returned to Poland, is the sometimes vague and at times undecipherable distinction between "Poles" and "Polish citizens." Very nearly half of the deportees were not ethnic Poles. While the amnesty officially covered all Polish citizens, in practice the Soviet authorities applied it, generally, only to ethnic Poles. Jewish, Ukrainian and Belorussian Polish citizens were often refused release.[381] They were, also, often told by Soviet representatives that the Polish government had rejected their citizenship claims when quite the opposite was true. Both Sikorski and Anders repeatedly protested to Stalin that Polish citizens were being refused amnesty on the basis of ethnicity and religious denomination.[382] Generally, those who had family members serving in the Polish army were released, no matter their background. As well, many managed to secure their release by successfully feigning Polish ethnicity or family relations with Polish soldiers.[383]

A group whose numbers are impossible to establish are those who escaped, either during the initial transports, or from their places of exile, or

---

[381] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!: Polscy Zeslancy lat 1940-1941 w ZSRR I ich losy do roku 1946 (Warsaaw: Instytut Hitorii PAN, 1998), 188.
[382] Anders, An Army in Exile, 84-85.
[383] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 188.

afterwards. The majority of those who did escape were certainly people who were not exiled with their families. One account was written by a woman who left her exile in Kazakhstan with a newborn son and managed to return to her family in the occupied territories and, later, to escape to the West.[384] However, such escapes must have been relatively few and surely people who attempted to escape were often caught and returned to their settlements or imprisoned. But, the NKVD likely did not need to guard against escapes with particular vigilance. For most of the deportees, escape was not feasible. First, most of them lived in family units, often with several children. Without easily available means of transport, food supplies, or valid documents the prospect of traveling thousands of kilometers through unknown territory and attempting to do so inconspicuously was not realistic. Moreover, there was hardly anywhere to escape to. The Eastern Polish territories were under Soviet jurisdiction. The deportees' restriction to their places of exile, even after the amnesty, was as much a matter of the realities that all-too-daunting circumstances imposed upon them, as it was one of forcible confinement.

Already before the evacuations had been completed, Polish-Soviet relations began to sour. When the Anders Army moved to Iran, the Polish government, as had feared Sikorski, lost a powerful point of leverage with Stalin.[385] Outside of occasional and not particularly pressing interventions on behalf of the Poles by the British, there was now no discernable reason for the

---

[384] See: Byrski, Ucieczka z Zeslania.
[385] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 190.

Soviet government to make concessions to the Poles. Consequently, in a drawn-out, but steady process, the Polish embassy's delegations in the field were dismantled, and their stores of material goods were taken over by the NKVD. Many representatives and field-workers of the Polish embassy were arrested on charges of espionage.[386]

Although official Polish-Soviet relations were maintained for the moment, the Soviet government took a decisive step when on 16 Januray 1943 the Commissariat for External Affairs informed the Polish embassy that all people who had been living on the formerly Polish territories at the time of their incorporation into the USSR on 1-2 November 1939 would now be considered Soviet citizens.[387] Those who refused Soviet passports were to be arrested.[388] The Soviet government officially broke off relations on 26 April 1943 citing repeated confrontations with the Polish government in London over the graves of Polish officers discovered by German soldiers in the Katyn forest.[389]

Tens of thousands of Polish citizens were issued Soviet passports and forced to remain in the USSR. Those who had left their places of exile once again had to seek work in order to survive. However, the material help that had been supplied by the Polish embassy was continued by the newly-formed Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP,) headed by prominent Polish communist Wanda

---

[386] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 316-318.
[387] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 191.
[388] NKVD USSR Report no. 77/b, 15 januray 1943. In: Wosik, Konflikty Polsko-Sowieckie, 35.
[389] Beria to Poland's Ambassador to Moscow, T. Romer, 26 April 1943. In: Polish Embassy in Washington, Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1943: Official Documents (Washington: s.n., 1943), 245.

Wasilewska. Although the ZPP has been dismissed by some commentators as nothing but a front for the Soviet government's manipulation of Poles in the Soviet Union and of foreign opinion,[390] between 1943 and 1945, the organization offered very tangible material help to ethnic Poles and Jews,[391] in particular to schools and orphanages and to the elderly and disabled who could not provide the means of their own survival. As well, a Polish army was reconstituted in the USSR under the leadership of Gen. Zygmunt Berling whose political views on a post-war Poland were in line with those of the Soviet government. Overall, it seems that the conditions of life for those deportees who remained in the USSR after the break in diplomatic relations were less onerous than they had been in the first two years after the deportations,[392] perhaps partly because they were now Soviet citizens and no longer subject to constraints on movement and employment.

The Soviet position on the former Polish citizens within its borders changed once again after the defeat of Germany. On 6 July 1945 the pro-Soviet germinal post-war Polish government, known as the Polish Committee of National Liberation, signed a repatriation agreement with the Soviet government that allowed Poles and Jews to seek Polish citizenship and be evacuated to

---

[390] See: Albert, Historia Polski, 399-400.
[391] The ZPP had declared its intention to represent all former Polish citizens, but the Soviet government insisted that Belorussian and Ukrainian Polish ctizens be excluded from the ZPP's relief programs. See: Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 202.
[392] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 213.

