

**War, resettlement, rooting and ageing:  
An oral history study of Polish émigrés in Britain.**

**Michelle Winslow**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
University of Sheffield,  
Department of History.

March 2001

## Summary

The aim of this research has been to draw attention to the extent to which the Second World War has exerted a major influence over the lives of Polish émigrés living in Britain. Memories of war trauma, loss of homeland, families and friends, and the struggle to adapt and cope in an alien environment, when most Poles longed to return to Poland, has affected everyday lives from the initial period of settlement until the present day.

This thesis is an exercise in oral history. The life stories of Polish émigrés, collected using oral methods, are the focus of this study, and the narratives reveal that processes of remembering have influenced attitudes and shaped identities. These memories, supported here by definitive archival studies of other scholars, contribute to our understanding of historical and sociological issues regarding the settlement of Poles in Britain. Further, in the context of mental health, oral testimonies emphasise the especial problems that are affecting many Polish émigrés.

A particular problem amongst ageing Polish émigrés is that of feeling like a foreigner again in later life, since their language skills have tended to deteriorate at the same time as age-related immobility has increased. Hence, many émigrés have become withdrawn from British society; isolated in their homes, with traumatic memories.

Perceptions of difference have also emerged as important to the Polish experience of living in Britain. Generally, Poles have reported that a cultural distinction has not been made between themselves, as white Europeans, and white British people, which in certain circumstances has been detrimental to their health and welfare. Later Polish migrants, and many of the 'second generation', have also found the Polish community to be dominated by first generation culture, which has prevented them from developing a strong sense of belonging to it. As a consequence, with only a minority of younger people interested in maintaining Polish organisations, the future of the Polish community in Britain looks uncertain.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks are extended to the Polish communities and individuals who have contributed their time and effort to assist with research for this study.

The advice and support received from Colin Holmes has been greatly appreciated. As has assistance given by Graham Smith, Tim Smith, Witold Szablewski, Barbara Szablewska and Zygmunt Zaleski.

For their encouragement and perseverance, a special thank you goes to Simon Winslow, Katie Winslow, Jack Winslow, Alexander Winslow and Jacqui Smith.

# Contents

<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 “Forget? No, I never” .....	2
1.2 An introduction to Polish émigré history .....	6
1.3 Estimates of the size of the Polish population in Britain .....	8
1.4 Some problems of settlement .....	9
1.5 Considering oral history and reminiscence work with Polish émigrés .....	11
1.6 Exhibiting oral history .....	19
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>Methods of research</b> .....	22
2.1 Part one: Methodological considerations .....	23
2.2 Motivations for taking part in oral history research .....	25
2.3 The interviewer/interviewee relationship .....	27
2.4 Second language interviewing .....	28
2.5 Transcription .....	30
2.6 Part two: The research project .....	31
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
<b>Narrating the Second World War</b> .....	42
3.1 Part One: Poles, Poland and the Second World War .....	43
3.2 “Gologota” .....	44
3.3 Part Two: Remembering the war .....	57
3.4 The September Campaign .....	57
3.5 Soviet occupation .....	60
3.6 ‘Amnesty’ .....	64
3.7 Fighting back .....	68
3.8 The Katyń massacre .....	69
3.9 The death of General Sikorski .....	72
3.10 Polish forces .....	74
3.11 The Monte Cassino campaign .....	77
3.12 Nazi occupation .....	78
3.13 “War is war, but this...” .....	82
3.14 The Warsaw Rising .....	86
3.15 Victory? .....	89
3.16 Concluding comment .....	93
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
<b>The Polish Community in Britain</b> .....	94
4.1 Part one: Six decades of community organisation in Britain .....	95
4.2 The myth of community? .....	96
4.3 The formation of the Polish community in Great Britain .....	97

4.4 Part Two: Polish community narratives .....	110
4.5 Return to Poland or stay in Britain? .....	111
4.6 Origins of the Polish community in Britain .....	112
4.7 Religion and the Polish community .....	118
4.8 Accommodation and employment .....	119
4.9 Hostility and discrimination .....	127
4.10 The question of integration .....	132
4.11 Marriage and children .....	135
4.12 The Third Republic of Poland .....	138
4.13 Change, continuity and growing older .....	141
4.14 Community 'outsiders' .....	148
4.15 Concluding comment .....	153

## **Chapter Five**

<b>War, settlement and mental health .....</b>	<b>156</b>
--	------------

5.1 Part One: The development of research .....	157
5.2 Part Two: The past in the present .....	177
5.3 Coping with mental illness in the early days of settlement .....	178
5.4 Mental health and the Polish émigré majority .....	181
5.5 Becoming 'invisible' in society: A disadvantage for mental health ....	188
5.6 Issues specifically concerning women .....	191
5.7 Issues that have negatively impacted on the settlement of Polish men	195
5.8 Growing old in a second homeland .....	198
5.9 A growing necessity to communicate in Polish .....	204
5.10 The problem of inadequate support .....	210
5.11 Concluding comment .....	212

## **Chapter 6**

<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>213</b>
-------------------------	------------

6.1 Summarising first generation narrative .....	214
6.2 The future of the Polish community .....	220

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Map showing German/Soviet demarcation line and Polish defensive positions of the September Campaign, 1939. ....	225
Appendix 2: Map showing destinations of Poles deported to the USSR ....	226
Appendix 3: Correspondence between H.MacMillan and General Anders regarding the Victory Parade, 1946. ....	227
Appendix 4: Certificate issued following the liberation of Dachau .....	229
Appendix 5: Map showing Polish borders before and after the Second World War. ....	230
Appendix 6 Conditions of Service in the Polish Resettlement Corps, as issued to officers .....	231

<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>233</b>
---------------------------	------------

## Photographs

Memorial to members of the Polish Air Force who died during the Second World War at Northolt, West London. ....	1
A resident of Antokol, a home for Poles in Chislehurst, Kent, with a photograph of herself and friends taken during the Second World War. ....	22
German soldiers burning a village in western Poland. ....	42
Polish Resettlement Corps kitchen workers, housed in a Nissan hut. ....	94
Making a toast at a summer get-together in Fenton, near Newark, 1999. ....	156
Watching a play at the Polish Ex-Servicemen's club in Sheffield. ....	213

# Chapter One

## Introduction



Photograph: T. Smith.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p127.

Memorial to members of the Polish Air Force who died during the Second World War at Northolt in West London.

## 1.1 “Forget? No, I never”.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that a lot of Poles did suffer when they were younger, the effects of war and imprisonment, two years of starvation in Siberia or other camps. You shake it off but I think sometimes you push it under the carpet and when you get older or you retire, it comes out, you reminisce about it.<sup>2</sup>

The extent to which the Second World War has impacted upon Polish émigrés cannot be understated. It is *the* defining event of their lives. The war tore them away from their homes and families, made them witnesses and recipients of atrocity and, ultimately, compelled them to live out their lives away from their homeland. For the vast majority of Polish émigrés in Britain, the traumatic experiences and painful losses of the past significantly impact on the present, and have remained prominent in memories throughout half a century of settlement.

Whilst Poland was on the ‘winning side’ at the end of the Second World War, the Poles who found themselves in Britain in 1945 had little to celebrate. Collectively, they had experienced the horrors of the Nazi and Soviet regimes, lost relatives and friends through death and displacement, lost their homes and their aspirations for the future, and ultimately, they were ‘exiled’ in an alien environment where they had to begin rebuilding their lives. Whilst Britain celebrated, Poles asked, “what victory”.<sup>3</sup>

Previous research into the settlement of Poles in Britain has generally focused on historical and sociological circumstances relative to their migration in the 1940s, and conspicuous amongst this body of work are the definitive publications of Keith Sword.<sup>4</sup> The current study does not take the route of re-evaluating Sword’s research, rather, it aims to increase our understanding of the historical and social circumstances of Poles in Britain by presenting oral history gathered during this research; it presents contributions that cast light on individual perceptions of war, the reception of Poles into British society and their responses to the situations they encountered. A strong

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr R (Fenton, Lincs.), 6 September 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 37, p7.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p5.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Polish ex-servicemen in Sheffield, 8 May 1995. This date marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe and the comment was prompted by the indifference of Polish émigrés to the celebrations and commemorations of that time.

<sup>4</sup> K. Sword, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950*, (London, 1989), and *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain*, (London, 1996).



motivation for this work has been a continued high incidence of mental health difficulty amongst Polish émigrés who settled in Britain as a result of the war. Hence, a significant objective has also been to highlight problems and issues that are likely contributors to this unhappy situation. Consequently, the way that the past is remembered is central, since it is believed that the development of lifestory narratives can help the tellers come to terms with traumatic life events.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis is organised around the recollections of Polish émigrés. Interviewees have included former servicemen and women, displaced persons, concentration camp prisoners, Underground Army members, survivors of the Government-in-Exile and dependants, and, on the ‘caring’ side, psychiatrists, social workers, priests and care assistants. Of the interviews conducted amongst first generation Poles, fifty five per cent were with men and forty five per cent were with women. In total, fifty one interviews were conducted for this study, many from Yorkshire, but research has also extended to Aberdeenshire, Gwynedd, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Greater London, Kent and Surrey. Research has also benefited from the oral history archive produced by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit.<sup>6</sup>

The vast majority of interviewees have described themselves as Polish Catholic, whilst a small minority did not state their religion, or declared themselves ‘non-believers’. No interviews have knowingly been conducted with Poles of Jewish background who arrived in the 1940s since they have tended to develop separate community structures.

It should be noted that due to the occasionally sensitive nature of the subjects raised, interviewees have at times requested that recording equipment be turned off. On these occasions notes were taken and views are represented in this thesis in a manner which the author believes has retained the intended meaning. Where possible, published and unpublished material has been provided that reflects the opinions expressed. Regarding the identification of interviewees, most did not object to their name being attached to their contributions. However, the author has chosen not to reveal identities

---

<sup>5</sup> Particularly the work of N.Hunt and I.Robbins, “Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping With Their Memories Through Narrative”, in *Oral History*, Autumn 1998, Vol. 26, No 2, pp57-64.

<sup>6</sup> The Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BHRU) was set up jointly by the M.S.C and Bradford Council (Museums and Libraries Divisions) in September 1983. Tapes and transcripts of interviews are archived in the Local Studies Department of Bradford Central Library.

as in the event of changed personal circumstances, interviewees may wish to revise their decision. Nevertheless, during the process of working with émigrés on representation it was pointed out that, whilst the argument for anonymity was understood, individuals would like to be able to identify their own oral contributions. Hence, footnote references refer to interviewees by abbreviation, e.g. Mrs Sk. Locations of interviews are given in brackets, e.g. (Sheffield).

\*

Agreeing on a collective word to describe Poles in Britain has proved emotive. Some writers have described first generation Poles as migrants and refugees, but these descriptions have been shunned by most participants involved with this study. Their preferred term is 'exile', or 'political exile', since after the war they firmly believed that return to Poland would compromise their Government-in-Exile's opposition to the Soviet regime, and place their own freedom and safety in jeopardy; a situation that is fully acknowledged here. During discussion of Poles as exiles, one interviewee, an ex-officer, commented: "Émigré or emigrants can be voluntary or probably forced to leave the country through economic reasons... exile is definitely somebody who is chased out".<sup>7</sup>

However, this study has opted to use the word émigré since its meaning can be more widely interpreted. Motives offered for remaining in Britain during research have not been exclusively political; the opportunity to raise social and economic positions was, for some, a consideration. A Pole in Bradford stressed: "I came of my own free will, and I was equally free to go whenever I wanted".<sup>8</sup> Additionally, as the years passed and émigré lives became increasingly dominated by work and family, support for exile politics was generally less fervent, prompting Mieroszewski to write in 1961 that émigrés had "become entirely reconciled to 'holiday Poland'".<sup>9</sup> Hence, as 'émigré' envelops differing experiences, it has been considered a more apt term of reference.

\*

This introductory chapter continues with a brief historical background to Polish migration to Britain, as a result of the Second World War, and outlines the impact of trauma and unwilling resettlement on émigrés. Since research has been conducted

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 8 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 29, p4.

<sup>8</sup> BHRU: B0050/02/22.

<sup>9</sup> J. Mieroszewski, "Rozwazania emigracyjne", in *Kultura*, (Paris, 1961), p100. Reproduced in Sword, op. cit., 1996, pp44-45.

using oral history, there follows an exploration of previous oral history and reminiscence work with Polish émigrés, and discussion of the use of oral history in exhibitions.

The methodological process is the focus of Chapter Two, with subjectivity, the interviewer/interviewee relationship and representation amongst the issues discussed. Chapters three, four and five present the experiences and opinions of émigrés and span the years from the start of the Second World War to the present day. These central chapters are each structured in two parts which juxtapose definitive work with oral history. The work of Norman Davies on the Second World War in Poland is followed by émigré memories of the same period; Keith Sword's work of the period 1945 to 1996 is set beside accounts of lives as they were rebuilt in Britain; and the research of various commentators on Polish émigrés and mental health issues is assessed alongside the testimony of contributors to this study.

To conclude, Chapter Six reflects on issues raised in this thesis and highlights areas that it has not been possible to address, but which could be considered as future research possibilities. Whilst the opinions and the experiences of the 'second generation' have not been the focus of this study, a number of people from this group expressed interest in the current research and made contributions to it. Therefore, issues pertinent to the children of émigrés are represented, followed by a consideration of the future of the Polish community.

Lack of awareness of difference is emphasised since this has proved damaging to both first generation Poles, their offspring and Polish migrants who arrived in later decades. There has been a tendency for Poles to be treated 'like the British' in their dealings with local authority agencies, as they are white Europeans, and in certain circumstances this ignorance of cultural diversity has had a damaging effect on their health and welfare. The reluctance of the Polish first generation to embrace alternative perspectives of Polish culture can also be viewed as not taking into account the importance of difference. As a result, later Polish migrants, and many of the 'second generation', have not developed a strong sense of belonging to the community. Therefore, as the ageing first generation gradually retire from their official community positions, there are few younger individuals willing to undertake

the responsibilities of maintaining Polish organisations and their clubs. The effect of this situation is that social networks that have supported Polish émigrés for over half a decade are ceasing to exist.

## 1.2 An introduction to Polish émigré history

The majority of Poles initially expected their stay in Britain to be temporary, believing that they would return home once the Soviet government in Poland had been removed. However, at the Yalta peace conference in February 1945, lengthy discussion of Poland's future resulted in allied legitimisation of the Soviet regime; an act which came as a devastating blow to tens of thousands of Poles who fought for Poland's freedom in the war, and then found themselves exiled in Britain.

For the majority, return to Soviet Poland was not a realistic course of action. Repatriation assistance was offered by the British government to Polish forces, but this was not a viable option for many as, apart from an unwillingness to accept the new administration in Poland, many believed they risked being accused of anti-Soviet activity should they return. Apprehensions regarding the new Communist regime's integrity were heightened by first hand experience of Stalinism and the belief that the Soviets were responsible for the slaughter of thousands of Polish officers, whose bodies were found in the Katyń forest in 1943. Around seventy five percent of Poles who came to Britain had been arrested in 1940 as suspected 'anti-Soviets' and deported with their families to inhospitable regions of Siberia and Kazakhstan; of almost one million Polish deportees, over half died in Soviet labour camps. In 1941, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union that brought the Soviets into the allied fold, Poles were offered an amnesty to free them to fight. Yet, the release generally amounted to just the opening of gates. Welfare assistance for the deportees was initially absent and when aid reached them in Spring 1942, it lasted for only a few months.<sup>10</sup> Onerous journeys south to join Polish military units had to be undertaken with insufficient financial means and during these journeys, hunger and exhaustion took their toll. Epidemics, previously kept in abeyance by freezing conditions, rampaged in warmer climes and deaths continued.

---

<sup>10</sup> Z.S Siemaszko, "The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940-1941", in K.Sword (ed.), *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41*, (London, 1991), p231.

Initially, labour camp evacuees headed for Polish military reception camps in southern Soviet regions, organised with British support. Strategic considerations and difficult camp conditions, exacerbated by typhus, dysentery and malaria, prompted a transfer to Persia in 1942. Able men and women were mobilised into the military, whilst the young, the old, the sick and those with dependants were transferred to civilian camps, mainly in India and Africa. At the end of the war, those under British jurisdiction were able to travel to Britain.

Totalitarianism in Poland after September 1939 had two faces; Soviets in the east and Nazis in the west. In Nazi-occupied areas Poles were subjected to 'Germanisation' which aimed to instil 'German identity' within the occupied territories. For many men, this meant forced recruitment into the German military. Poles not considered suitable for Germanisation faced deportation to Germany as slave labour.

Fewer Poles from German-occupied areas arrived in Britain after the war largely because they were unable to travel to and join Polish military units. Exceptions were those who were compelled to join the German army and later managed to transfer to a Polish unit, often after their capture. A further speculative explanation for Britain's reception of fewer Poles from former Nazi regions is that having experienced German tyranny they were less afraid of returning to the Stalinist regime<sup>11</sup> - 'the more Communist, the more anti-German'.<sup>12</sup> The offer of repatriation might have seemed more attractive to those who thought nothing could be worse than the Nazi regime.

During the war, the Polish population was decimated. More than six million Poles were killed, of whom almost three million were Jewish.<sup>13</sup> Military victory in 1945 brought little comfort for the survivors due to Poland's continued Soviet occupation, and whilst Polish service men and women waited anxiously in Britain for a political solution, if the need arose, they were prepared to go to war again: "Everybody here was expecting that there will be a third war and Poland would be liberated from the

---

<sup>11</sup> L.Olsson, referring to Poles repatriated from Sweden in, *On the Threshold of the People's Home of Sweden: A labor perspective of Baltic refugees and relieved Polish concentration camp prisoners in Sweden at the end of World War II* (New York, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> R.Sikorski, *The Polish House: An Intimate History of Poland*, (London, 1997), p124. Also, fighting the Nazis by allying with your enemy's enemy was described in W.Lotnik and J.Preece, *Nine Lives: Ethnic conflict in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands*, (London, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> "The Polish Republic was reduced by 6,028,000. Of these, some 2.9 million were Polish Jews." N. Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, (Oxford, 1981), p463.

Russian occupation”.<sup>14</sup> However, the allied governments had no desire to engage in further hostilities and tens of thousands of Poles were left bitter and disillusioned.

### 1.3 Estimates of the size of the Polish population in Britain

The various routes by which Poles arrived in Britain complicates attempts to calculate the number that eventually settled here, and Hanson warns of anomalies that hamper calculation of the size of the post-war Polish population. For example, census figures after the war are unreliable as they include Ukrainians claiming pre-1939 Polish nationality to avoid repatriation to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Hanson concludes that after the Second World War over 150,000 Poles settled permanently in England and Wales, with a further 7-8,000 in Scotland, the majority of whom were Roman Catholic.<sup>15</sup>

Amongst this heterogeneous group of men, women and children were service personnel, Government-in-Exile officials and their dependants, displaced persons, concentration camp survivors and Underground Army members. Their pre-war backgrounds spanned the social stratum and included in this research are individuals who, prior to 1939, were peasants, intelligentsia, business people, electricians, farmers and army and airforce recruits, plus a lawyer, a teacher and a musician. Those who were children before the war have reported varying experiences of education ranging from elementary peasant schooling to attendance at prestigious and expensive private schools.<sup>16</sup>

Referring to a Home Office source, Jerzy Zubrzycki stated that in December 1951, there were 135,770 aliens registered as Polish Nationals in Great Britain.<sup>17</sup> The 1961 census recorded a similar figure, stating that 134,989 people of Polish birth were living in England, Wales and Scotland.<sup>18</sup> By 1971, this number had been reduced to

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview, 4 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 46, p14. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>15</sup> J. Hanson, “Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility: British attitudes to non-repatriable Poles and Ukrainians after the Second World War and to the Hungarian refugees of 1956”, PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, pp118-119.

<sup>16</sup> Tapes and transcripts in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>17</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain. A Study of Adjustment*, (The Hague, 1956), p63.

<sup>18</sup> *Census 1961 England and Wales: Birthplace and Nationality. Education. Socio-economic group. Usual residence*. HMSO, London, 1964. Also, *Census 1961 Scotland: Birthplace and Nationality*, Vol.5, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1966, p4.

110,925,<sup>19</sup> and census statistics for 1981 revealed a further fall, to 93,369.<sup>20</sup> The most recent figures available, for 1991, recorded 73,738 Polish-born residents of Great Britain.<sup>21</sup> The steady decline in numbers can be attributed to deaths amongst first generation Poles, who form the majority of the Polish population in Britain.

#### 1.4 Some problems of settlement

Since the arrival of the Polish émigré population in Britain, they have suffered a disproportionately high incidence of mental difficulty. Mental illness amongst Poles was four times higher than the English born population in 1956;<sup>22</sup> in 1971, the Polish Ex-Combatants Association wrote of its concern that mental illness was exceptionally high amongst its members;<sup>23</sup> and in 1995 the British Medical Association acknowledged that Polish immigrants were especially vulnerable to mental-breakdown.<sup>24</sup>

The relationship between migration and mental illness has received much attention from researchers, although a considerable amount focuses on the difficulties of West Indians and Asians. However, a few studies have been concerned with Polish mental health and they support the view that problems amongst Polish émigrés are significant.

In the early days of settlement many Poles were admitted into psychiatric care, their problems having much to do with war trauma, bitterness at being exiled and an inability to settle and cope in their new environment. Hostility to foreign labour was an additional cause of stress, and problems occurred amongst well-educated émigrés who found themselves deskilled in their employment due to the language barrier and unrecognised qualifications.

Further difficulties developed as Poles grew older, with isolation becoming a significant problem. Isolation amongst ageing Polish émigrés can reach beyond the

---

<sup>19</sup> *Census 1971: Great Britain: Country of Birth Tables*, HMSO, London, 1974, p26.

<sup>20</sup> *Census 1981: Country of Birth. Great Britain*, HMSO, London, 1983, p3.

<sup>21</sup> *1991 Census: Ethnic Group and Country of Birth. Great Britain. Vol.1*, HMSO, London, 1993, p26.

<sup>22</sup> Zubrzycki op cit., 1956, pp186-187.

<sup>23</sup> The Polish Ex-Combatants Association, *The Poles in Great Britain 1971*, (London, 1971), p6.

<sup>24</sup> British Medical Association, *Multicultural Health Care: Current Practice and Future Policy in Medical Education*, (London, 1995), p12.

immobilising effects of disability, it can be cultural and linguistic also, which adds an extra dimension to the usual problems of ageing. Cultural isolation can be due to severed contact with Polish companions, for whatever reason, whilst linguistic isolation might have come about through losing touch with Polish friends and the adoption of a British lifestyle, with the resultant loss of opportunities to talk in Polish.

Learned languages have a habit of diminishing as the Polish émigré gets older and even the most expert English speakers have complained of deteriorating language skills, which is more than a nuisance or an embarrassment, it heightens feelings of being a foreigner, growing old in a country that is becoming alien all over again. Loss of language makes hard work of everyday life and, further, with a reduced English voice, there is a pressing need to communicate in Polish. Where people have stayed in contact with Polish organisations their language needs can be met; however, there can be unhappy consequences where contact has been lost.

Reminiscence, a familiar process of ageing, can also have embittering consequences. Poles remember being taken from their beds by armed police; horrific deportations into slave labour; empty stomachs; witnessing and experiencing atrocities, lost family and friends and ultimately, the allied 'betrayal' that brought about their exile. Happier memories can be overshadowed by a need to make sense of past events.

To combat the negative effects of these distressing memories, there is therapeutic value to be gained from talking in Polish with someone who has lived through the same events. However, not all Polish émigrés have access to an empathetic Polish ear. There are also people who have never spoken about their painful experiences and probably never will. In other situations, non-Polish partners might be unsupportive should their spouse want to renew their acquaintance with their Polish cultural background. Immobility further prevents older Poles from meeting together and there are few local authorities that provide transport to Polish centres. Therefore, whilst professional opinion supports talking, this apparently uncomplicated therapy is not always an option.



## 1.5 Considering oral history and reminiscence work with Polish émigrés

The traumatic history of the Polish émigré population has prompted the writing of numerous Polish language biographies and broader historical publications.<sup>25</sup> Much less is available to the English-speaking reader, although in recent years there has been a noticeable increase in English language lifestory publications, motivated by a will to inform a broader English-speaking audience who generally know little of the reasons for Polish settlement in Britain. Additionally, many ‘children’ born to émigrés are not Polish speakers and there is an increasing demand for historical information from this group.

Even so, the Polish minority has attracted little attention from academics, which Sword attributes to it being a “white and therefore largely invisible community”, who have deliberately maintained a low profile.<sup>26</sup> Aside from Sword’s work, most academic studies have been written by Poles themselves and the first of these was by the political exile, Jerzy Zubrzycki, whose *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, was published in 1956.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1960s, Czaykowski and Sulik, younger members of the post-war settlement, produced *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii (Poles in Great Britain)*,<sup>28</sup> which Sword has described as a ‘Defoe-like’ tour of the major Polish centres of settlement in Britain.<sup>29</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, Sheila Patterson, a Polish-speaking anthropologist who worked for the Polish Ministry of Information during the war, also made a significant contribution to work on Poles by producing a number of essays on the Polish community.<sup>30</sup>

Since this early period, much work has been in the form of university dissertations and theses. Doctoral theses include those of J.Coutouvidis on the Polish Government-in-Exile (1975); K.Sword on ethnic identity and Polish émigrés (1983); A.Zebrowska,

---

<sup>25</sup> As stocked in the in-house libraries of Polish clubs nationally. The library at the Polish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith also holds the largest Polish language publication collection outside Poland.

<sup>26</sup> Sword op. cit., 1996, p15.

<sup>27</sup> Zubrzycki op. cit., 1956.

<sup>28</sup> B.Czaykowski and B.Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, (Paris, 1961).

<sup>29</sup> Sword op. cit., 1996, pp15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Work by S.Patterson: “The Polish Exile Community in Britain”, in *The Polish Review*, Vol.VI, No.3, 1961; “Polish London”, in R.Glass et al (eds.), *London: Aspects of Change*, (London, 1964); *Immigrants in Industry*, (Oxford, 1968), “Immigrants and Minority Groups in British Society”, in S.Abbott (ed.), *The Prevention of Racial Discrimination in Britain*, (Oxford, 1971); “The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain”, in J.Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, (Oxford, 1977).

on second-generation Poles (1986); T.Kernberg on Poles in Scotland (1990); J.Gula on the Roman Catholic church and the Polish community (1992); and J.Hanson on British attitudes to post-war European migrants (1995). Additionally, B.Krawczyk produced an M.Ed. study of a Polish Saturday School (1988) and M.Demunck gained an M.Phil. for a biographical study of a Polish exile (1990).<sup>31</sup>

Whilst English language studies on Polish émigrés are few, oral history projects are even fewer. However, Poles have not been neglected by oral historians since, in keeping with other minority groups who have gained a voice through oral history, Poles have participated in studies.

A significant oral history project was begun by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BHRU) in 1983, and was set up jointly by the Manpower Services Commission and Bradford Council (Museums and Libraries Divisions). As a community history undertaking, the initial intention of this project was to examine the experiences and feelings of the entire immigrant community in the city. However, it was quickly realised that whilst previous studies had been made of Asian, West Indian and Irish immigration, there had been no attempt to produce an oral history survey of Middle and Eastern European immigration in a British city.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, the study concentrated on the four largest European immigrant communities in Bradford; the Poles (4,000), the Ukrainians (3,700), the Italians (1,500) and the Yugoslavs (1,200).<sup>33</sup> The project aimed to focus on immigrant communities in the years since their arrival in the city, and interviews were conducted with first and second generation members. However, as also noted during the current study, it is the period before settlement that most impacted on lives, and Perks describes a tendency for interviewees to over-concentrate on childhood and pre-war years. Whilst identification with the home country varied amongst interviewees, the keynote for all the BHRU interviews was identified as being a perception of ‘not quite belonging’; a position undermining the, “received wisdom that European migrants have generally been assimilated into British society”.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> See bibliography for complete references.

<sup>32</sup> R.Perks, “‘A Feeling of Not Belonging’: Interviewing European immigrants in Bradford”, in *Oral History Journal*, Vol.12, No.2, Autumn 1984, p64.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp64-67. Population figures are estimates.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p67.

It was noted by Colin Holmes that previous research on people of Afro-Caribbean descent and Asians from the Indian sub-continent has generally focused on the extent to which they have been tolerated in British society, and far less attention has been paid to other issues relating to their settlement.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the historical background of Poles in Britain has been documented, principally by Keith Sword and Norman Davies, but the extent to which they have been tolerated has largely been neglected. Indeed, a common misapprehension has been that Poles are 'like the British', and therefore apparently immune to intolerance. On this premise, thoughts that Poles might also have experienced racism and discrimination tend to have been sidelined. Oral history has, however, challenged the assumption that Poles are immune to racial hostility.

During the late 1980s, the Kirklees Sound Archive recorded the experiences of thirty five first and second generation local residents of Polish origin, as part of a wider oral history project in West Yorkshire. Interviews conducted with first generation interviewees recalled life in pre-war Poland, and their experiences of war and settlement in Britain. Andrew Nocon's involvement with the recorded archive, at a later date, which was motivated by his Polish parentage and a desire to learn about the experiences of their generation, was reported in *Oral History* (1996) in an article which contested the idea that Poles had been welcomed into British society. Nocon revealed that in areas where Poles settled after the war a willingness to accept the newcomers did not always exist; "...the interviews provide a number of examples of racist intolerance, discrimination, hostility and abuse, at both an institutional and an individual level".<sup>36</sup> Certainly, the experiences of white Europeans are different from those of black people in Britain, however, as Nocon concluded: "...skin colour is only one way of defining 'outsiders'".<sup>37</sup>

An oral history project initiated by the Hammersmith and Fulham based Polish Reminiscence Group in 1988 resulted in a publication presenting the testimonies of five first generation émigrés: *Passport to Exile: The Polish Way to London*. Printed in both English and Polish, the book aimed to inform readers of the reasons why a

---

<sup>35</sup> C.Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?: Immigrants and Minorities in Britain*, (London, 1991), p2.

<sup>36</sup> A.Nocon, "A Reluctant Welcome: Poles in Britain in the 1940s", in *Oral History*, Vol.1, No.24, Spring 1996, p86.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

sizeable Polish population existed in London. Additionally, the producers wanted to “...escape from certain well established stereotypes...” by printing individual experiences of leaving Poland, rather than opting for stories that are often considered “representative”.<sup>38</sup> The first contributor came to Britain in 1940 as a boy of sixteen and joined the Polish Air Force; the second woman took refugee status in Paris in 1948 after being pressed to return to Communist Poland; the third arrived via Sweden and joined the Polish ATS; the fourth woman joined the Polish forces in Russia and travelled through Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Italy before arriving in Britain in 1946; and the final contributor was captured by the Soviets and joined the Polish Army in 1944 after a term in a camp in Lithuania.<sup>39</sup>

The Polish Reminiscence Group published a further book in 1989, based on extracts from the accounts of five Poles: *Travelling Light: Poles on Foreign Soil*. This second publication recounted experiences after leaving Poland, and illustrated settlement problems. The book’s Polish contributors told of their struggles with a different language and culture, and of their efforts to find accommodation and tolerable employment. The account given by ‘Rex’, who settled in West London, is representative of the experiences of many émigrés who participated in the current research:<sup>40</sup>

Victoria Station holds different memories for different people. To me it is the place where I realised that after twelve years in the air force (Polish, French and Royal Air Force) I was now a civilian in a brand new demob suit... all thoughts were running through my mind. I had hundreds of friends, some were dead and others had to go their own way, perhaps feeling the same loneliness as I did... First was a visit to my future employer in Earls Court who had to sign one of my documents... A police station had to be notified of my presence in London... I looked for a bedsit... some adverts in shop windows clearly stated “Room to let but Irish and Polish need not apply”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, *Passport to Exile: The Polish Way to London*, (London, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> S.Kyriacou and the Polish Reminiscence Group, *Travelling Light: Poles on Foreign Soil*, (London, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p3.