Poland.[393] Just as after the August 1941 amnesty, however, getting to various designated collection points was not always easy, and the Poles' departure was again hampered by some local officials.[394] Up to 1949, approximately 266,000 people were repatriated to Poland from the Soviet Union.[395] At the same time, however, another 50,000 Poles were imprisoned during this period and placed in various prisons and work camps in the Soviet Union,[396] and were released and returned to Poland only after an amnesty was granted in March 1957.[397] Moreover, Poles who had not been deported, but were, in 1945, living on what had become Soviet territory in 1939 were also repatriated to Poland. Altogether, because of the massive and often confused character of the post-war repatriations, it is difficult to say how many people of which category were repatriated, how many stayed in the Soviet Union, or how many regained post-war Polish territory by their own means and were not included in statistical reports. Polish historians familiar with both Soviet and Polish materials have cited a total of 415,000 repatriates after 1944.[398]

---

[393] We cannot rightly say that they were returned to Poland because post-war Polish eastern borders were moved some 200km west of where they had been on 17 September 1939. How all these people adapted to their new surroundings in Communist Poland deserves a study that is well beyond the scope of this paper.

[394] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 216.

[395] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, et al., Masowe Deportacje Radzieckie w Okresie II Wojny Swiatowej, 79.

[396] Another 42,000 were at least temporarily interned in 1944-45 on central-Polish territories occupied by the advancing Red Army. 40% of them were members of the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK) whose clandestine units had conducted partisan warfare against the German occupying forces, but whose overwhelmingly anti-Communist views were well-known to the Soviet leadership.. See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 33.

[397] Ewa Kowalska, Przezyc, aby wrocic!, 221.

[398] Ciesielski, et al., Masowe Deportacje Radzieckie w Okresie II Wojny Swiatowej, 82.

5. Numbers

Certainly, the temptation to assign the genocidal label to Soviet actions results from an instinctive desire to term in the starkest, most immediate terms available to us actions that represent crimes against humanity on a scale that defies the imagination. Figures such as 1 million lend themselves well to a symbolisation of victimhood. In the absence of verifiable proofs and in a situation of increasing political redundance, war-time Polish authorities in exile adopted figures that contained an iconic numerical component, thereby hoping to rouse support in the West. In the long-run, however, such symbolic figures, precisely because they are iconic, serve to make the story of the deportations all the more abstract. Such an abstraction then becomes not an event that can be understood within a historical context, but a symbolic representation of suffering that inevitably is stripped of relevant meaning with the passing of time. Assessing the real numbers of Polish victims of Soviet repressions at the expense of symbolic figures does not demean the victims' memory. On the contrary, by providing a clearer understanding of Soviet actions and their effects, accurate, source-based assessments can only illuminate and contextualise these events and, thereby, take them out of the realm of conjecture and abstraction and place them within the body of historical knowledge.

The history of the inflated numbers of Polish deportees and of the death-toll among them began as early as May 1940, when reports emanating from Polish partisan army units still operating in the occupied territories stated that

150,000 people were being deported each month, that the total number of deportees had already surpassed 1 million, and that the Soviet authorities were pursuing a "planned [...] extermination of the Polish element."[399] These figures were quickly taken up by various Polish organizations in the West. Notably, the Polish embassy in Washington published, in 1943, a volume of documents on Polish-Soviet relations that contained an introductory chapter on the situation of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union which reported that 1,050,000 people had been deported and that "the Polish government [had] proof that the death-rate among [them] amounted to at least 20%."[400]

The proof the Washington embassy likely referred to were reports from the Polish embassy in the USSR and a report filed by two members of the Polish underground who had travelled to major Polish exile settlements in the summer of 1940.[401] These figures, or ones very much like them, were adopted by the Polish government in London in its efforts to rally support for the Polish cause. That such high estimates offered a poignant rallying-cry for the Polish government in exile is not to say that the estimates were insincere. However, it is interesting to note that an early critic of these figures was the Polish ambassador to Japan, Tadeusz Romer. In October 1940, Romer, who would later replace Kot as ambassador in Moscow, sent a report to London in which he stated that "given

---

[399] Stanislaw Ciesielski et al., Masowe Deportacje Radzieckie w Okresie II Wojny Swiatowej (Wroclaw: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego, 1994), 26-27.
[400] Polish Embassy in Washington, Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1943: Official Documents (Washington: s.n., 1943), 21.
[401] Bockowski suggests that the implausibility of unhindered travel in the Soviet Union at the time calls the report into question. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 99.

the technical difficulties of transport and settlement" in the Soviet Union, he considered the figures reported earlier to be improbable. Romer did not, however offer an estimate, though he considered the number of deportees to be "hundreds, rather than tens, of thousands."[402] However, upon receipt in London, the report was edited so that it seemed to confirm, rather than dispute, the high estimates.[403] In any case, the exiled Polish Government's insistence on the high figures did little to support its cause in the end.

In the decades following the war, figures of 1 million or higher, as well as high death-tolls, were oft-repeated by *émigré* Poles and were taken up by Western historians who published on the subject. The numbers also led commentators to conclude that the Soviet Union's actions were genocidal because they had aimed and apparently succeeded at killing a substantial portion of Polish society. Given that for decades the only available information were the testimonies of witnesses and the above-cited reports, neither *émigré* Poles nor Western historians can be faulted for adhereing to what were approximate, yet seemingly confirmed estimates. Those in the Polish public who were familiar with Western publications as well as historians carrying on clandestine work in Poland during the years of communist rule considered these numbers to be all the more plausible precisely because they were published in the West where historical work was not subject to censorship.[404] Indeed, over the years the

---

[402] Cited in: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 102.
[403] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 99.
[404] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 101.

numbers went steadily upwards, so that figures of 1.5 million deportees and death-tolls of up to 30% found currency in the Western literature.[405]

With the opening of the Soviet archives, beginning in 1988, research into various aspects of Polish-Soviet relations took a dramatic turn. In the early 1990's publications presenting the results of research conducted by both Russian and Polish historians rejected the earlier estimates and pointed out that the objections of those commentators who criticized the Soviet documentation as unreliable and who defended the earlier, high estimates in the face of the newly available information "provide[d] for undoubtedly valuable comments and reflections on the methodolgy and the investigative craft of the historian."[406]