The work of reminiscence groups enables power of interpretation to be retained by the 'tellers'. By placing their memories on paper themselves, the Polish Reminiscence Group were able to narrate, "our own stories in our own words".<sup>42</sup> Oral historians are aware of the responsibilities of their role in terms of representation, and with this in mind, many share their working processes with interviewees. Nevertheless, in the final instance, it is the interviewer who determines the interpretation and who selects extracts that will represent the interviewee. Whilst most oral historians work with skill and sensitivity, the nature of their work places them in a position of power in relation to the memories of others. Oral history produced by reminiscence groups keeps history with those who possess the memories, enabling them to tell their stories unimpeded by the interpretation of others. The importance of this activity has been recognised during research for this study and, to digress, its value should be addressed.

Jane Mace and Jane Lawrence wrote of the strengths of reminiscence group work in contrast to the oral history interview. Group reminiscence enables participants to re-evaluate their memories over a period of time; feelings that re-surface when telling a story from years ago can be re-examined and mulled over and after a period of reflection the story can be told again in a different way. Additionally, in reminiscence groups, the experiences of others can be taken into account and new interpretations assigned to events in the past. Participants also have control over what happens to their stories and, if published, they share in the power of editing.<sup>43</sup>

Joanna Bornat asserts that many people feel the need to explore their own life-story as they get older and perhaps draw meaning from it, which might be understood as an attempt to come to terms with their own shortcomings and failings. Interrelated is the capacity of reminiscence to reinforce identity, particularly when people are trying to maintain, "a sense of who they are amidst life circumstances which have changed out of all recognition". The possession of a life-story is important, writes Bornat, and can often be seen as a whole entity with major themes that can be refined or elaborated on. Indeed, she argues that the creation of a life-story which not only makes sense of

---

<sup>42</sup> Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, op cit, 1988.

<sup>43</sup> J.Lawrence and J.Mace, *Remembering in Groups: Ideas from reminiscence and literacy work*, (Essex, 1992), pp12-13.

the person, but also communicates its meaning to a wider audience, is one of the essential tasks of ageing.<sup>44</sup>

In the experience of the current research, Polish émigrés are especially in need of a life-story that gives meaning to their lives. When Poles look back from the vantage point of old age at traumatic events involving violence, deprivation and loss, the upshot of which was resettlement in a foreign country rather than return to an independent homeland, they are not always able to make sense of the past; a situation that has prompted comments during research such as: “Waste of my life”.<sup>45</sup> This can be a particular problem when émigrés are isolated, since they are unable to mull over the past with others. Hence, a further positive aspect of reminiscence groups is their social potential.

During the course of research, there was a growing awareness that a number of interviewees had written about their experiences, or were in the process of doing so. These personal projects were mostly discovered by chance. For example, during one interview with an ex-officer, in which he talked about deportation to a Soviet labour camp, the author asked if he could recall the name of the camp. “One moment”, he said, “I have it written down”. He then searched through a cupboard full of papers and returned with several files:

Look, my memoirs are too big. I wrote them because my daughter told me, ‘I want you to write memoirs’. I said, ‘why?’. ‘Because my great-grand children must know you were at Monte Cassino’. And she wants to have some memoirs about my life, and this is some from them. First part is in Russia, because I was taken by Russians, and second and third part is war against the Germans. It is in English, but I don’t think it would be useful because it is too big, one hundred and twenty five pages...

*When did you do this?*

Mostly when I retired.<sup>46</sup>

The daughter of an émigré who experienced deportation to Siberia at the age of fourteen, also described her mother’s compulsion to write about her experiences of

---

<sup>44</sup> J.Bornat, “Introduction”, in J.Bornat (ed.), *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, Evaluations, Achievements*, (Buckingham, 1994), pp8-9.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mr Mj (Sheffield), 25 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 8, p8.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 26 September 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 38, p1.

near starvation and rape, and the death of her parents and sister. Periodically, over many years, this woman had been admitted into psychiatric care and her daughter believed that her problems stemmed from trying to block out events that are too terrible to remember: “Things happened that play on her mind and they take their toll... she wants to write as a way of healing”.<sup>47</sup>

Malgorzata Kmita, a Polish psychologist, offered the opinion that life history writing can have cathartic significance.<sup>48</sup> The process of gathering memories for publication, and then producing a book, can also reap positive rewards in terms of raising skill levels and confidence amongst group members. The stream of published work from reminiscence groups and people who act as their facilitators is viewed by Patricia Duffin as a powerful expression of “people engaging afresh with their lives”, who want to tell their stories in their own words, rather than those of others.<sup>49</sup>

Rather than re-engaging with their lives, a group of Poles in London offered a different motive for contributing their memories of Soviet deportation to a study by Jagna Wright. Their motive was their need to bear witness. Wright believes that the memories of survivors were repressed for the sake of post-war political expediency, that the stories of Poles deported to the Soviet Union as slave labour, told by émigrés in Britain, were an embarrassment once the Soviets were “friends”. Hence, with no experience of film making, Wright spent five years working on an ambitious project recording survivors’ stories, and presented them as a documentary that received a public cinema screening in London in March 2000.<sup>50</sup>

Reminiscence work amongst Poles, such as that of the Polish Reminiscence Group and Jagna Wright’s documentary are, nevertheless, rare. It is likely that a significant reason for this situation is that there are inherent difficulties involved in encouraging reminiscence amongst Polish émigrés. The memories of Poles are particularly traumatic and require the presence of a skilled Polish-speaking facilitator with a good knowledge of Polish history, and an awareness of problems that face ageing émigrés.

---

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication with Ms L (Sheffield), 15 February 1995.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with M.Kmita, 12 February 1998.

<sup>49</sup> P.Duffin, “Turning talking into writing”, in J.Bornat (ed.), *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, Evaluations, Achievements*, (Buckingham, 1994), p116.

<sup>50</sup> M.Braid, “The forgotten children of Poland’s past”, in The Monday Review section of *The Independent*, 3 April 2000, p7.

Their memories are of families torn apart by forced deportations, displacement and death, and of witnessing and experiencing Nazi and Soviet perpetrated atrocities. Making sense of the past is not always possible given these circumstances.

Bogusia Temple's oral history work with Poles discerned that, in addition to making sense of the past, there was also a need to find a sense of 'self'. Temple wrote that her respondents' sense of who they were and what they were was tied to their journey from another country. Indeed, it was noted that the journey was frequently the main focus of the interviewee's dialogue, being physical in that routes to Britain were long and arduous, but also metaphysical in the sense that 'journeys' to find a sense of 'self' have lasted a lifetime.<sup>51</sup>

Journeys were also highlighted as central to life story narratives by Tatiana Sceglova and Vieda Skultans. Sceglova recorded the experiences of Poles and other nationalities exiled by the Soviets to Altai in Siberia, and who remain there to this day. She noted that across different national backgrounds, memories focused on deportation by train, the difficulties of the journey and coming to terms with their new environment.<sup>52</sup> Skultans also discovered during her research in Latvia that the journey of Latvians into Soviet captivity were central to their lifestories. Memories of deportation were regarded as defining post-Soviet Latvian identity, and recollections of the cattle wagons used to transport people eastwards are described as symbolising human experience.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, during the current research, accounts of deportation journeys to Soviet labour camps and the conditions experienced, have dominated many interviews, as have slave labour deportations to Germany and the journeys of Poles arrested after the Warsaw Rising.

It could be suggested that a collective will to remember might be influencing reflection towards certain aspects of the past. However, as oral testimony from disparate groups of people follow similar patterns, it might be supposed that attention becomes focused on these events because they were responsible for dramatically

---

<sup>51</sup> B.Temple, "Telling Tales: Accounts and selves in the journeys of British Poles", in *Oral History*, Vol.23, No.2, Autumn 1995, p60.

<sup>52</sup> T.Sceglova presented her research paper, "The Development of Oral History in Altai", at the European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam, 5-7 March 1998.

<sup>53</sup> V.Skultans, "Remembering Time and Place: A case study in Latvian narrative", in *Oral History*, Spring 1998, Vol.26, No.1, pp65-57.



altering the course of lives. Additionally, these journeys involved fear and uncertainty, and since research has suggested that highly negative emotional events are well retained in memory, this could further explain why preference is given to these periods.<sup>54</sup>

## 1.6 Exhibiting oral history

During the current research, efforts have been made to combine the academic interests of the researcher with the desire of the researched to be involved in the representation of their own history. In this respect, the production of an exhibition provided an opportunity to meet this challenge.

The use of oral history in exhibitions has grown in popularity in recent years due to its accessible format and the ability of the medium to relate to its audience, and the value of this method of presentation became apparent during the current study. In 1999, and again in 2000/2001, in collaboration with BHRU, a large selection of extracts from the author's research were presented in a unique exhibition produced by Tim Smith and Michelle Winslow: 'Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain'.<sup>55</sup> The oral history and photographic format of the exhibition enabled the themes of war, coming to Britain, initial settlement, consolidation of lives in Britain, and ageing in a second homeland, to be addressed from the perspective of personal experience. That Polish history is presented in English by Poles accounts for the exhibition's uniqueness.

An especial value of the exhibition, and of the accompanying publication,<sup>56</sup> was that it enabled interviewees, contributors to the current research, to become involved in the representation of their own history. However, there is also a danger that narrations might reinforce a narrow representation of a community's culture and history, with the oral historian playing an active role in this process. As Anette Day warned, interviewees do not necessarily talk about themselves alone, they can

---

<sup>54</sup> S.Christianson, "Emotional stress and eyewitness memory: A critical review", in *Psychological Bulletin*, 1992, Vol.112, No.2, pp284-309.

<sup>55</sup> Oral history and photographic exhibition produced by T.Smith and M.Winslow, "Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain", launched at Bradford Industrial Museum, July-September 1999 and exhibited at City Museum, Sheffield, November-February, 2000/01. For a selection of photographs from the exhibition, see chapter title pages.

<sup>56</sup> T.Smith and M.Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000).

become representatives of their particular communities, and thereby a 'collective myth'.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, to identify the element of myth in oral sources is not to say that we are working with memories of a false past. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson asserted that not only does myth lie behind all historical evidence, it is rooted in real experience: "...both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception".<sup>58</sup> Day further explained that a constructed historical representation of the past can play a positive role, in that it can enable a community to, "make sense of, to come to terms with, perhaps even to make palatable, and certainly to express feelings about past events and experiences."<sup>59</sup>

Collective narratives can undoubtedly have a political purpose, and in this sense, Polish 'community' history, as recounted in Polish homes, schools, churches, social clubs and numerous Polish publications, has embodied the *raison d'être* of the community. It has explained events that prevented the return of Poles to Poland and, crucially, it succeeded in providing a unified Polish émigré voice against the communist regime in Poland. The collective community narrative has been central to the struggle to free Poland from Soviet domination, and given Poland's long history of occupation until 1918, followed by re-occupation in 1939, it was, and still is, loaded with historical symbolism.

Whilst accepting that collective versions of the past are beneficial in one sense, in another sense, their potential for exclusivity can have negative implications. Hence, the oral history included in 'Keeping the Faith', both exhibition and book, aimed to broaden the community narrative by highlighting issues that are often extra to it, including the experience of a sizeable group of émigrés who fought with the German forces during the war. A significant inclusion was the fate of Jewish Poles who were rounded up in ghettos and destined for death camps in wartime Poland, although it should be stressed that a number of interviewees contributed harrowing eye-witness memories of atrocities perpetrated on Jewish Poles. Also addressed were issues

---

<sup>57</sup> A.Day, "Listening Galleries: Putting oral history on display", in *Oral History*, Vol.27, No.1, Spring 1999, p92.

<sup>58</sup> R.Samuel and P.Thompson (eds.), "Introduction," in R.Samuel and P.Thompson, *The Myths We Live By*, (London, 1990), p6.

<sup>59</sup> Day op. cit., 1999, p92.

surrounding the impact of living through such a terrible period of history, such as fear, loss and bitterness.

A comprehensive representation of an émigré ‘community’ is probably an impossible task. Yet, with due care, efforts can be made to address the complexities involved in representation. During the compilation of ‘Keeping the Faith’, interviewees were asked their opinion of the proposed content of the exhibition and issues were debated with them; a process that brought to light various concerns, including the prospect that Poles might be stereotyped as pre-war peasants, or that an impression of Poles as “sufferers or martyrs” might be conveyed.<sup>60</sup>

Interest in the exhibition, publication and the current research has been encouraged by a consensus amongst first and ‘second generation’ Poles that the history of Polish émigrés should be recorded. However, how and why histories are recorded is an issue demanding attention and it will be interesting to observe future oral history projects as they seek to represent communities.

\*

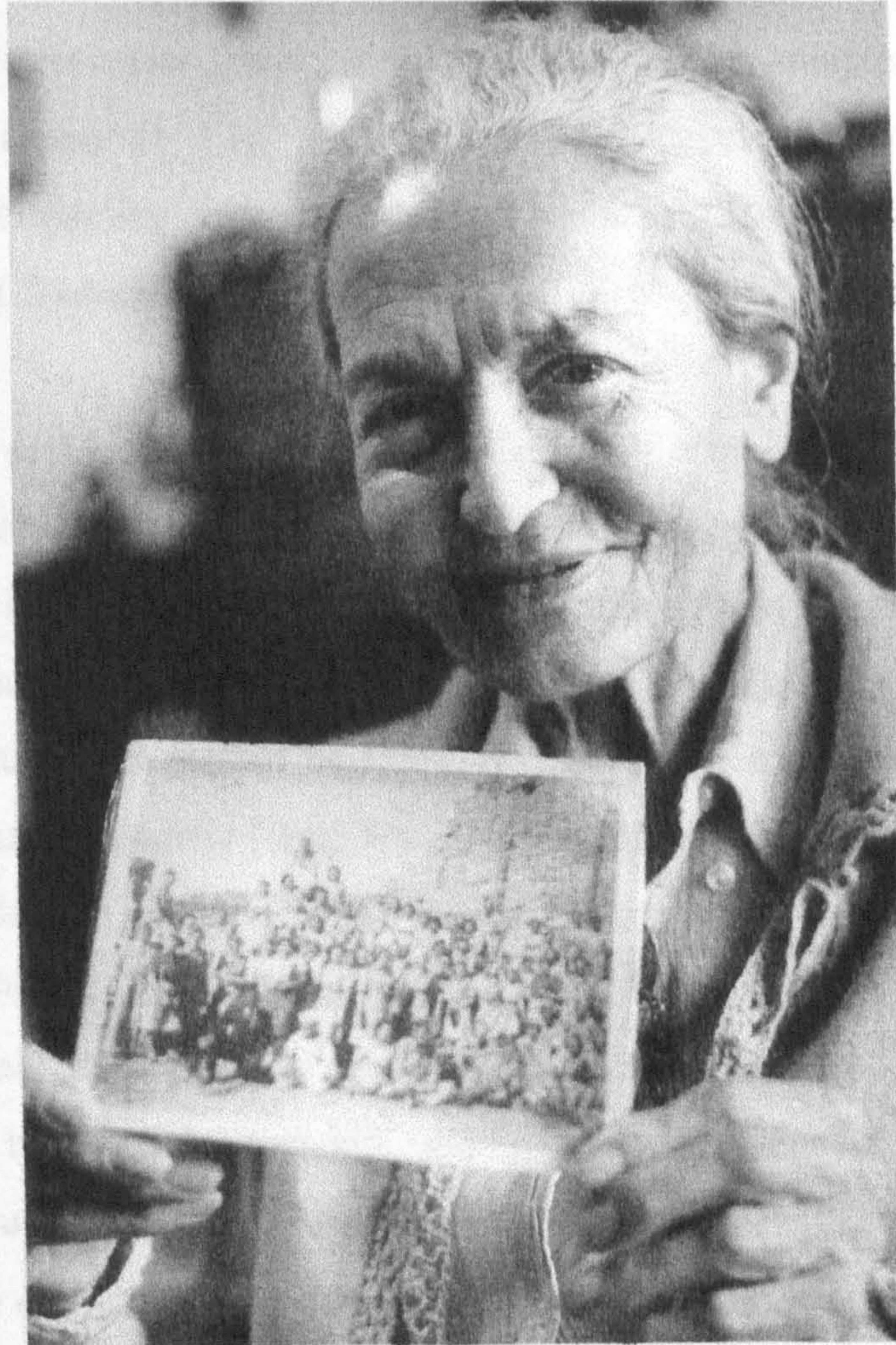
Having discussed the work of other oral history and reminiscence projects, and touched on the author’s involvement in exhibition presentation, consideration of issues that have impacted on the development of this study follows. Amongst other considerations, issues of representation have been at the heart of the present study. Indeed, it took careful deliberation of the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee to bring this study to fruition.