As is evident from the documentation which I have cited throughout this study, the body of publically-available archival materials has grown steadily now for over a decade. That the initial reaction to the Soviet figures was mitigated is understandable given the emotionally-laden nature of the subject. It is not surprising that those who had for years attempted to highlight Soviet crimes against humanity reacted negatively to such a substantial downwards revision of Polish victims of those repressions. It seems that, although the numbers are still sometimes disputed, most Polish historians had largely accepted the available Soviet figures by the end of the 1990's.[407]

---

[405] See, for ex.: Keith Sword, Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-1948 (New York: St-Martin's Press, 1994), 27.
[406] Ciesielski, et al., Masowe Deportacje Radzieckie w Okresie II Wojny Swiatowej, 82.
[407] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 101.

However, commentators who have contributed to the sparse body of scholarly commentary on the deportations in Western Europe and in North America have, up to the present, demonstrated a singular aversion to the findings of Polish and Russian researchers. In July 1999, the Paris-based Cahiers du monde russe carried an essay by Jerzy W. Borejsza, who has published on various aspects of totalitarianism and Polish foreign relations and is affiliated with the Historical Institute at the Polish Academy of Sciences. The article treated views of Russia and the Soviet Union in post-1989 Polish historiography. While Borejsza mentioned several works on the deportations of Poles to Siberia and to Kazakhstan, he bypassed the issue of the revised numbers – a curious omission, given that Borejsza's essay aimed to demonstrate that an insistent anti-Russian bias was still present in Polish historical writing and disrtorted historians' conclusions on Polish-Soviet relations.[408]

Also in 1999, Alexandra Viatteau, a Polish-born historian who has lectured on Soviet propaganda at the Université de Paris, published a work on Stalin's attitudes towards the Poles, unambiguously titled Staline assassine la Pologne (1939-1947) in which Viatteau stated that as many as 1,750,000 Poles had been deported into the Soviet Union. That such numbers were cited by a scholar who undoubtedly had access to findings that contradicted her thesis represents a glaring omission. Moreover, in 2001 Viatteau posted an on-line article that, while failing to explicitly cite the comprehensive work performed by

[408] Jerzy Borejsza, "La Russie moderne et l'Union Soviétique dans l'historiographie polonaise après 1989," Cahiers du monde russe 40, no. 3 (Juillet-septembre 1999): 545.

Polish researchers on the subject, charged that "young [Polish historians whose] historical baggage has been lessened [...] by the passage of time" or who were "interested in an ideologically acceptable or politically correct version of events" had fallen prey to "time-bombs of intoxication and disinformation" that were, in her opinion, present in the NKVD documents on which those historians relied to revise the numbers of the deported. While citing many figures, though none of those brought forward by the "young historians," Viatteau unambiguously referred to "the communist genocide."[409] In the face of the volume of documentary archival information that had, then, already been comprehensively examined by Polish researchers in comparative studies that took into account varied sources of information to corroborate their findings, such an obstinate attitude towards new directions in the historiography suggests a willful ignorance of the body of knowledge that had been accumulated by the end of the 1990's.

A similar, though not as explicitly stated, attitude has been demonstrated by one of the major contributors to the field in the United States, Jan T. Gross, who is professor of War and Society in modern European history at Princeton University. Gross has published extensively on various aspects of both the German and the Soviet occupations of Poland and is likely best known for Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001) which described the

[409] Alexandra Viatteau, "Le déminage des archives communistes soviétiques." May 2001. Article may be accessed at: <www.diploweb.com/p7viat#308273F>; accessed 15 June 2007.

massacre of Jews in the Polish town of Jedwabne in 1941.[410] Gross' most important contribution to the history of the deportations was his publication of War Through Children's Eyes, a collection of testimonies written by Polish children after their evacuation to Iran.[411] For the purposes of our discussion, perhaps equally as important was Gross' revised, second edition of Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia, published in 2001.[412] In the body of non-archival source-based literature on Soviet repressions against Poles, the book rises above the field in its critical and balanced approach to both previous (i.e.: pre-1989) work on the subject and to the witness' testimonies which make up the bulk of its source-base. Gross explicitly states that Polish accounts of the deportations carry with them an inevitable bias.[413] Moreover, Gross' discussion of the Soviet occupation and administration of Polish territories has not been contradicted by more recent findings and I relied on it extensively in my discussion of the occupation, above. However, although it is a benchmark of conscientious historical writing on the occupation, Gross' work is also a telling example of the incapacity of a historiography based almost solely on witness' testimonies to reach beyond its

---

[410] The publication of this work sparked wide debate in Poland, since Gross claimed that Poles had of their own volition perpetrated a massacre of Jews in Jedwabne.

[411] Gross was the first historian to make extensive use of tens of thousands of hand-written testimonies and transcripts of interviews collected by the Polish embassy in the USSR during the period of amnesty, which after the war were transferred by the Polish government in London to the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University, Stanford, California. Index of the archives' "Polish Collection" may be accessed at: <www.hoover.org/hila/col#30A4A02>. Accessed 15 June 2007.

[412] The first edition was published in 1986.

[413] Gross, Revolution, xxii-xxiii.

source-base: its conclusions on Soviet motives in effecting the deportations do not stand in the face of archival materials.

In preparing the revised 2001 edition, Gross was well aware of the findings of the previous decade. However, the only mention that Gross made of those findings was a passing comment on KARTA's Raport in the concluding paragraph to his "Preface to the Expanded Edition." There, Gross stated that "the best count of the total number of deportees [in 1940-41] now runs between 309,000 and 327,000,"[414] thus explicitly accepting that estimates based on Soviet documentation are correct. However, Gross failed to include a revision of the numbers in the body of the book. For example, in his discussion of statistical estimates, we read that "in [Gross'] judgment, the most thorough estimate of the scale and composition of the deportations was produced by the Polish ministry of Foreign Affairs in London on March 15, 1944."[415] Gross then seemingly attempted to reconcile his positive assessment of this report with the new figures by stating that of the 1.25 million Polish citizens that the 1941 report stated "were moved or went into the USSR's interior during 1939-1941"[416] about 450,000 were deportees. But a map reproduced on the opposing page shows that 1,050,000 people were deported.[417] As well, contradicting his own acceptance of the revised figures in his "Preface," Gross also stated that Soviet figures submitted to the Polish government in 1941, which put the number of Polish

---

[414] Gross, Revolution, xiv.
[415] Gross, Revolution, 193.
[416] Gross, Revolution, 194.
[417] Gross, Revolution, 195.

citizens detained on Soviet territory at 387,932, were "a wild guess, at best, and more likely a deliberate deception."[418] Also eschewing the findings of the report, Gross reported that as many as 13,000 people were executed during the evacuation of Lwow's Brygidki prison at the time of the German invasion,[419] while KARTA's report stated that in the evacuation of the prison and of several camps that made up a complex around Lwow a total of 1,328 prisoners were later unaccounted for.[420] Gross also claimed that, overall, the NKVD killed as many as 100,000 people during various evacuation operations in the summer of 1941.[421]

It is not difficult to understand the reason for Gross' half-hearted attempt to include the revised figures. On the basis of the high estimates of deportees, on the basis of witness testimonies that reported that some 10% of deportees died during their transport alone,[422] on the basis of Norman Davies' God's Playground: A History of Poland (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) - which reported 750,000 dead deportees by the time of the Anders evacuations[423] - Gross argued that the deportees "were not singled out for resettlement. They were meant to be destroyed." Overall, Gross was led to conclude that "Soviet power [...] was predicated on massive extermination of its

---

[418] Gross, Revolution, 193.
[419] Gross, Revolution, 180.
[420] This number includes escapees and those killed by German bombing runs. See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 12.
[421] Gross, Revolution, 228.
[422] Gross, Revolution, 221.
[423] Davies' numbers were based on those reported by Anders. See: Anders, An Army in Exile, 116. Although Gross stated that Davies' estimate may be "not far off the mark," he stated that 300,000 dead was more plausible. See: Gross, Revolution, 229.

subjects."[424] It is doubtful that the essence of Gross' thesis could have remained unaltered had he attempted to tackle the findings presented in KARTA's Raport in all their import.

The results of archival research conducted by Polish and Russian historians have been available in print, publically since as early as 1994. They have since been complemented by extensive publications of archival materials that substantiate their findings. It is an implcit comment on the dearth of both the knowledge of, and interest in, the groundbreaking work of Eastern-European historians and its implications for the history of the Soviet Union and its satellites that reviews of Viatteau's[425] and Gross'[426] work written by Western historians entirely failed call into question the statistical information adduced by both authors, especially since their conceptual framework was largely predicated on the numbers that they cited. This is particularily true of Gross' work in light of the incongruities that are inherent in the author's passive acceptance of the new findings.

Authors of more recent works published in the West, while they report the new numbers, tend to call into question their validity and to put their trustworthiness on a par with that of the older, much higher estimates.[427]

---

[424] Gross, Revolution, 224.
[425] Cécile Vaissié, review of Staline assassine la pologne (1939-1947), by Alexandra Viatteau, Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire, no. 67 (Jul.-Sep., 2000): 202-203.
[426] Albert Resis, review of Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia, by Jan T. Gross, Europe-Asia Studies, 55, no. 5 (July, 2003): 812-813.
[427] Writing in 2002, Jolluck stated that "work on the Soviet documents remains in its early stages." Moreover, citing both the revised figures and the older estimates of 1 million or more, Jolluck expressed an "assumption that the real figure lies somewhere in between." See: Katherine

Although there are many numerical discrepancies in the Soviet documentation they are of a scale that does not call into question their overall validity.[428] Arguments that the NKVD falsified its accounting of the deportations are implausible at best and, at worst, disingenuous. Such arguments could be taken into account if the revised numbers were based on, perhaps, several documents. But, they are not. As has been pointed out by Bockowski, the documentation that has spurred the Polish literature of the past decade represents documents ranging from orders from the highest echelons of Soviet administration, to the situation and operational reports of NKVD agents in the field, to the reports of convoy troops who escorted the transport trains, to reports by the NKVD divisions who received the deportees at their places of exile and the reports on work-force contingents from the various industries in which the deportees were forced to work, among others. A coordinated, premeditated falsification of this varied documentation at the source would hardly have been realizable, nor are there plausible explanations as to the purpose that such a falsification would have served.[429] Surely, the NKVD apparatus was more involved in maintaining control over its various operations, than it was concerned with the prescient planting of disinformation in its documentation.

R. Jolluck, Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 11. Piotrowski, on the other hand, in 2004, in his introduction to a collection of survivors' memoirs, after citing KARTA's findings, adduces the estimates of railway workers, which were tabulated by a former deportee, whose account was reported in a 1992 work published in the United States in order to conclude his discussion of numbers with an estimate of 1,692,000 deportees. See: Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees, 5.

[428] Bockowski, who presents an exetensive comparative analysis of a wide range of materials, states that the NKVD documents show a 90-95% mutual numerical convergence. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 98.

[429] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 98.