---

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 8 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 29, p8.

## Chapter Two

### Methods of research



Photograph: T. Smith.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p126.

A woman who lives in Antokol, a home for Poles in Chislehurst, Kent, with a photograph of herself and friends taken in the Middle East during the Second World War.

## 2.1 Part one: Methodological considerations

Oral history presents the historian with a unique opportunity of being able to engage in history with the living. During research, recording the life histories of Polish émigrés in Britain has enabled further insight into their past, and has brought to light issues that have influenced their experience of settlement. Nevertheless, working with lifestories, and with those who give them, demands consideration of critiques of oral history and of issues such as representation of subjects, subjectivity in accounts and the interviewer/interviewee relationship. Part one of this chapter considers these methodological concerns. Part two presents the development of the research chronologically, beginning with the origins of work as a BA dissertation, through to the final stages of doctoral study.

The recording of oral history has a number of positive implications, of which perhaps the most commonly understood is that it gives a voice to groups who would otherwise be ‘hidden from history’. In this respect, ethnic minority organisations have utilised oral history to communicate their historical, cultural and social uniqueness in British society. Oral history has proved particularly appropriate to the current study since Poles in Britain are a minority group whose history is relatively unknown to the wider population. In addition, as highlighted by Kendall, memory and meaning are central to most psychological theories of the aetiology of psychiatric disorder.<sup>1</sup> Hence, narratives not only shed light on neglected histories but enable information to be amassed about the “whole person”, aiding understanding of migration related problems and issues. Indeed, Graham Smith and Joanna Bornat have argued that there is a place for the use and development of life history methods, including oral history, in general medical practice, since it recognises the interconnectiveness of people’s lives.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, oral history has long been the subject of debate since not all historians are sympathetic towards this approach to research. The counter-argument questions whether oral sources can be believed and criticisms aimed at oral history involve

---

<sup>1</sup> R.E Kendall, “The nature of psychiatric disorders”, in Heller, Reynolds, Gomm, Muston, Pattison (eds.), *Mental Health Matters: A Reader*, (London, 1996), pp21-22.

<sup>2</sup> G.Smith and J.Bornat, “Oral history, biography, life history: broadening the evidence”, in *The British Journal of General Practice*, September 1999, p771.

issues of hindsight in recollection and selectivity of memory. Smith noted that oral history has developed as a result of addressing these problems, with difficult issues becoming central methodological interests and strategies developed which turn apparent weaknesses into strengths.<sup>3</sup>

Oral historians do not claim that their work is 'historical truth'. Alessandro Portelli stated, "oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility"; their importance lies in departure from fact, "as imagination, symbolism and desire". The historical significance of oral history does not lie in its ability to preserve the past, but in its capacity to convey the changes wrought by memory; changes which reveal the narrators' effort to "make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives...".<sup>4</sup>

Nor are memories greatly removed from other sources, which are also socially created and recreated. Elizabeth Tonkin reminds us that no accounts, oral or written, are without the teller's point of view and that, with both sources, the reader cannot avoid making judgements as to how authoritative the account is.<sup>5</sup>

Oral historians accept that memories are composed, structured and restructured to support identities. Alistair Thomson acknowledged: "We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general public acceptance, we seek out particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives".<sup>6</sup> Selective memory enables us to feel comfortable with who we are, and the way we project 'who we are' to others.

This previous point is extremely pertinent to the current research, which highlights that ordering thoughts into a comfortable narrative, involving a process of deselecting more difficult memories, can help individuals to come to terms with the past. Additionally, that many interviews have tended to recount similar historical narratives suggests that the 'community' account is also selective in what it actively remembers. Equally, it is argued here that a shared narrative can have positive psychological

---

<sup>3</sup> G.Smith, "Oral history and the historian: in praise of hindsight and selective memories". Newsletter for students and staff of Open University course DA301, No.1, 1998, pp8-11.

<sup>4</sup> A.Portelli, "What makes oral history different", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (London, 1998), pp68-69.

<sup>5</sup> E.Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history*, (Cambridge, 1995), p114.

<sup>6</sup> A.Thomson, "Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia", in Perks and Thomson op. cit., 1998, p301.

connotations since, in addition to promoting political unity during the years of opposition to Poland's Soviet government, it has explained why Poles were unable to return to their homeland after the war.

Whilst the framework of a shared past has been evident in many interviews, the story of the individual has dominated accounts during research. Indeed, on one occasion an interviewee revealed that he had been conscripted into the German army during the war, therefore, his past did not fit with the shared narrative at all.<sup>7</sup> Regarding community narratives, Schragger commented on the symbolism of 'I' and 'we' in narratives; the former standing for the one doing the talking and the latter designating the speaker's membership of a group.<sup>8</sup> During this research, 'I' has been prevalent.

## 2.2 Motivations for taking part in oral history research

As eye witness accounts of occupation, war and unwilling migration, the oral recollections central to this research are historically important in their own right. Yet, as the ageing émigré generation diminishes, those who can relate first hand experience become fewer. In this respect, the participation of many interviewees in this study has been motivated by a recognition that their history must be recorded, whilst there are people who can still remember it:

In ten, fifteen, thirty years, there will be second and third generations of Poles. They'll probably have heard old stories from parents or grandparents, but it's not the same.

When you speak to me you get the information from the horse's mouth, so to speak.<sup>9</sup>

Implicit in acts of recording histories has been a will to remember horror and injustice. As a journalist with *The Independent* noted following her interview with survivors of Soviet deportation: "Gaining their rightful place in the history books is all the justice they crave".<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one man specifically asked for the inclusion in this thesis of an act of atrocity that he witnessed, as since the war he has searched in vain for some written record of it:

---

<sup>7</sup> See pages 37 and 78 for further discussion of this interview.

<sup>8</sup> Schragger in Perks and Thomson op. cit., 1998, pp297-298.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 8 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 29, p3.

<sup>10</sup> M. Braid, "The forgotten children of Poland's past", in *The Monday Review* section of *The Independent*, 3 April 2000, p7.

I reading maybe twenty, thirty books, in English language, by some Jewish people. Not one book mention this. That beats me, why they not mention this?<sup>11</sup>

Plus, it has been stated that memories should be recorded in order that future generations might learn from history:

I think Germany will be dominating whole Europe and dictating everybody. I worry because although German Kohl is still in power as Prime Minister, if one of the Nazis come, there will be problem. I think it is a nation which like to dictate to everybody else. They want to be dominating every other country. That's what I'm worrying, having experience...<sup>12</sup>

For the majority of Poles in Britain, Polish history is also more than a record of the past - it is central to their identity. This was aptly illustrated by the Polish Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, in an address to the émigré community in 1982:

Those who [came] here within the framework of wartime events were not emigrants. They were Poland, torn from her own frontiers, from her own battlefields, Poland reawakened barely twenty years earlier, to an independent existence, Poland, which was rapidly being rebuilt after age-old destruction and wounds, Poland in fact which they tried once again to divide as in the eighteenth century, imposing on her a horrible and murderous war with the dominating forces of the invaders. That is how it is. What today we have become accustomed to calling 'Poland in Britain' was formed as the very backbone of Poland, fighting for the sacred cause of her independence, fighting once again in accordance with the watchword 'for our liberty and yours'... What I am saying flows from a living sense of history.<sup>13</sup>

Just as Poles in the nineteenth century struggled to maintain their culture and language in partitioned Poland, modern day émigrés endeavour to sustain this cornerstone of 'Polish identity'. However, as first generation numbers decline, their culture, religion and language are increasingly under threat. Whilst the schooling of subsequent British born generations in Polish history has been, and remains, a key

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr R, 6 September 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 37, p2. See page 82 for interviewee's account.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, 14 May 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 26, p6. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>13</sup> Extract from an address given by Pope John Paul II at Crystal Place in 1982. Reproduced in T.Modelski, *The Polish Contribution to the Ultimate Allied Victory*, (Worthing, 1988), pp260-261.



community activity, children of Polish origin are influenced more by their day-to-day non-Polish environment. The gradual loss of first generation culture to the “inevitability of assimilation”,<sup>14</sup> has provided further motivation for participation in this research since first generation interviewees are acutely aware that their memories of a bygone ‘traditional Polishness’ are dying with them.

### 2.3 The interviewer/interviewee relationship

On many occasions, usually before an interview has begun, an explanation for the author’s involvement in Polish émigré history have been sought. In this respect, a question that has nearly always been asked is whether the author has Polish family background, to which the answer is ‘no’. Motivations for involvement in this research have included an interest in migration history and oral history, and a discovery that members of the Polish émigré population in Britain have suffered a disproportionately high incidence of mental illness since their arrival in the 1940s.

The author’s lack of Polish background has generated interest on many occasions and, conceivably, might have caused some suspicion. Perks, for example, experienced suspicion of his motives for interviewing when interviewing Eastern Europeans in Bradford, and reported that it was an obstacle affecting the project. He attributed the problem to a fear of authority born of a tradition of subjugation by authorities in their homeland, which was exacerbated by British Intelligence screening at the end of the war.<sup>15</sup> Perks had to offer continual reassurance that his research was not connected with the local authority and, likewise, the motives of this study had to be outlined on several occasions. Nevertheless, Perks probably experienced more suspicion than has been evident during the current research since he was working in the early 1980s, when the Soviet system was intact and émigrés were more cautious about what they revealed to outsiders.

Interviewee interest in the author’s background prompted a reflection of the interview relationship, and the effect that the lack of Polish background might have on it. The many Polish history lessons received before recording equipment has been switched

---

<sup>14</sup> K.Sword, *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain*, (London, 1996), p225.

<sup>15</sup> R.Perks, “A feeling of not belonging’: Interviewing European immigrants in Bradford”, in *Oral History Journal*, Vol.12, No.2, Autumn 1984, p65.

on almost certainly owe much to the interviewer's position as an 'outsider'. Far from being tedious, this has been interesting. Explanations started before an interview have often continued during it, and historical 'scene setting' for the benefit of the interviewer has encouraged interviewees to reflect on the past and their part in it. With an interviewer thought to be more inculcated in Polish émigré culture and history, such clarification might not be deemed necessary. As Akemi Kikumura found when conducting 'insider' life history with her mother, "the life history participant often assumes that you already know about past events and do not need to be told".<sup>16</sup>

A particular perception of the interviewer based on nationality is just one of many influences that might affect the outcome of an interview. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee can be shaped by responses to other factors, such as gender, age, perceived social and professional status, and assumed life experience. Interviewees adjust their testimonies in accordance with their perceptions of the person facing them in the interview, taking into consideration whether information might upset, offend, provoke, or be 'unsuitable' in some other way.

That different interviewers secure different results adds to the richness of oral history and offers the possibility of never exhausting an interviewee's memory. Portelli wrote that, "no matter what their personal histories and beliefs may be, historians and 'sources' are hardly ever on the same 'side'" - the confrontation of different partialities, he continues, makes oral history interesting.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.4 Second language interviewing

Associated with the author not having a Polish background is the issue of interviewing in the interviewee's second language - and there is an argument for first language interviewing. Whilst conducting oral history amongst Eastern Europeans, Perks found that some first generation Ukrainians refused to be interviewed in anything other than their first language as they felt their poor knowledge of English limited self-expression.<sup>18</sup> However, an unwillingness to be interviewed due to

---

<sup>16</sup> A.Kikumura, "Family life histories: A collaborative venture", in Perks and Thomson op. cit., 1998, pp142-144.

<sup>17</sup> A.Portelli, "What makes oral history different", Ibid., p73.

<sup>18</sup> Perks op. cit., 1984, p65.

language considerations has not been communicated during the current research. The majority of contributors have played an active part in British society for over half a century and are confident English speakers.

To a great extent, difficulties regarding learning English were experienced by older generations of émigrés, most of whom are no longer living. In contrast, those who were younger when they arrived in Britain generally absorbed the language more easily. It is this generation who have mostly contributed to research. Nevertheless, the ageing process impacts on learned language skills and many interviewees have complained that they forget words more frequently than when they were younger. In this respect, English language ability has varied. Many interviews have been detailed and expressive, whilst others have been more laboured - but this problem can also be a characteristic of interviews with native English speakers.

An argument for conducting interviews in English has been expressed repeatedly by Polish émigrés since little has been written about Polish émigré history in their adopted language, and as their numbers decrease there is a desire to record stories for wider public consumption. Tadeusz Modelski reinforced this view in his English account of the contribution of Poles during the Second World War, and included this response to his work:

Dear Sir, I have wished for a long time that someone who has more energy than I would account for our Polish effort in the last war and publish it in the English language... To write a book in English is especially a valuable enterprise...<sup>19</sup>

This research has also highlighted that statutory health and welfare bodies generally know very little of the background to Polish migration; a situation that adversely affects the care of émigrés who are often assumed, mistakenly, to be 'like the English'. Assumptions made on the basis of Poles being white and European do little to improve their experience of health and welfare services as they age. That their culture and history impacts on their ageing experience generally goes unacknowledged, and can have serious implications. Hence, whilst this oral history study acknowledges that second language interviewing can pose problems, in this

---

<sup>19</sup> Modelski op. cit., 1988, p271.

instance, it is believed that its negative implications are offset by the positive outcomes.

## **2.5 Transcription**

During interviews, face to face communication enables body language and voice intonation to enrich understanding of its meaning. Hence, it has been important in this study to transcribe an interview as soon afterwards as has been reasonably possible, whilst the author's memory of it is fresh and significant non-verbal communication can be recalled and recorded. Transcriptions of Polish émigré testimony have been made in full and remain faithful to original speech. However, minor editing of extracts used in this thesis has occasionally been necessary in the interests of brevity, or because grammar and sentence structure were particularly confusing.

On occasions where interviewees have asked to see transcripts of their interviews, they have usually requested that extracts of speech be 'tidied up' before use. Only one person was so unhappy with his transcript that he withdrew reproduction permission completely. However, through consultation with the interviewee this problem was overcome, to a great extent. Edited versions of extracts were shown to him in order to verify that their original meaning had been retained, enabling important memories to be released.

## 2.6 Part two: The research project

The current research into problems and issues of Polish settlement began in 1995, as an undergraduate dissertation,<sup>20</sup> and as a novice oral historian the author faced the daunting task (as it was at the time) of securing interviews. A research trip to a Polish peoples' residential and nursing home for ageing and infirm émigrés in Penrhos, North Wales, was productive in this respect. Additionally, socialising in Sheffield's Polish Catholic and Ex-Serviceman's clubs provided genial opportunities to meet their members.<sup>21</sup> A questionnaire designed to establish a profile of the Polish community aided interaction and interviews were obtained from this inquiry since respondents were asked to indicate their willingness, or otherwise, to be involved in further research. Fifty percent of the respondents (ten people) consented, but time constraints resulted in five being approached at the time.

Transcripts of these early interviews have been revisited during the writing of this thesis and it has been interesting to note that, with hindsight, it is likely that interviewees responded generously to the interviewer's relatively recent arrival to Polish history. Explanations of certain events were unusually careful and detailed, so much so that extracts from the first interview were used in the exhibition and book, 'Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain'.<sup>22</sup>

After this early research, work continued as a PhD study. Since the author was already a familiar figure in the Polish clubs of Sheffield, approaching potential interviewees was not a particular problem. Further, attendance at a Polish language class held in the Ex-Serviceman's club helped with the process of becoming accepted. The author's language proficiency never attained an appropriate standard for interviewing, nevertheless, knowledge of basic Polish showed respect for first generation interviewees. Polish classes also brought the author into social contact with 'second generation' students, many of whom attended as they regretted not

---

<sup>20</sup> M.Winslow, "'Scarred for Life': The effect of war trauma upon an ageing Polish population", Department of Historical and Critical Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> M.Winslow's British grandfather, H.J.Potter, frequented the Polish Catholic Centre due to his friendship with members of the club. His introductions made possible a speedier entrée than would otherwise have been likely, and enabled Polish members to identify the author's background.

<sup>22</sup> For discussion of this exhibition see pages 19 and 38.

learning Polish as children. Some of these people became interested in the current research and helped to arrange interviews with their parents' generation.

The first year of interviewing generated a growing archive of oral material, most of which centred on deportation, labour camp experience and the Polish Forces. However, very little was disclosed of how people felt about their losses and unwelcome emigration. A second trip to Penrhos affirmed that mental health problems amongst ageing Poles could often be associated with their past, but these were not being openly discussed in Polish communities. Allusions to the psychological legacy of war by the author during interviews gained little response. Even in Penrhos, where problems were confirmed by staff, and were observable, a fleeting reference to the psychological impact of the past during conversation with a resident prompted the swift response: "Sorry, I am not your problem child!".<sup>23</sup> Discussion of this reaction with the 'second generation' Polish class students produced a consensus of opinion; questions on mental health would be mostly ill-received by the first generation.

This difficult situation was discussed with Jan Niczyperowicz, an Eastern European Social Welfare Officer, who acknowledged the problem of stigma in a brief report on the social difficulties of his clients. His understanding was that mental illness could be considered as a weakness, and that shame caused many mentally ill and handicapped people to be kept at home.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, reference was made to religious undertones since illness might be perceived as a sign of guilt, or 'punishment from God'.<sup>25</sup> At a later stage of research, a Polish voluntary outreach worker contributed her opinion of attitudes towards mental illness:

People have very strange attitudes to mental illness you know. If I go and see somebody who is, say, confused in old age, I accept it, it doesn't worry me. But it's lack of knowledge, people are afraid of somebody who is slightly different than they are... there is an attitude. Some English people are like this, don't you think?... it is ignorance, it's lack of knowledge... when people are old and confused it's not

---

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Mrs B (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 April 1996.

<sup>24</sup> For further reference to this issue see page 170.

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with J.Niczyperowicz, 9 February 1996. Also, J. Niczyperowicz, "The Polish Community in Leeds: A social perspective", March 1987, p5. Unpublished report.

dangerous, you don't catch it... But we're not really very educated on the whole are we?<sup>26</sup>

With concern growing that research might not achieve its objectives, owing to the stigma surrounding discussion of the psychological consequences of past trauma, consideration was given to alternative areas of exploration. And realising that a concern voiced frequently by interviewees at the time was, 'our memories are dying with us', thoughts were directed towards involving the local Polish community in preserving their past. Following deliberation of the extra workload, Polish émigrés in Sheffield were approached with the idea of producing a community history; a project that received the support of the Migration and Ethnicity Research Centre at the University of Sheffield.

On reflection, there have been 'landmarks' during research that can be identified as significantly influencing outcomes, and embarking on a community history represents one such turning point. Discussion of the project with community members, and the inclusion of a news item about it in *Oral History*, which demonstrated that it was not 'just talk',<sup>27</sup> altered perceptions of the research and the researcher. In the past, both Polish centres in Sheffield have been subjected to inquiry by university students on several occasions, but the results of these research projects are rarely seen. In contrast, the proposed community project offered an opportunity for émigrés to participate in a study and, crucially, influence the resulting historical and cultural representation.

With two projects in hand, a PhD and a community venture, it was essential to think carefully about how oral testimony would be used, and to communicate the same to the interviewee.<sup>28</sup> Care was taken to explain to potential interviewees that research interests were twofold. One aspect was to record life histories for the community project, whilst PhD research might necessitate questions about the impact of the past. Clearly, this agenda was too large to be tackled in one interview which led to discussion with interviewees of how they felt able to contribute to research, and to an increasingly reflexive research method. As work for the community project got

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, pp11-12.

<sup>27</sup> News item by M. Winslow included in "Current British Work", in *Oral History*, Vol.25, No.2, Autumn 1997, p13.

<sup>28</sup> For ethical guidelines see A. Ward, *Copyright Ethics and Oral History*, (Essex, 1995).

underway, efforts were made to conduct interviews in a minimum of two sessions. The first interview aimed to record the individual's lifestory, and enabled interviewee and interviewer to become more acquainted. Increasing familiarity, coupled with a developing sense of trust that contributions were confidential, contributed to a more relaxed situation in subsequent interviews.

A common assumption of an oral history interview is that, whilst interviewees might stimulate conversation - "a conversation is not our aim".<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Grele described how a "conversational narrative" can evolve that takes into account the social and psychological relationships between the participants.<sup>30</sup> This approach was particularly appropriate during this study as the development of 'conversations' in interviews enabled the sharing of thoughts and concerns.

However, the problem remained of how to facilitate discussion about the impact of the past on present lives. Since a rapport was growing between the author and a few interviewees, it was sensed that a situation was developing whereby it might be possible to introduce concerns. However, it was feared that a spoken explanation of the mental health problems of Polish émigrés, 'out of the blue', might suffer from awkward delivery or be misunderstood. Therefore, a decision was taken to experiment with a brief written explanation that outlined key issues, and ask the interviewee their opinion of it. To emphasise that there was no pressure to respond, at an appropriate moment during the interview (coffee-time), recording equipment was turned off whilst the interviewee read the following:

The Polish population in Britain have a remarkable collective history, much of which has been well documented. Where my research differs from previous work is in its focus upon actual life experiences both during and after the Second World War, and on distressing aspects which can potentially damage health. Recent work by the British Medical Association supported statistics produced in 1981 which showed that Poles in Britain had a disproportionately high incidence of mental health problems. The BMA, and other medical researchers, have stated that these difficulties are still evident today, half a decade after the war. Indeed, a particularly vulnerable time for illness is after

---

<sup>29</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Oral History Interview Guidelines*, (Washington, 1998), pvii.

<sup>30</sup> R.J.Grele, "Movement Without Aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history", in Perks and Thomson op. cit., (London, 1998), p44.



retirement when contact with colleagues is lost and individuals reach the stage in life where factors such as ill health, bereavement and children leaving home may produce stress and further isolation from the familiar life previously known.

Of course, these problems can affect all ageing people, but Polish émigrés have additional problems. Learned language has a tendency to fade with age whilst the support of an extended family may be absent as relatives died in the war or remained in Poland. Further, the slower pace of life in retirement allows time to reflect upon the events of a lifetime, but where people become increasingly isolated they are unable to share reminiscence with others, and importantly, to do so in their own language. All of these issues are then combined with coming to terms with growing old in a country that few had expected to grow old in. It is hardly surprising that some people experience difficulty in coping.

\*

Interviewee: Very good Michelle, I agree with you.<sup>31</sup>

The occasion when these words were spoken was the first time an interviewee had been invited for an opinion in this way, and his affirmation of the thoughts on paper came as a great relief. At last, oral history research was substantiating that ‘ordinary’ Poles were affected by a legacy of war, not necessarily to an extent that might require medical attention, but enough to have an adverse affect on their quality of life.

The written prop proved a valuable tool in developing the subject of psychological difficulty. Rather than being requested to offer personal experience, the interviewee was asked for his or her own opinion, which enabled that person to retain control of the discussion. As highlighted by Cybulska, an individual who feels vulnerable in a situation is unlikely to engage in candid discussion.<sup>32</sup>

Facilitating a more open and comfortable situation also enabled the interviewer to gain experience of discussing disturbing subjects with émigrés. Indeed, with hindsight, talking about delicate issues was clearly an issue involving the interviewer together with the interviewees. As an ex-nurse, the author came to this research with experience of engaging in distressing discussions, but with little experience of talking

---

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p4.

<sup>32</sup> E. Cybulska, “Poles - unsuitable for psychotherapy?”, letter in *Psychiatric Bulletin*, October, 1993, p629.

with people who were not compelled to involve themselves in uncomfortable dialogue. The decision to write down key issues brought about a situation that was less likely to alienate the interviewee, whilst also increasing the interviewer's understanding of difficult interview situations.

The use of the text prop was undoubtedly important in the development of oral history interviewing during this research, but only proved necessary for a short period of time. Once the problem of how to raise issues of mental health during interviews had been tackled, the author gained in confidence and expertise and the subject was increasingly raised verbally. It should be noted that the ethical dimension of this situation has been taken into account. As discussed by Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack, the researcher should remain aware that the interviewer is there to follow the narrator's lead and honour that person's integrity and privacy - "not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back".<sup>33</sup>

Increasingly, discussion of mental health during interviews brought new interview possibilities since individuals passed on names of people whom they considered 'more knowledgeable', including professional, voluntary and family carers. This was a further significant landmark in research as new contacts contributed a broader perspective. It was particularly interesting to find émigrés who arrived in the 1980s, some who were involved with the Polish community in Britain and some who were not, and who were prepared to be critical of it. However, where controversial views have been offered, interviewees commonly requested that recording equipment be turned off. Notes were taken in this situation. With interviewees aware that their opinions might be included in the research, many of them requested anonymity.

As the research progressed, the objective of the work with Polish émigrés was increasingly understood and greater trust developed. A trip to Poland, made by the author in 1997, provided further assurance of commitment to the work, and generated interest amongst interviewees who asked questions about the places visited. One outcome of the growing confidence in the study was that an émigré who had been interviewed at the start of research requested another interview, saying that his first had not been completely truthful. The author's recollection of the first interview was

---

<sup>33</sup> K.Anderson and D.C.Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analyses", Ibid., p170.

that it had been vague to the extent that it was difficult to follow, and focused mostly on Poland's distant history. Nevertheless, an arrangement was made to conduct the interview in the Ex-Serviceman's club of the interviewee's home town. The aim of this interview was to concentrate on the lived experience of the interviewee and, as such, it began with his childhood. The interviewee obliged by recalling his school days and his apprenticeship as a baker, however, after just ten minutes, his tone altered as he began to talk about a television documentary, screened the previous night, about the German occupation in Poland:

Maybe you was looking at a television programme last night, nine o' clock.

*Yes, about the Nazis.*

Well, they didn't show enough what was going on. You see ... they was needing the men for the German army.<sup>34</sup>

The interviewee then related his experience of being drafted into the German Army; the testimony was extremely moving. Whether the interviewee had intended to recall this aspect of past when he asked for another interview, before the prompt of the documentary, is unknown. However, that this man was being interviewed about his past was not unknown to other club members. Whilst only supposition, the impression was gained that there was some apprehension about what might be disclosed; the interview was interrupted several times, with the interviewee even being called away on more than one occasion to assist with club business.

It was the interviewee's decision to be interviewed in the Ex-Servicemen's club, and his disclosure on tape that he has experienced hostility over the years from his compatriots due to his German army past, caused the author to wonder whether the consequences of being interviewed on club premises were foreseen by him. Nevertheless, the lesson learned from this arrangement was that more attention should be paid to the location of interviews.

As the snowball effect gathered pace, the interview workload grew. That the research was also leading towards the production of a community history had not been forgotten. Indeed, the author felt a heavy burden of responsibility in respect of

---

<sup>34</sup> Interview conducted 2 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow. Interviewee requested that further details be withheld. See page 78 for further reference to this interview.

ensuring that it was produced. Two 'second generation' volunteers were keen to help in its production and meetings were held with them to determine how the project should proceed. One volunteer expressed an interest in becoming involved with interviewing, and conducted an interview with her mother, which provided an insight into issues of 'insider interviewing'. The mother skimmed over wartime events, in contrast to many discussions with Poles that had taken place with the author, and did not discuss trauma or other negative aspects of her life. A significant strength of the mother/daughter interview lay in its disclosure of domestic details. Additionally, the dynamics of the discourse were interesting since the memories of mother and daughter were in conflict:

*So you actually had to learn that [dressmaking] when you came to England?*

Yes, I've learned everything. I went to shop, to Marks and Spencer, saw a nice dress, I looked at it and a woman said to me, 'are you going to buy it?'. I said, 'no, I'm just looking how it's made'. And I went home and made it. I made all your coats, even Eric's trousers and even his suit, you know jacket and trousers.

*I remember people complimenting us on our nice dresses when we were at school...*

*Those dresses you made out of scraps didn't you?*

NO. I bought materials. Remnants like...

*...Oh that's another thing, I remember that when you first arrived you had to do a lot of bartering, didn't you, bargaining and things. Didn't you have to swap things for other things?*

No. We did that in Germany.

*You did that in Germany not in England?*

No, we did that in Germany.<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, this was the only interview conducted by the project volunteer since employment pressures and family illness prevented the further involvement of both women. Without assistance, the community project underwent a period of uncertainty. However, a fortuitous opportunity enabled it to continue.

With Tim Smith, and initially Graham Smith, the author became involved in the production of 'Keeping the Faith', an exhibition based on an oral history of Britain's

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mrs F and Mrs Gr (Sheffield), October 1997, recorded by T.F, Tape 28, pp7-8.

Poles, and photographs.<sup>36</sup> Much of the exhibition's photographic work was produced by Tim Smith, whilst a significant proportion of the oral history displayed was collected during the course of this study. Extracts of lifestories contributed by Sheffield's Polish community were represented within the exhibition and are included in the accompanying publication. The support of funding from Marks and Spencer, the Migration and Ethnicity Research Centre (University of Sheffield), and Polonia Aid Foundation Trust, meant that the exhibition and publication were of a higher production quality than the initial community project would have been able to achieve.

Following the launch of the exhibition in Bradford, in July 1999, the author was approached to assist in the production of a cultural information pack about the Polish community in Sheffield, for the use of health and welfare services in the area.<sup>37</sup> That it was a first generation Polish community leader, Witold Szablewski, who requested this assistance was particularly gratifying.

The pack provides a general background to Polish history, culture and language and is aimed at agencies and individuals involved with health and welfare in and around the Sheffield area. The series editor, Safuran Ara, Senior Information Officer of Multicultural Services, emphasised the relevance of the research in the course of an introduction:

There are over twelve ethnic minorities with around eighty five languages and dialects spoken locally, but there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding of most minority languages and cultures. As a result many organisations, both statutory and voluntary, and the individuals who work for them, have had difficulty in understanding their needs. Consequently, they may find themselves providing inadequate or inappropriate services.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> See page 19 for additional discussion.

<sup>37</sup> W.Szablewski and M.Winslow, "Polish Community Cultural Awareness: Information and Learning Pack", Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, January 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p1. The pack is part of a series that includes publications by the African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Pakistani communities in Sheffield. A senior nurse at St Luke's Hospice in Sheffield, Lynn Potter, confirmed that cultural information packs were of value when patients of these ethnic backgrounds were admitted into their care.