At the present, KARTA's Raport still represents the most lucid synthesis of the data provided by post-Soviet archives and various Polish sources, such as field reports filed by the Polish embassy's workers during its tenure in the USSR, and of the work of Polish and Russian researchers conducted during the 1990's. KARTA considers that the total number of Polish citizens of all ethnic backgrounds and religious denominations who were in various manners "repressed" by Soviet organs after 17 September 1939 is approximately 570,000.

Of that number, 320,000 were deported in the four major deportation operations.[430] Among the others, over 45,000 were imprisoned or temporarily interned as prisoners-of-war between 1939 and 1941, of whom14,587 were executed on the basis of Beria's order of 5 March 1940. 110,000 were civilians detained in prisons in the occupied territories, of whom 7,305 were executed on Beria's March 1940 order and another 1,208 were sentenced to death by Soviet courts.[431] In 1939-41, including both civilians and former soldiers, 40,000 Polish citizens were detained in various GULag correctional labour camps. In 1944-45, 42,000 were interned – 40% percent of them were members of the underground Polish army who had resisted the German occupation. Additionally, after 1944, another 50,000 Polish citizens were arrested or deported into the USSR.[432]

---

[430] People who were temporarily exempted from deportation and who later joined their families in exile reprsent 1-2% of the total number of deportees. See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 18.
[431] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 14.
[432] See: Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport.

It is important to note that not all researchers agree with KARTA's limitation of the estimates to these categories of people. Bockowski, for example, estimates that, including Polish citizens who were forcibly incorporated into the Red Army, those who were displaced during the cleansing of the border strip, those who were forcibly evacuated at the time of the German attack in the Summer of 1941, those who fled the attack on their own and those who sought work in the Soviet interior, either on their own or under pressure from Soviet authorities, at least 750,000-780,000 Polish citizens found themselves to the east of the inter-war Polish border during the Soviet occupation.[433] Since Bockowski includes those who voluntarily moved into the Soviet interior, but agrees with figures of 315,000-330,000 for the four deportations,[434] his figures must not be taken to support the older estimates of the numbers of people who were forcibly deported. However, they do afford, perhaps, a degree of credibility to the estimates published in 1944 by the Polish government in London, cited by Gross, which put the number of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union at 1.25 million.

Finally, how many died? KARTA's report admits that establishing "even an attempt of an account" of death-rates among the various cagories of the repressed Polish citizens remains an "uncommonly difficult" task.[435] In the report's estimation, a maximum of 15,000 deportees died from the time of their

---

[433] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 92.
[434] Bockowski estimates that of the Polish citizens moved by the deportations, 53% were Poles, 30% Jews and the remainder were Ukrainians, Belorussians and others. However, of the total 750,000-780,000, Poles remained in the same proportion, while Jews represented 20%. See: Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 91, 95.
[435] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 21.

arrival in exile, up to the time of the amnesty, but that number does not include deaths during the initial transport and the authors of the report do not hazard a guess as to mortality rates on the transport trains. Death-rates among the deportees stood at 7.7% for the settlers and foresters and at 2.5% for those deported in the other operations.[436] Of those imprisoned in GULag camps, the report cautiously states 1,500 dead, with the implication that the numbers may be higher.[437] Bockowski, on the other hand, cites 9.5% dead among the February deportees and arrives at an overall mortality rate of 5-6% among all those forcibly moved into the USSR, representing 20,000-25,000 dead in 1940-1941.[438] although he does not make explicit whether these numbers include deaths during transport. According to his calculations, death-rates in the transport trains amounted to 0.3-0.5% in February 1940 and these were the highest of the four deportations.[439]

For the period after the amnesty, Beria reported in 1944 that 11,516 Polish citizens had died between the time of the amnesty and the end of 1943.[440] Both Bockowski and KARTA consider this number to be too low, largely because during the period of amnesty the realities presented by large numbers of people moving on their own precluded the NKVD from keeping remotely

---

[436] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 19.
[437] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 15.
[438] Although Bockowski does not make this clear, these calculations seem to include not only the deportees, but other categories of Polish citizens forcibly moved into the Soviet interior during this period. Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 159.
[439] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 59.
[440] "Information on the numbers of former Polish citizens," 1 May 1944. In: Materski, ed., Konflikty Polsko-Sowieckie, 169.

accurate accounts.[441] Bockowski's opinion is that of the 395,000 Polish citizens released under the amnesty possibly 6-7% died during this period.[442] The authors of KARTA's report, however, dispute Bockowski's estimate and term it "hasty."[443] Owing to important discrepancies in both Soviet and Polish documentation relevant to this period the KARTA authors limit their opinion to implying that Beria's 11,516 is too low, but Bockowski's approximation of 21,000 or more is likely too high.

Since Bockowski's typology of repression is more inclusive than KARTA's, we may take his numbers to represent the high range of estimates produced by comprehensive archival research. Thus the number of Polish citizens who died in the USSR between 1939 and 1943 as a result of their deportation or imprisonment will likely range between 40,000 and 45,000. This number does not include the 22,000 executed on Beria's orders in the spring of 1940. Notwithstanding the differences that result from differing approaches to the data, it is clear that the death-tolls reported in much of the older, and some of the more recent, work on the subject that spoke of hundreds of thousands dead were severely exaggerated.

---

[441] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 247.
[442] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 246.
[443] Ciesielski, Materski, Paczkowski, Raport, 20.

6. Conclusions

Soviet documentation and the testimonies of survivors suggest conflicting accounts of the deportations and their effects on the deportees. The records of the Soviet bureaucratic apparata show closely planned and executed mass resettlements infrequently hampered by irregularities that could be traced to the lax execution of duties by low- or mid-level personnel. The witness' testimonies present brutish, chaotic and traumatic events that were followed by a daily struggle for survival in which hunger and disease were inescapable realities. If mass Soviet repressions are to be understood, rather than only decried as morally abhorrent, we must try to reconcile these two sources of information. They must be made complementary.

In choosing an analytical, rather than a commemorative, approach to the testimonies I have not disregarded the victims' suffering. But their emotional potency has been sufficiently mined by previous authors. What I have attempted is the examination of a part of the overall body of evidence on the deportations and its capacity to offer insights into Soviet intentions towards the deportees, which for too long have been covered with generalizations and emotionally charged labels that may help to commemorate the events, but do not advance our understanding of the deportations within the scope of soviet policies, nor to assess the validity of Soviet archival sources.

On the other hand, Soviet documentation is silent on the exceedingly daunting daily realities that the deportees endured. The deportees' testimonies,

because what they experienced were the diluted effects of directives from higher echelons of Soviet administration, are not a source-base that is adequate to impugn motives to Soviet policies. The reliability of both source-bases must be considered. NKVD and other reports on the deportees' life in exile were framed in euphemisms that did not reflect their extremely difficult, and often precarious situation. On the surface, it would seem that the two source-bases are mutually exclusive: we cannot look up to the levels of decision making from the eyes of the deportees who dealt not with officers of the Soviet state, but with middling field agents and soldiers, as we cannot look in on the deportees through the reports of NKVD officers and high functionaries of other Soviet organs whose aim was inevitably to appear to have carried out commands dutifully, shifting blame elsewhere when irregularities were evident. They usually shifted that blame downwards onto the middling functionaries, agents and soldiers.

It is this invisible class of people who staffed the lower levels of the NKVD and other Soviet organs of state who are at the point of convergence of the two sets of sources. What emerges from this convergence is a picture of middling and low-level class of functionaries were left to compensate for the discrepancies between the demands of central planning and the sheer lack of resources that the Soviet state had at its disposal to fulfill those demands. That the deportees experienced varied forms of treatment suggests, in turn, that this class of lower-level functionaries, under whose direct jurisdictions the deportees were placed, adopted varying methods in their attempts to either fulfill quotas or

to remain invisible in their posts. We must, however, make the distinction between more isolated places of exile where control from the top was surely more lax, and larger industrial or forestry complexes in which regulations were likely more strictly enforced. Some officials treated the deportees as implicit allies in the daily attempt to remain at their posts by remaining simply inconspicuous. It is those who felt little moral restraint against exploiting the deportees' meager resources, both material and personal, who were likely to leave the deportees with the memories that form the heart wrenching scenes of death, hunger, misery and dislocation present in the body of testimonies.

The deportees' hardships and the deaths of many were not the planned results of Soviet policies. But, they were the results of a policy of extracting slave-labour from millions of people in the pursuit of Joseph Stalin's ideological and megalomaniacal fulfilment. That hundreds of thousands of people were taken from their homes and sent into settlements where their survival hinged on circumstance, resourcefulness and the good or ill-will of local functionaries was made possible by the NKVD organization under the leadership of Lavrenti Beria. Beria's variously-intoned qualifications of hundreds of thousands of people as incorrigible enemies of Soviet power demonstrates the facilititating effects of an ideological terminology in stripping human beings of their intrinsic worth and rights.

* * *

Historians have assigned a squarely genocidal intent to the Soviet government. Bockowski, who supports the lower estimates for the deportations, argues that the deportations carried "all the hallmarks of the crime of genocide."[444] Given the available evidence, I must refute this view. The intent was to neutralize people who were seen to be politically dangerous. The aim was to thereby eliminate the political identity of a particular national group - not the physical destruction of all Poles, but their Sovietization - or, to borrow from Soviet phraseology, their revolution. Perhaps the clearest argument against Soviet genocidal intent is that among the deportees and those arrested in the occupied territories, approximately 48% were not ethnic Poles. It was not Polish ethnicity that mattered, but Polish citizenship. In some cases, merely the place of residence mattered. The Soviet aims were ones of ideologically-motivated social cleansing, but not mass destruction of human life. Most definitions of genocide do not require that the victims be targeted based on ethnicity alone.[445] But in the case of the deportations, genocide was not the aim of the Soviet authorities.

The killings of the 22,000 Polish officers, policemen and others interned in the 'special camps' and in various prisons on Beria's order of 5 March 1940 are another matter, however. Here a premeditated program of killing was carried out and those who were killed were clearly targeted for physical destruction

---

[444] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 162.

[445] The United Nations Genocide Convention stipulates "national, ethnical, racial or religious" groups. This limitation has been criticized as omitting groups that are undefined beyond the perpetrators' arbitrary identification of the group – such as the Soviet designation of "enemies of the People" or Beria's above-cited "incorrigible enemies of Soviet Power." See: Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies (New Haven & London: Yale University press, 1990), 10, 26.

because of their social and political status and their leadership abilities – here the aim was to eliminate the human potential for the restructuring of the Polish state. A paradox for which I fail to find a satisfying explanation, was Beria's order that the executed officers' families were to be allowed to keep the money obtained from the liquidation of their assets after their deportation.

As a concentrated program of political repression, should the Katyn killings be considered to be separate from the deportations? Clearly, both were part of a premeditated effort to Sovietize the occupied territories. If we accept that they were part of the same plan, can we say that part of the plan was genocidal, and another was not? That certainly seems to be a frail line of reasoning. The solution I propose is to see the deportations not as a homogenous program, but as distinctly separate operations whose aims were not generalized, but were quite specific to each of the deportations.