One argument of this thesis is that when Poles become ill and are brought into contact with statutory services, a lack of knowledge about their past and present situations is detrimental to their care. Hence, a recognition of the need for cultural information to be made available was a welcome step.

As with the exhibition, involvement in the production of the Polish information pack informed the current study since the issue of representation was a key issue. The pack was primarily a production of the Polish community and, therefore, decisions on representation were essentially for them to make. However, the author was able to offer advice and helped to shape the final publication.

The information that was selected by Polish community representatives for inclusion in the pack reinforced the perception gained during oral history research that history, recent and distant, is central to émigré identity. Indeed, the historical narrative began in the year that Poland emerged as a state, 966, and outlined key events until the start of the Second World War, when more detailed explanation was offered. The inclusion of events from the distant past reflects the identification that émigrés have with their forebears who also engaged in struggles for Poland's autonomy.

The fact that a significant part of the work focused on Poland's history became a point of discussion with representatives of the Polish community, who were keen to incorporate this dimension. The author recognised the need for such history but also believed that if the pack were to inform non-Polish carers of a Polish client's or patient's needs, the inclusion of cultural information was important. As a consequence, a section was included that contained information on family life, religion, death, language, respectful forms of address, name days and birthdays, and food and drink. Polish émigrés who do not participate in the predominantly Catholic Polish community life were also discussed, as were those whose histories contrast with that of the majority.

There was no debate about the inclusion of a section entitled "Polish Émigrés and Mental Health", which highlighted the extent to which perceptions of the current research have shifted since it began. Indeed, the author was invited by Witold Szablewski to talk on this aspect of Polish settlement as part of a Cultural and

Language Awareness Course attended by staff from hospitals, hospices and nursing homes.<sup>39</sup> The revised perspective, with regard to the author's work, probably reflected increased confidence amongst émigrés that their situation was not in danger of negative misrepresentation. In the early days of research, concerns were expressed by some of the 'second generation' that their parents, and they themselves, by association, might be presented as 'mad'. Assisting in the amelioration of this negativity was the publication of an article, by the author, "Polish Migration to Britain: War, exile and mental health" (Spring 1999).<sup>40</sup> This work was read by a number of émigrés and a copy was also sent to the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, the umbrella body for Polish organisations and the head of the Polish community since 1989. The empathetic nature of the article, together with its contention that the plight of ageing Poles has not been adequately met by statutory bodies, seemingly eased concerns.

The course of this research, from start to finish, has taken the author on an incredibly rewarding journey. At the outset, work was impeded by the cautious approach of many émigrés, with the motives of a non-Polish researcher from a university being regarded with suspicion. Yet, a sustained interest and involvement in the community and its activities, in addition to the production of a well-received exhibition and book about émigré history, succeeded in establishing the author as someone who could be trusted with their memories.

The path that this research has taken has undoubtedly been winding. Yet, had problems not been recognised, understood, and attempts made to resolve them, it is doubtful that this study could have attained its objective; that of learning from Polish émigrés *themselves* that the past exercises a negative influence on their present lives.

---

<sup>39</sup>Cultural and Language Awareness Course organised by Sheffield Libraries and Information Services. Held at Burngreave Library, Sheffield, 26 October 1999.

<sup>40</sup> M. Winslow, "Polish Migration to Britain: War, exile and mental health" in *Oral History*, Vol.27, No.1, Spring 1999, pp57-64.

## Chapter Three

### Narrating the Second World War



Photo: Bradford Heritage Recording Unit.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p13.

German soldiers burning a village in western Poland.

“Somebody told them this village provides us Partisans with food, bread, things like that... Germans took these photographs and took them to a Polish shop to be developed. One set was developed for them, and one set was developed for Polish Underground. Look how happy their faces are as they burn and kill people. I forgive always my enemy, but forget, no, I never.”

Interview with Mr R (Lincs.), 6 September 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 37, p5.



### 3.1 Part One: Poles, Poland and the Second World War

The Poles settled in Britain as a direct result of the Second World War and their wartime history has always been at the centre of émigré community life, culturally and politically. Hence, any study of the Polish community must address their historical background and this chapter aims to do this by juxtaposing the perspectives of historian and those who lived the history. Initially, Norman Davies' study on Poland in the Second World War in *God's Playground: A History of Poland* is summarised, followed by the wartime memories of Polish émigrés, as related during interviews. Interviewee accounts of events parallel Davies' work to a great extent and have little new factual detail to offer. However, during the collection of these interviews it has been clear that whilst details conform with written texts, it is the way in which the past is remembered that sets émigré accounts apart, as individuals try to make sense of their traumatic memories. Indeed, the effect of war on the 'ordinary' Pole has been deep, as evidenced by the negative psychological legacy that haunts the émigré population, and an understanding of this traumatic past can only add to knowledge of the impact of war.

Representing the Polish Ex-Combatants Association in Britain, Suchcitz wrote: "...after five years and eight months of war in which Poland had played an active part from the first day to the last day, she emerged as the heaviest loser on the winning side".<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the losses sustained have been difficult for Polish émigrés to accept and many have not come to terms with their dispossession and have lived for half a century in Britain reflecting on missed opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Hence, there is a sense that émigré accounts are rationalising the past and ordering events into a narrative to explain why over a hundred thousand Poles in Britain have spent a lifetime far away from their families and homeland; it is this implicit sense of history as identity which sets émigré accounts apart from the work of Davies.

As highlighted previously, important to émigré identity is Poland's history of insurrection following the country's partition when it lost independence to Prussia,

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Suchcitz, *Poland's Contribution to the Allied Victory in the Second World War*, (The Polish Ex-Combatants Association in Great Britain, 1995), p16.

<sup>2</sup> This opinion has been expressed on several occasions during unrecorded and recorded interviews. E.g. interview with Mr Mj (Sheffield), 25 September 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 8, p8.

Russia and Austria. The analogy has not always been voiced, but both interviewer and interviewee are aware that talk of ‘fighting for Poland’ also refers to an insurrectionary tradition that follows in the footsteps of Polish forbears. As with so many minority groups in Britain, history is central to identity and for Polish émigrés it has given meaning to their émigré life.

### 3.2 “Golgota”<sup>3</sup>

The devastating first blow to Poland’s brief inter-war period of independence was struck in the early hours of 1 September 1939. This initial attack was followed by air raids which arbitrarily targeted the country’s infrastructure, its population, and especially its air force. Bridges were hit, trains derailed and panic stricken refugees sprayed with machine-gun fire as they fled the Nazi terror.

By 6 September, the Polish command had abandoned its defence of Poland’s frontiers and turned its attention to delivering a counter-offensive. However, the odds were stacked against the Poles since, in addition to their inferior military capabilities, on 17 September the Soviet army launched an assault on Poland.

The Polish army defended Warsaw until 27 September, during which time the Polish government was able to abandon the surrounded city and head for Romania. The conspiratorial double invasion quickly overwhelmed Poland’s capacity to defend itself and army formations were ordered to disperse, bury their weapons and fend for themselves. In the last few hours before Soviet forces sealed the frontiers, tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians escaped into Romania and Hungary and the armed defence of Poland became the responsibility of the Underground and combatants fighting abroad.<sup>4</sup>

A popular legend attached to the September campaign tells of “brave but foolish” Poles charging German Panzers on horseback. There is some truth in this story as isolated cavalry squadrons did fight in the traditional manner, although their only

---

<sup>3</sup> “Golgota” is the title of the chapter on the Second World War in Davies’, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland. Vol. II*, (Oxford, 1981). Gulgota is another word for Calvary, or a representation of the crucifixion of Christ, but it can also be used in the context of a passage in life, or journey, that has involved suffering. Personal communication with B.Szablewska, 23 May, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Davies op. cit., 1981, pp437-8.

other option was surrender. However, Davies writes that the Poles were technically ill-equipped, not incompetent or guilty of “mad courage”, and emphasises a frequently overlooked fact, that the Poles were fulfilling their part of a pre-war agreement. The Polish army were expecting allied support but, in the event, faced the enemy alone. Davies contends that the myth of glamorous defiance emerged from the bitterness and humiliation felt by Poles as a result of their fate, and that allied governments were ready to accept this view rather than acknowledge their own lack of response. In the first month of the war, the Polish forces lost 60,000 men, 140,000 were wounded and civilian casualties numbered many more. The western allies staged a leaflet drop over German territory, but otherwise “had not fired a shot in Poland’s defence”.<sup>5</sup>

Nazi-occupied territory extended eastwards to the rivers Bug and San, beyond which, Poland’s land was under Soviet control. There was further division within the Nazi dominated partition since the north and west became the ‘New Reich’, annexed directly to the Reich, and central and southern areas were formed into a separate ‘General-Gouvernement’. The first twenty two months of war saw German and Soviet leaders merging their interests; Soviet oil fuelled the German military whilst Nazi and Soviet propaganda lauded each others achievements.<sup>6</sup>

In all areas of German occupation, Poles were denied civil law protection and lived under Martial Law which punished offences with death or concentration camp. Reflecting Nazi opinion, Himmler stated that Poles were not to be endowed with “decent German thoughts and logical conclusions of which they are not capable”.<sup>7</sup> The Nazis also immediately began realising their anti-Semitic policies by separating the Jewish population from the Aryan. In Jewish ghettos, people endured appalling conditions, a starvation existence, and worked as forced labour for the benefit of the Wehrmacht.

All Poles were registered with the Nazi authorities and classified as either; Reichsdeutsch, for Germans born within the old frontiers of the Reich; Volksdeutsch (German Nationals) who could claim German ancestry in their family within three

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp438-439.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp440-441. See Appendix 1 for map showing German/Soviet demarcation line and Polish defensive positions of the September Campaign, 1939.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp442-445.

generations; Nichtdeutsch (non-Germans) who could prove themselves free of all Jewish connections; and Juden (Jews). Classification enabled further segregation and the enclosure of Jews in ghettos.<sup>8</sup>

Middle class families had their suburban properties confiscated to provide homes for incoming German officials and large numbers of Poles were forcibly deported into slave labour in Germany. Racial apartheid was enforced and all non-Germans were confined to their own districts, where they were prohibited from owning a wireless set and were not allowed to congregate in groups of more than three persons, except in church. The Jewish population was allowed no such concessions and in the ghettos death was a constant threat for both those who abided by the rules as well as those who resisted.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulties involved in executing the categorisation scheme, particularly where family backgrounds straddled categories, gave rise to confusion, corruption and brutality. Bogus family trees and false papers made the task of ordering the population more difficult and, faced with this problem, the Germans reacted harshly. Poles in Gdansk were registered as German en masse and throughout the expropriated territory fates could be decided by the exchange of jewellery, or a bullet. Davies writes that the situation in Poland deteriorated into a hunting-ground for “desperadoes and sadists”.<sup>10</sup> By 1943, arbitrary mass killings were also commonplace amongst the non-Jewish population.

In spite of the murder and mayhem during the first years of German occupation, the rate of death did not reach its peak whilst the death camps were still under construction. However, violence increased due to pilot extermination schemes that tested the efficiency of *Cyclon B* gas and a Euthanasia campaign (1939-40) which sent ten thousand Polish intellectuals to Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. Hospitals were also cleared of their mentally and physically disabled and, in the Palmiry Forest near Warsaw, there was a mass execution of 3,500 political and

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p440-445.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p441 and p446.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp446-447.

municipal leaders. Further, in reprisal for Polish Partisan fighting, 20,000 Poles were killed in Pomerania in October 1939.<sup>11</sup>

In the Soviet-controlled areas of Poland, in the eastern part of the country, there was greater inclination towards creating an impression of democracy. The results of plebiscites taken amongst occupied peoples claimed that ninety two percent of the electorate were clamouring to be admitted into the USSR. Nikita Khrushchev (First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party) maintained that Soviet power received unanimous support, although continuing arrests of the “bourgeois enemy” would appear to contradict this claim.<sup>12</sup>

Davies writes that the Soviet NKVD in eastern Poland were even more destructive in the early part of the war than their German cohorts. The Soviets had refined their techniques of political terror in previous years, particularly during the collectivisation campaign and the purges, and without the need for experimentation they could implement their plans with greater speed. In the Soviet zone, the population were also classified and segregated and, in contrast to German policy, undesirable individuals removed immediately. This policy led to the mass deportation of Polish citizens to inhospitable northern territories of the USSR; an operation described as the culmination of Stalinist terror. Davies writes that the allies had knowledge of the Soviet deportations and slave labour camps, just as they knew about Nazi atrocities, but largely ignored the information.

Poles were the foremost victims of deportations to inhospitable northern Soviet territories and were sent there in four massive rail convoys in February, April and June 1940, and June 1941. The vast majority were convicted for a ‘crime’ they had not committed; it was enough that the Poles were an enduring enemy of the Soviets, and of the previous Russian nation.<sup>13</sup>

Of the deportation trains, Davies wrote that conditions almost defied description. Packed standing in unheated and windowless cattle-wagons, deportees were dispatched on a winter journey of up to six thousand miles:

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p447.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp443-444.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p448.

Their only view of the outside world was through a small opening under the roof which could be used for passing out excreta and corpses. Instances of derangement, frostbite, starvation, infanticide, even cannibalism occurred.<sup>14</sup>

The anonymous biography, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, provides Davies' work with an account of Soviet deportation. The writer recalled his arrest and conviction on a charge of action "inimical to Stalin", his imprisonment prior to deportation, the train journey north, and conditions in the labour camp which, each year, killed 2,000 of the 10,000 inmates. The author was so completely demoralised that he was about to mutilate himself in order to gain access to hospital care when news of impending release arrived.<sup>15</sup>

On 22 June 1941, the Wehrmacht launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the USSR. This event prompted relations between the Soviets and the western allies and, between 1941 and 1943, enabled the Polish Government-in-Exile to enter into discussions with the Soviet Union. An 'amnesty' was agreed for the Poles in labour camps, although by the time of their release around half of the one and a half million deportees were dead. It was agreed that the released prisoners would be received into a Polish army on Soviet soil. However, Davies writes of evident tensions in the Polish-Soviet agreement since the Poles were conscious of their weak position and determined not to concede any ground on territorial or political matters. The Soviets exerted pressure by not releasing all labour camp prisoners, by imprisoning or shooting Polish and Jewish leaders, and by withholding support and supplies to the Polish army. Following the Declaration of Friendship, signed by Stalin and Sikorski on 5 December 1941, the activities of the Government-in-Exile were repeatedly obstructed.<sup>16</sup>

Nor did Polish-Soviet discussion shed light on the whereabouts of fifteen thousand missing officers. Although the Soviets strenuously denied it for half a century, they were responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of Polish officers. In April 1943, 4,321 of the officers were discovered in the Katyń Forest near Smolensk, their hands tied behind their backs and each shot in the back of the head. The Nazis blamed the

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p449.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp449-451.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p484.

Soviets and the Soviets blamed the Nazis, but the evidence firmly pointed to Soviet guilt.<sup>17</sup> On this subject, *God's Playground* was disadvantaged by its time of writing, in 1981. At that time the matter was still officially a 'Nazi war crime' and there was no possibility of western historians viewing Soviet documents regarding the affair.

Ten years later, with the disintegration of the Soviet system, President Gorbachev confirmed Soviet culpability for the crime, an admission that was later corroborated in more detail by President Yeltsin. Writing in 1997, Davies was able to state conclusively that the murderous act had been authorised by Stalin and carried out by the NKVD, who completed the whole operation by the sixth of June, 1940.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence of Gorbachev's admission of Soviet guilt, two further killing grounds were discovered, and in a letter to *The Times* in 2000, Davies wrote that the official estimate of Polish officers murdered in 1940 had reached 25,000.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the Katyń slaughter was terrible, the subsequent reaction of the British allies exacerbated the trauma of the situation. Since the German invasion of the USSR, 'Katyń' had become an embarrassment for the British wartime government since it was committed to the Soviet alliance but also host to the Polish government in London. The British were aware that the Soviets were the most probable culprits and an unpublished British report concluded as much, but revelation would have risked destabilising both the allied relationship and public perceptions that allies did not commit the same atrocities as the Germans.<sup>20</sup>

The Nazi invasion which brought the Soviets into the allied campaign acquired new territories for the German state, whose war machine rolled into areas formerly under Soviet occupation. The long term Nazi plan was to resettle twenty million Poles in Western Siberia; three to four million were deemed suitable for Germanisation whilst Jews, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners-of-war and people unfit for work, so called "useless" people, were destined for extermination.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp451-452.