The first and second deportations targeted, in the overwhelming majority, ethnic Poles. The settlers had benefited from the Polish governments' Polonisation of the Eastern territories and often were veterans of the Polish-Soviet war whose inimical attitudes towards Soviet power had been explicitly demonstrated in that conflict. The foresters were intimately familiar with large tracts of land that, for the Soviet Union, represented both an important economic resource and a potential arena of partisan resistance. In short, the first deportation targeted those who physically knew and controlled the land. Their removal was, for the Soviet Union, a convenient conjunction of ideological, functional and

economic needs. In one operation, the area was cleared of a conspicuously hostile element that was intimately connected to the land and whose removal allowed the Soviet authorities to claim to be redistributing the wealth of exploiters among the remainder of the population. Economically – and this is a characteristic that was to some degree common to all the deportations – moving all these people to various work colonies in the Soviet interior provided the Soviet war economy with tens of thousands of labourers. A confirmation of this assessment may be sought in the first situational reports sent to Beria during the February 1940 deportation - they emanated from the NKVD's economic branch.

The second deportation was more explicitly punitive in its character. It targeted, largely, the families of the 22,000 murdered on Beria' orders. Their deportation differed from the first in that they were not classified as special settlers who were to be permanently settled in labour colonies; the deportees of April 1940 were instead classified as being subjected to "administrative exile" that was not decreed to be permanent, but was to last ten years. And although, as we know from the witness testimonies, women, as well as children over the age of twelve, were subjected to the same work quotas as were adult males, it is doubtful that the NKVD considered the deportees encompassed by this operation to be a particularily viable economic resource. They were sent to kolkhozes in Kazakhstan, not to labour colonies in the North.

Thus, although the first two deportations differed in certain aspects, their most important shared characteristic was that they targeted, in an overwhelming

majority, ethnic Poles who, either directly or through family ties, were closely connected to the efforts of the Second Republic to Polonise the Eastern territories and were, thus, conspicuously hostile to Soviet power and were likely to foment and to carry-out resistance and dissent. Seen in this light, the first two deportations were quite different from those that followed and, in conjunction with the execution by shots to the back of the head of 22,000 human beings, must be considered as part of a concerted effort to not only Sovietize the occupied territories, but also to eliminate the potential re-structuring of a distinct national identity. We can thus say that the Katyn killings were a genocidal massacre that was part of a policy of assimilation conducted by the Soviet Union against Poles, which is not the same as Bockowski's point that the NKVD's exile settlements represented a "genocidal policy of assimilation of the most patriotic segments of the conquered nations."[446]

The distinction may seem pedantic, but within the scope of an attempt to insist on the historical importance of these events, to assign broad labels to acts of political repression that evidently took on varied forms is only to do a disservice to historical accuracy. Generalizations, notwithstanding their potential for stirring emotional responses, do not contribute to render a clear picture of the past and only serve make events of mass repression seem all the more abstract. The premeditated murder of at least 22,000 human beings, coupled with the displacement of hundreds of thousands of others, tens of thousands of whom

[446] Bockowski, Czas Nadziei, 205.

died, largely through the neglect of the deporting authorities, is a crime on a scale that deserves both remembrance and unequivocal condemnation as a callous abrogation of both individual and collective rights. But the Soviet policies directed against Polish citizens were not directed towards the physical extermination of Poles (which I take to be a criterion that is central to definitions of genocide) on a scale that would allow us to properly term them "genocidal."

* * *

The lives and deaths of the deportees did not take place within concepts nor in conceptual wrangling, but, for many, on cold nights, in cattle-cars reeking of feces, in emaciated bodies, in the wasting away of parents in front of children whose childhoods were stolen and in all the pain that comes from not understanding how human beings can inflict suffering on others. In the words of one deportee: "We really don't find the words to describe these experiences in Russia. It is impossible either to describe or to tell, only that person can understand it who felt it himself on his own skin. Otherwise no one will understand."[447] Those were the realities that the Soviet Union imposed on far too many people and the deported and executed Poles represent only a fraction of that suffering. But it is only by presenting the most accurate picture possible of the ways in which that suffering was brought about that we may come to better understand the real implications of the injustices that result from the valuing of an ideology over the worth of human life.

---

[447] Gross, War Through Children's Eyes, 75.

Eastern Europe has never held the attention of Western historians. What I have hoped to show here is that an examination of Soviet policies and actions directed towards Polish citizens illuminates far larger issues that should prove to be of interest to historians outside Eastern Europe, such as the extent of the NKVD's role within the Soviet state, the incapacity of the Soviet infrastructure to fulfill the goals of central planning without exploiting a slave work-force, the demonstrably varied behaviour of low- to mid-level Soviet functionaries (which ought be of particular interest for studies of Soviet society "from below"), as well as the extent of both the material and human resources necessary to carry out mass actions that removed and confined hundreds of thousands of people. The state of current research in Poland seems to be such that establishing ever more accurate numbers is still a primary concern. I hope to have demonstrated that, even while taking into account only published materials, the subject of the deportations can be afforded a higher degree of complexity than has been done to date.

Bibliography

I. Published primary sources

a) Archival Materials

Adamuszko, Wladimir, et al. eds. Wydarzenia I Losy Ludzkie: Rok 1939. Vol 1 of Zachodnia Bialorus, 17 IX 1939 – 22 VI 1941. Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1998.

Bugai, Nikolai F. "Specjalna Teczka Stalina: Deportacje i reemigracja Polaków." Zeszyty Historyczne 107 (1994): 76-140.

Jakubowski, Grzegorz et al. eds. Deportacje obywateli polskich z Zachodniej Ukrainy i Zachodniej Bialorusi w 1940 roku. Warsaw: Instytut Pamieci Narodowej – Komisja Scigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu; Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnetrznych I Administracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej; Moscow: Federalnaia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2003.

Materski, Wojciech, ed. Katyn: Dokumenty Ludobojstwa: dokumenty i materialy archiwalne przedane Polsce 14 Pazdziernika 1992 r.. Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1992.

___. Armia Polska w ZSSR, 1941-1942. Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1992.

___. Konflikty Polsko-Sowieckie, 1942-1944. Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1993.

Polish Embassy in Washington. Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1943: Official Documents. Washington: s.n., 1943.

Strzembosz, Tomasz, ed. Okupacja Sowiecka (1939-1941) w Swietle Tajnych Dokumentow. Warsaw: Instytut Studiow Politycznych PAN, 1996.

b) Witness' Testimonies

Adamczyk, Wesley. When God Looked the Other Way: An Odyssey of War, Exile and Redemption. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Anders, Wladyslaw. An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps. London: Macmillan & Co., 1949.

Bilewicz, Marian, M. Wyszedlem z Mroku. Warszawa: Ludowa Spoldzielnia Wydawnicza, 1989.

Byrska, Maria. Ucieczka z Zeslania. Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1986.

Czapski, Joseph. The Inhuman Land. London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1987.

Dubanowiczowa, Magdalena. Na Mongolskich Bezdrozach: Wspomnienia z zeslania 1940-1942 spisane w 1943-945. London: Polish Cultural foundation, 1974.

Gross, Jan Tomasz and Grudzinska-Gross, Irena, eds. War Through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-1941. Stanford, California: Stanford university;The Hoover Institution Press, 1981.

Klukowski, Bogdan, ed. My Deportowani: Wspomnienia Polakow z wiezien, lagrow i zsylek w ZSRR. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Alfa, 1989.

Komisja Historyczna Zarzadu Glownego Zwiazku Sybirakow. Wspomnienia Sybirakow. 8 vols. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Pomost, 1989-1992.

Piotrowski, Tadeusz, ed. The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2004.

Przysiezniak, Roman. Freedom Lost and Found. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

Siemaszko, Zbigniew. Pod Sowiecka Wladza (1939-1942). London: Polish Cultural foundation, 2001.

Sobota, Anna. W Stepach Kazachstanu: Wspomnienia z lat 1939-1946. Wroclaw: Biblioteka Zeslanca; Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1993.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: An experiment in literary investigation. Abridged by Edward E. Ericson. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.

Swianiewicz, Stanislaw. W Cieniu Katynia. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1990.

Teczarowska, Danuta. Deportation into the Unknown. Braunton, England: Merlin Books, 1985.

Wielhorski, Wladyslaw. Wspomnienia z Przezyc w Niewoli Sowieckiej. London: Orbis, 1965.

II. Secondary sources

Albert, Andrzej. Najnowsza Historia Polski, 1918-1980. London: Puls Publications, 1991.

Applebaum, Anne. Gulag: A History. New York: Anchor Books, 2004.

Bockowski, Daniel. Czas Nadziei: Obywatele Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w ZSRR I opieka nad nimi placowek polskich w latach 1940-1943. Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 1999.

Borejsza, Jerzy. "La Russie moderne et l'Union Soviétique dans l'historiographie polonaise après 1989." Cahiers du monde russe 40, no. 3 (Juillet-septembre 1999): 529-546.

Bugai, Nikolai F. The deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996.

Chalk, Frank and Jonassohn, Kurt. The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies. New Haven & London: Yale University press, 1990.

Cienciala, Anna. "Detective Work: Researching Soviet World War II Policy on Poland in Russian Archives (Moscow 1994)." Cahiers du monde russe 40, nos. 1-2 (Janvier-juin 1999): 251-270.

Ciesielski, Stanislaw, Hryciuk, Grzegorz and Srebrakowski, Aleksander. Masowe Deportacje Radzieckie w Okresie II Wojny Swiatowej. Wroclaw: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego, 1994.

Ciesieslki, Stanislaw, Materski Wojciech and Paczkowski, Andrzej. Raport: Represje Sowieckie wobec Polakow i Obywateli Polskich. Warsaw: Osrodek KARTA, 2002.

"Documents relating to the Administration of Occupied Territories in Eastern Europe: The Soviet Occupation of Poland." New York: Polish Information Center, 1941.

Eberhardt, Piotr. Polska Granica Wschodnia, 1939-1945. Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1993.

Gross, Jan T. Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Jolluck, Katherine R. Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002.

Kowalska, Ewa. Przezyc, aby wrocic!: Polscy Zeslancy lat 1940-1941 w ZSRR I ich losy do roku 1946. Warsaaw: Instytut Hitorii PAN, 1998.

Pohl, Otto J. The Stalinist Penal System: A Statistical History of Soviet Repression and Terror, 1930-1953. Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, 1997.

Porycka, Ileana and Wancerz-Gluza, Alicja, eds. Rosja a Katyn. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo KARTA, 1994.

Sanford, George. "The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations 1941-43." Journal of Contemporary History 41, no. 1 (2006): 95-111.

Siemaszko, Zbigniew. Poczatki Sowietyzacji (1939-1946). London: Caldra House, 2000.

Sleszynski, Wojciech. Okupacja Sowiecka na Bialostocczyznie, 1939-1941: Propaganda i Indoktrynacja. Bialystok: Agencja Wydawnicza Benkowski; Bialostockie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2001.

Stachura, Peter D. Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Stola, Dariusz. "Forced migrations in Central European History." International Migration Review 1992 26(2): 324-341.

Sword, Keith. Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-1948. New York: St-Martin's Press, 1994.

Szubtarska, Beata. Ambasada polska w ZSRR w latach 1941-1943. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2005.

Viatteau, Alexandra. Staline assassine la Pologne: 1939-1947. Paris: Seuil, 1999.