<sup>18</sup> N.Davies, *Europe: A History*, (London, 1997), pp1004-1005.

<sup>19</sup> N.Davies, "UK Act excludes Katyn's killers" (letter), in *The Times*, April 29 2000:  
<http://www.times-archive.co.uk>

<sup>20</sup> Davies op. cit., 1997, pp1004-5.

<sup>21</sup> Davies op. cit., 1981, pp453-454.

Nazi terror gained in intensity and, after 1941, Poland became the site of death-factories and camps and "...the scene of executions, pacifications, and exterminations which surpassed anything so far documented in the history of mankind".<sup>22</sup> Murder in war-torn Nazi-occupied Poland was an arbitrary and everyday occurrence. People were forcibly evicted from their villages to make way for German settlers, children were deported for Germanisation and the physically able were transported to the Reich as slave labour.

Labour camps were sited near military work-sites; Judenlager for Jews and Polenlager for Poles. Concentration camps were reserved for the political and racial enemies of the Nazi regime and in Auschwitz new arrivals were tattooed with their camp number, given a striped prison uniform, billeted in a prefabricated hut and put to work - their life expectancy was three months. Auschwitz-Birkenau's infamy stems from its operation as an extermination centre; at the Nuremberg Trials the camp was said to have claimed the lives of over four million human beings, mostly Jewish, but included in this number were many non-Jews. Davies writes in painful detail of the indignities and cruelties suffered by camp prisoners and of the procedures that determined whether individuals were selected for their labour potential or consigned to the gas chamber.<sup>23</sup>

The persecutors did not meet with a passive Polish population as the Resistance Movement had operated from the start. Collaboration was not an option since Poles were meant to submit completely to the demands of the Nazi regime, not collude with it. Therefore, as there were no advantages attached to submission, resistors increased in number. Partisans occupied the forests and insurgents multiplied in urban areas. Their task was to interfere with Nazi and Soviet activities wherever possible and one such "lone ranger", as Davies refers to him, was Major Henryk Dobrzanski (1896-1940). Known as 'Hubal', this officer was killed in action on 30 April, 1940.<sup>24</sup> He was the Commanding Officer of an ex-Partisan interviewed during this research and his testimony provides an example of an assuring reliability of memory that has been evident in much of the oral evidence collected:

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p454.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp455-457.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p464.



I was first in Polish partisans, we fight from 1939, from first of September up to twenty third of June 1940. My officer commanding was killed last day of April 1940... Major Hubal they called him... He was lovely man, lovely man... Every year, first Sunday near thirtieth of April, people come to the place where he was killed [village near Kielce]. I go there every year. Now I am only one left who was in this regiment from first to last day. Only I am left now. Last Mohican I call myself.<sup>25</sup>

Out of the many early resistance movements came the Home Army (AK), which was the largest European resistance formation and operated in line with Government-in-Exile plans. Other organisations representing diverse sectors of society were formed, although political co-ordination between them was not always possible. Particularly, co-operation between the AK and their Communist led rivals was restricted to practical matters and did not run to an agreement regarding a post-war political programme. As illegal assembly was an offence punishable by death, resistance movements operated with great difficulty. Nevertheless, in addition to sabotage and subversion, the resistance successfully organised a secret teaching network which provided clandestine education for a million children.

The operations of the Polish Council of Assistance for Jews (RPZ), formed by the AK, were restricted by ghetto confinement which allowed few opportunities to collect arms and conspire with non-Jewish colleagues, but it did manage to help 100,000 people avoid the Final Solution. Also, when the final liquidation assault on the Warsaw ghetto began on 19 April 1943, the Jewish resistance were able to meet it with armed force. For three weeks the ghetto fighting raged and was the largest single act of resistance before the Warsaw Rising. When it was over, seven thousand Jewish fighters had been killed, six thousand deliberately burned to death in their hideouts and fifty six thousand Jewish prisoners transported to the death camp at Treblinka.<sup>26</sup>

Increasingly, however, the leaders of the AK found themselves in a difficult position as the allies were urging co-operation with the Soviets, even though the resistance organisation would not acknowledge their existence. Where the AK had fought with the Red Army against the retreating Wehrmacht, they ended up under Soviet arrest. But it was the fate of Warsaw that caused greatest concern and Davies writes that the

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mr R (Fenton, Lincs.), 6 September 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 37, p5.

<sup>26</sup> Davies, *op. cit.*, 1981, pp464-466.

AK faced the dilemma of whether to throw their reserves into the fray in an attempt to keep the city from falling to Soviet control, or to try and wrest control from the Germans on their own. The latter option would risk condemnation for disrupting the Grand Alliance. The AK weighed up the possibilities and their Commander, General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, became convinced of the need for an armed uprising in order to confront both problems. In a dispatch to London on 22 July 1944, Bór-Komorowski stated that the Varsovians would not stop their struggle against the Germans and would mobilise the whole population in opposition to Russia.<sup>27</sup>

Due to having just three or four days of ammunition the AK were hesitant about starting an armed rising. Additionally, an emissary from London had stated that allied help would not be forthcoming. However, following encouragement from Moscow, and the arrival of Red Army tanks in the Praga district of Warsaw, Bór-Komorowski was persuaded that the Soviets would support AK action. Hence, it was agreed that at five o'clock on the first of August 1944, the Uprising, or 'Operation Tempest', would begin.

Half an hour after the Rising began, Bór-Komorowski learned that the tanks waiting in Praga were an isolated Soviet patrol and not part of the main army. He knew then that the Rising was doomed but it was too late to prevent it. Davies lauds Bór-Komorowski's actions as courageous, however, other historians have erred towards the view that he was guilty of "gross irresponsibility".<sup>28</sup>

Davies believes that the decision to launch the Warsaw Rising represents the most tragic mistake in Poland's recent history. Although the Rising was initiated for the most honourable motives it injured the cause that it intended to bolster. The Rising stood little chance of success since it was mistimed, its tactical considerations were misguided, it had unrealistic political goals and there was little chance of allied support. Military intelligence was also needed if Warsaw was to be seized in the period between German withdrawal and Soviet arrival, and only the Soviet command could supply it. The decision to go ahead with the Rising was like "grasping at a

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp472-473

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp474-475.

straw in the wind”, and “human emotions straining at the leash, paved the way for catastrophe.”<sup>29</sup>

The Rising lasted for sixty three brutal days. After the first four days, and the occupation of the city’s central suburbs, the insurgents were forced onto the defensive. One hundred and fifty thousand “ill-armed amateurs” pitched battle against the Nazi military who dealt out retribution to civilians and combatants alike. Warsaw was systematically reduced to rubble and the Nazis continued with their murderous campaign. Mass executions were common, as was the tying of women and children to German tank hulls to deter ambushes.<sup>30</sup>

Isolated and surrounded in the city centre, and having lost 20,000 of its members, the AK were forced to surrender. Civilian deaths amounted to 225,000. Bór-Komorowski signed an act of capitulation on the second of October 1944 and his men became prisoners of war, in the custody of the Wehrmacht. Warsaw was subsequently evacuated, 550,000 people were taken to Pruszków concentration camp and 150,000 were deported as forced labour to the Reich. German demolition squads moved into Warsaw and dynamited the remaining buildings. When the Soviet Army arrived on 17 January 1945 they found a city without people. Warsaw’s previous population of 1,289,000 had gone and just a handful of buildings were left standing.<sup>31</sup>

It is generally believed that Stalin deliberately backed the Warsaw Rising since he expected the Poles, his political rivals, to be destroyed by the Germans. The evidence also pointed to Soviet treachery as Stalin had urged Warsaw to rise but then disassociated the USSR from the venture and denounced the leaders of the Rising as “a group of criminals”.<sup>32</sup> Yet, Davies writes that other factors to be taken into account are that Soviet troops were attacked on the Second of August by Panzer divisions as they advanced for Warsaw, and that Soviet military priorities lay elsewhere in mid-August as they were invading the Balkans. Davies also explains that misleading broadcasts from Moscow radio which urged on the Rising, and then condemned it, could have been related to the time lag before routine propaganda adjusted to the shifting military situation. Nevertheless, the overriding opinion of the affair is in line

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p475.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p476.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp476-7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p477.

with that of Churchill who was convinced that the Soviets wanted the non-communist Poles destroyed, whilst creating the impression that they would rescue them from their dire situation.

Davies also concludes that there was little reason to expect that Stalin would assist people who were hostile to the Soviet system and that it was unthinkable that the British and Americans would consider upsetting the Soviet alliance for the sake of the Poles:

By 1944, no one wanted to be reminded of the fact that the Soviet Union, hardly less than the Nazi enemy, had been involved in the outbreak of war. Even today [1981], western public opinion finds difficulty in grasping the paradox that their salvation from Nazi Germany was largely undertaken by the sacrifices of a Soviet ally whose practices were hardly less abhorrent than those of the common Nazi enemy.<sup>33</sup>

The conclusion of the Warsaw Rising marked the end of the old order in Poland and for the rest of the war Soviet authority was not seriously challenged. The Government-in-Exile lost any influence that it still retained and in January 1945 the Home Army was formally disbanded, its leaders arrested by Soviet security forces. German occupation gave way to Soviet 'liberation' and in the rest of Poland the Red Army advanced into Silesia, Prussia and Pomerania, murdering German soldiers and civilians as they passed through.<sup>34</sup> By 9 May 1945, when peace was declared, all Polish land was under Soviet control.

Davies notes a change in Stalin's stance during the course of the war. Between 1939 and 1941 Stalin had wanted to destroy all trace of Polish nationality and independence, but later expressed a wish to restore 'a strong and independent Poland'; although the Soviet interpretation of 'strength and independence' differed somewhat from that of the Poles and their western allies. However, Davies suggests that by comparing Poland with post-war Ukraine and the Baltic States, it can be believed that Stalin placed some commitment behind his rhetoric.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p478.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp478-481.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp487-488.

In late 1943, in Tehran, discussions between 'The Big Three', Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt, implied that Poland would come under Soviet control with the Curzon Line as the eastern frontier, which was an idea rejected in 1920. Discussions regarding the western frontier between Poland and Germany were not completed. At the time of the meeting in Tehran, no information was made available to Polish representatives.

At Yalta, in February 1945, Churchill and Roosevelt attempted to re-assert their influence over the eastern reaches of Europe. The two western leaders insisted that representatives of the parties supporting the Polish Government-in-Exile be admitted into the Warsaw government, and they recognised Poland's right to lands which had been annexed by Germany.

In Potsdam, in July and August of the same year, the western leaders settled territorial problems that remained outstanding and the Polish-German border was fixed on the Oder and the Western Neisse. Additionally, it was insisted that free and democratic elections must be held in Poland as soon as possible. With that, commented Davies, "the western powers left Poland to its fate."<sup>36</sup>

Davies writes that these post-war changes to the Polish state, nation and its society were "deep and permanent".<sup>37</sup> The Soviet order was ruthlessly imposed in Poland; local officials were replaced, peasants had livestock and food pillaged and dissenters became casualties. Geographically, Poland shifted one hundred and fifty miles to the west, its eastern borders, including Wilno and Lwów, taken by the Soviet Union. Recovered territory included Wrocław, Szczecin and Gdansk. Just fifty four per cent of the territory of the pre-war Republic passed into the People's Republic; the territory lost was far in excess of that gained.

However, Davies notes that the resources acquired in the Western Territories more than compensated for the Republic's diminished area. Lost to the USSR were primitive undeveloped rural districts, whereas territory gained from Germany was rich in coal and iron, with modern networks of roads and railways and a large number

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p488.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p488

of cities and seaports. By acquiring Silesia and Pomerania, Poland's prospects of economic modernisation and industrialisation were increased.

Nevertheless, a census taken in 1946 revealed that Poland's population had fallen by a third since 1939, leaving the country with a workforce that was the same size as it had been in 1918. Proportionately, more people had been lost from Poland than land. Further, the Western territories had to be repopulated by refugees and families transferred from the Soviet Union, and where uprooted newcomers outnumbered indigenous inhabitants, former social traditions came under threat.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, Davies wrote that social structures were transformed out of all recognition. Additionally, with the loss of the Jews, the expulsion of the Germans, and the incorporation of Ukrainians and Byelorussians into the USSR, the Polish-speaking Roman Catholic population formed an overwhelming majority. Hence, for numerous reasons, Davies found that post-war Poland under the Communist regime was most certainly a new Poland.<sup>39</sup>

\*

For six years after the first of September 1939, the homeland of Britain's Polish émigrés suffered a sustained and bloody assault. In the chaos of the war, the lives of Polish citizens, across ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, were torn apart. When the war ended, many survivors were left destitute and displaced from their homes. Within Poland and in the world beyond its contested borders, Poles were compelled to resettle and rebuild their lives.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p489.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p491.

### 3.3 Part Two: Remembering the war

Oral history provides an opportunity to consider the perspectives of those who were the ‘players’ in Davies’ history and expand understanding of it; reaching beyond military and government decisions to the experiences of those who lacked political power and influence. This is the challenge of oral history; it reaches into the ‘ordinary’ lives of soldiers and civilians, male and female, whose histories have been ‘hidden’.

After nearly six years of war during which most of Poland was destroyed, millions of its people murdered, and tens of thousands exiled as a result of their defence of it, a question lingers with many émigrés - ‘what was won’? Certainly, coming to terms with their massive personal losses has not been easy, nor possible for some. However, by interpreting their experiences more positively and by focusing on keeping Polish culture alive outside Poland, especially in opposition to communism, meaning was brought to expatriate life.

As discussed previously, émigré involvement in this oral history study tends to have been motivated primarily by a need to preserve the past and ‘bear witness’ to the atrocities perpetrated in Nazi and Soviet-occupied Poland.<sup>40</sup> The remainder of this chapter recounts memories of the war as related for this study; additional reference has been made to texts which lend support to chronology and detail, and community publications referred to where they reflect wider émigré opinion.

### 3.4 The September Campaign

... the beginning of a nightmare which was to last not for five and a half years but nearly half a century.<sup>41</sup>

The gains made by Poland during its period of inter-war independence were lost after the first of September 1939. The Polish government was forced to flee the country and Poland suffered economic collapse: “The money was worth nothing, so many

---

<sup>40</sup> See page 25 for discussion of motivations for taking part in this study.

<sup>41</sup> Suchcitz, *op. cit.*, p3.

thousands pounds to just light a fire with.”<sup>42</sup> However, and understandably, memories of the Second World War in Poland predominantly recall terror and accounts tell of killing, burning, beatings and abduction.

Those who were in the Polish forces when the Nazi invasion took place have recalled that period of their life in detail, stressing the damage that Poles inflicted on the enemy, but also painfully aware of their own defeat. Nevertheless, accounts contain a sense of honour and pride at the achievement of holding back the Wehrmacht for so long: “Technically we were far inferior to the Germans... but we put up a good fight”. After a hard campaign of alternately fighting and retreating, many Polish troops found themselves in the south-east of Poland where they judged that the front line had stabilised. Believing that the Germans had been successfully repulsed, “that probably our luck had changed”,<sup>43</sup> their hopes were then shattered by the Red Army’s attack, or Stalin’s, ‘stab in the back’.<sup>44</sup>

That the pre-war allied promise to defend Poland was not immediately honoured is not forgotten by émigrés, although this ex-officer’s thoughts were not as vitriolic as one might expect: “We were attacked, we had no chance... and although Poland had the partners, Great Britain and France, both countries were not yet ready.”<sup>45</sup> Others have been less charitable, their views represented by Smith who writes of, “a worthless promise”, and who remonstrated: “The only help she [Britain] gave was to withdraw her ambassador from Berlin and drop some leaflets on Germany”.<sup>46</sup>

The Polish army was forced to follow its government out of Poland in a “terribly messy” military evacuation:<sup>47</sup>

Just like that, Russians turn up. I didn’t know what’s happened. They told me to get horse and cart from the peasant and put some equipment on it and we were going towards Romania or Hungary. That’s quite a long way, and I am Rear Guard with a cart used by gardeners, you know, like a platform with a seat on the front and horses at

---

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 30, p3.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 9, p1.

<sup>44</sup> The phrase ‘stab in the back’ was used by General Anders and is commonly repeated by émigrés.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 17, p3.

<sup>46</sup> B.Smith, *Poland: A Study in Treachery*, (Worthing, 1984), p8.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst, Kent), 31 October 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 39, p3.



side, for putting flowers on, things like that. I think there were about, oh, at least hundred and twenty of those carts.<sup>48</sup>

During this interviewee's journey south, his battalion came under attack from Ukrainian nationalists in Stanislawów, and again as they approached the Polish-Hungarian border by rail:

It was open platform train, not wagons. We have machine guns on each... and come through very steep mountain, on the main route going towards Hungary... going through valley with forest on both sides and somebody, probably Ukraines, open fire on us. So everybody got any kind of weapon and open fire.

*Where there any casualties?*

Yes, but not much, you don't think about two people killed, three people. So, off the train, came to the border... and they put us in a camp.<sup>49</sup>

Both military and civilian convoys fled Poland in the few days before the borders were sealed and many made their way over the Carpathian mountains. They were received into internment in Romania and Hungary and by the end of September, 90,000 Polish troops had escaped. The French government offered to receive the Polish troops, but with the leadership interned the task of moving men was not easy. The evacuation of military internees took nine months, with about forty percent also being transferred to Yugoslavia and Italy and on to the French frontier at Modane.<sup>50</sup> This latter route out of Poland was taken by many émigrés who went on to fight with the allied forces.

There's no doubt that the first wave of Poles who left Poland after the 1939 campaign in Poland were those who wanted to continue the fight. The idea was to come to France and reconstruct Polish forces and that's what happened. We organise four infantry divisions in 1939, two took part in the French campaign... And there was a brigade which took part at Narvik together with British troops, so to build four divisions in such a short time, in the foreign country, it was not a bad achievement.

Mind you, what help us was that there was a lot of Polish emigrants who live in France. They were residents but they had no French citizenship and so French government

---

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mr Wa (Aberdeen), 19 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 41, p5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp6-8

<sup>50</sup> K Sword et al, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain*, (London, 1989), pp37-38.

couldn't mobilise them into the army... But they made agreement with our authorities that we could mobilise them in Polish army and that's what happened. And some of those came to England as well.<sup>51</sup>

\*

Shortly after the war, the Public Relations Division of the Polish Armed Forces wrote:

... in their hearts, the Poles refused to admit that the war was over. True, regular fighting on Polish soil came to an end, but it continued underground, it went on in foreign lands, by the side of Poland's Allies.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.5 Soviet occupation

Those who remained in Poland after September 1939 had to endure the double ordeal of Soviet and Nazi occupation:

Seventeenth of September, Russian army walked into Poland and that's when problems started. They were pressing us to speak Russian, to march around with red flags. And they didn't like to hear us talking in Polish... me and my brother had to stay at home, couldn't move anywhere.<sup>53</sup>

In Soviet areas acts of oppression were as extreme as in Nazi controlled territories; land and property was confiscated, industry and banks nationalised and a programme of agricultural collectivisation initiated. The majority of Poles who later settled in Britain originated from these eastern areas: "Our part where we lived, it was near Brody... it's Ukraine now... they ruin everything because it used to be Polish."<sup>54</sup>

Prior to February 1940, people of prominence were arrested and then people of lesser standing were gradually rounded up:<sup>55</sup> "...Everybody was frightened, nobody knew

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Mr Z, 8 June 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 29, p4

<sup>52</sup> Capt. W. Leitgeber, *It Speaks For Itself: What British war leaders said about the Polish armed forces 1939-1946 - selections from communiqués, speeches, messages and press reports*, (Public Relations Division, Polish Armed Forces, 1946), pviii.

<sup>53</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p1. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 14 May 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 26, p8. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>55</sup> Z.S Siemaszko, 'The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR' in K. Sword (ed.) *The Soviet Take-over of the Polish Eastern Provinces 1939-41*, (London, 1991), p219.

what's going on. Everybody was waiting for something."<sup>56</sup> These fears were justified as the Soviets were planning a further round-up, one which was to provide the majority of Polish émigrés with their most terrifying life experience - deportation to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union.

Around two million Polish citizens were to be arrested and exiled to the Asiatic USSR and camps in the Arctic north.<sup>57</sup> Included in this number were prisoners of war and civilian prisoners considered guilty of an offence by Soviet authorities:

I was arrested because I joined sort of Polish underground - a would-be Partisan. You know, these things sprung up in various towns, and I was caught because somebody had me on their list... I was arrested Christmas Eve 1939, and taken first to Stanisławów prison. Then I was given eight years of correction camps and shifted to Siberia... to a place called Konsomolsk, I will show you a map... not quite on the Arctic circle but not far from it. This is a quite recent map, now they show a railway going that way. But there was no railway at that time. They took us there, sixty men to the sleigh, pulled the things on the sleigh down the frozen river... It took about four days. There was eight hundred of us coming there. And at first, somewhere around these mountains here, I was engaged in felling trees and whatever.

Then, this town was built by an organisation called Komsomol [Communist Youth League]. Youngsters from that organisation undertook to build that town, but because of German invasion of Russia all those young people were called to the army. And they shifted us from felling the trees to finish the building of that town. So I spent the time there, on the town buildings, as a mate to a carpenter.

*Was that an improvement, was that better work?*

Well that was an improvement only in as much as I wasn't in the wilderness. But what do you call civilisation? It wasn't.<sup>58</sup>

Also deported were tens of thousands of Jews charged with hostile activity and espionage, who were sentenced to exile and forced labour.<sup>59</sup> However, by far the largest category of prisoners to be deported to Soviet labour camps were men, women and children suspected of anti-Soviet thought but not charged with any crime. Around

---

<sup>56</sup> Interview, 14 May 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 26, p8. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 2 for map showing locations of concentration camps and prisons in the USSR.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 49, pp4-5.

<sup>59</sup> S.W.Slowes, *The Road to Katyn*, (London, 1992), p5.

seventy five percent of non-Jewish Poles who settled eventually in Britain began their journeys away from home as part of this group of prisoners.

Deportations took place en masse and on set dates. The first occurred unexpectedly in the early hours of Saturday 11 February, 1940, when families were woken by armed groups of NKVD, private soldiers and militia in civilian clothes who forced them against a wall with their hands raised, searched their homes and ordered them to pack a few belongings. An émigré who was not taken in this round-up witnessed his neighbours being collected for deportation:

They took most of people from my village you know. They took people like teacher, my teacher... they took him in first transport 1940, February, to the Soviet Union. Railway was separate to our village, in next village... and my father had to get the horse, twelve o' clock at night - frost was about forty centigrade below... so cold - to evacuate people to the station, five kilometres from our village. And they took them just like cows, animals, you know, in wagons to the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup>

The following interviewee described her experience of the February deportation:

They took us to railway station... it was such a severe winter that year. We hardly managed to walk. And there was long, long train, I don't know how many carriages there were. They were for taking cows and cattle, they weren't for humans.... And they packed us in, about fifty in one carriage, can you imagine? They locked the door, the window was covered with ice, we couldn't see anything that was going on but I could hear whispers of our neighbours... and I could hear our dog, he was running right from our home, twenty kilometres to the station. You should have heard those dogs, screaming and barking, everybody thought it was end of the world... when train moved they said we are going to the east, so we knew where we were going, it's not for the first time because Poland was occupied by Russia several times, and thousands people never come back... my parents, my aunts and uncles, they start crying, start praying, we were absolutely stunned.<sup>61</sup>

An estimated 220,000 people were deported as a result of this single round-up. Exact destinations were not recorded but they were towards the north of European Russia,

---

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 7, p2.

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p2. Request for name to be withheld.

the Arkhangelsk district and Komi ASSR (Autonomous Republic) and to the Siberian districts of Sverdlovsk, Omsk, Tobolsk, Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk.<sup>62</sup>

A further mass deportation took place on 13 April 1940, and its method mirrored the previous one. Those targeted on this occasion were families of people previously arrested or who had fled abroad. The deportees represented a cross-section of the population in Eastern Poland and included families of army officers, policemen, landowners, teachers, entrepreneurs, businessmen, politicians, members of local government, lawyers, civil servants, peasants, Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Jewish activists, ex-members of the Communist party and ex-sympathisers. This deportation contained mainly women and children and their destination was the Steppe regions of northern Kazakhstan, Aktyubinsk, Kustanai, Petropavlovsk, Akmolinsk, Pavlodar and Semipalatinsk. The total deported in the April transport has been estimated at 320,000.<sup>63</sup>

Just before Easter my father was arrested by the Russians, he wasn't a criminal but he was in the employment of the Polish pre-war state. And he was sent to Russia. We didn't know where. Then about three weeks later, three o'clock in the morning, we had the banging on the doors, saying 'open up, open up'... We were deported to Russia.<sup>64</sup>

It is believed that one tenth of the deportees died in transit. The remainder met harsh labour camp conditions and toiled in work such as mining, agriculture, forestry, factory labour and canal building.<sup>65</sup>

Twelve years old... and we had to load pieces of wood and they were very, very heavy. Many hours a day, cold, without proper food. Putting into oven to dry. As they come out we had to take hack saw and slice it and they used it as fuel for tractors... And I worked so hard but my father had to pay for my food because we didn't do amount of work they expected from us. But we were children.<sup>66</sup>

\*

---

<sup>62</sup> Siemaszko in Sword (ed.), op. cit., p221.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp221-224.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Mr Sl (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 6, p1.

<sup>65</sup> M.Hope, *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-war settlement in Great Britain*, (London, 1998), p23.

<sup>66</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p3. Request for name to be withheld.

Only kind of meat we got was when horse died... I were working with a horse, we used to drag trunks from forest to saw-mills... We were short of vitamins and everything, a lot of people were losing their sight.<sup>67</sup>

Poor diet, hard labour and unsanitary conditions brought about the early deaths of more than half of the one and a half million Poles deported to Soviet labour camps and interviewees who were deportees have all reported losing family members to starvation and disease during this period.

### 3.6 'Amnesty'

Release for some deportees came after June 1941:

After Germany attacked Russia there was agreement between Polish Government-in-Exile... there was a pact signed by General Sikorski and Russian ambassador to Great Britain... his name was Maisky... anyway, they let the Polish people who were deported join the Polish Army, which started forming in Russia.<sup>68</sup>

The agreement signed by Sikorski and the Soviet Ambassador enabled Poles to leave the labour camps and create a Polish army in the USSR; the Polish Government-in-Exile were aware that political strength lay in its ability to provide an army and the collapse of France had meant the loss of vital recruiting grounds. The organisation of a new source of manpower was a priority. However, the arrangement which released Polish citizens was termed an 'amnesty' and to the present day this has remained an extremely sore point amongst Poles:

It was Churchill who made agreement with Stalin that Poles will be amnestied. We were furious about it, what amnesty? We didn't commit any crime.<sup>69</sup>

The largest exodus of Poles took place amongst those deported to the Arkhangelsk and Komi ASSR. Following the Sikorski-Maisky agreement, these people headed south to the warmer climate of Central Asia, around Tashkent, where the Polish army was to form.

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mr T (Sheffield), 7 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 3, p1.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Mr Sl (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 6, p1.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 31 October 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 39, p1.

Welfare assistance for travelling refugees was initially absent as the Polish government and their British financial supporters were not prepared to spend money rescuing Poles in the USSR, nor was the Soviet government particularly anxious to support them. On 31 December 1941, 100 million roubles of Soviet aid was eventually granted but it did not reach deportees until Spring 1942, and lasted only for a few months.<sup>70</sup> A view heard amongst émigrés is that the slow and inadequate response to assist the Poles was due to Soviet reluctance to lose their slave labourers.<sup>71</sup>

Initially, all Polish citizens, regardless of nationality, language or religion, were entitled to the 'amnesty'. However, the position altered after the Red Army managed to contain the German advance. Soviet authorities declared that only ethnic Poles were entitled to Polish citizenship and that Polish Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Jews were to be treated as Soviet subjects.<sup>72</sup> Those who left the USSR are estimated at 160,500 (many of whom were to settle in Britain), leaving 881,200 Polish deportees on Soviet soil at the start of 1942.<sup>73</sup> However, following the German defeat in the USSR the Soviet Army re-entered Polish territories and in mid-1944, as a result of this second occupation, several million Poles, including 50,000 Polish Underground Army members, were deported to distant locations in the USSR.<sup>74</sup>

Plater-Zyberk wrote in 1982 that Poles in the USSR were the second largest group living outside Poland.<sup>75</sup> It was estimated in 1987 that the Polish minority amounted to around four million, although a Soviet census of 1979 reported 1,151,000 Poles. The Government-in-Exile explain that the discrepancy is possibly due to around 2.8 million people withholding their true nationality due to fear of persecution, declaring themselves instead to be Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Russian, Lithuanian or another nationality.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Siemaszko in Sword, op. cit., p231.

<sup>71</sup> Opinion repeated in M.Braid, "The forgotten children of Poland's past", in The Monday Review section of *The Independent*, 3 April 2000, p7.

<sup>72</sup> Siemaszko in Sword, op. cit., p231.

<sup>73</sup> K. Plater-Zyberk, *In Defence of Poles in the USSR*, (London, 1982), pp3-5.

<sup>74</sup> Polish Government-in-Exile, *Memorandum on the fate of Poles in the Soviet Union*, (London, 1989), p3.

<sup>75</sup> Plater-Zyberk op. cit., 1982, pp3-5.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Refugees who attempted to make journeys south in 1942 were hungry and homeless. They spent weeks waiting for transport, often without shelter; they did not have the right to bread ration cards or to use eating-rooms and were continually subjected to disinfection, pass check-ups and other acts of 'administration'.<sup>77</sup>

When I left it was September, I went with the others... we had no money, very little... so if you catch a train and you not paying, used to throw you out. Sometimes took us to police station... They look at papers and push you out, so you catch another train. It were like that right through Russia. I finish in south, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, that area.<sup>78</sup>

Interviewees' descriptions of this period recall more misery, uncertainty and death:

That agreement started to organise Polish army, but people, they were skeletons, so poorly, sick, ulcers all over their bodies, a dreadful picture. They told us 'you are free people because we want you to fight with us against the Germans'. We were very pleased to hear that... and we started to travel, but we had no food. If you had no food you would die during the journey... if you travel it's at your own risk. Was dreadful conditions, dreadful. People falling down and nobody care, because of hunger. And then, typhoid, dysentery, you've never seen anything like it, people were dying like flies... We walked on dead people, believe me...

In a town where the train stopped, my father and myself went out to try to buy something. We still had some gold, a few things, mama's necklace and clock. So of course, you can sell it and buy something from the Uzbeks. Father managed to buy soup to bring to the transport that was waiting for us. But my father dropped it, he had a severe heart attack... people behind us run quickly, 'what's happened?', and they called militia. They said, 'he's dead... if you want to see where your father's going to be taken, you can go with us'... They took us in a little car and we came to a huge building. As they opened the gate all I could see was bodies of dead people, and they just took my father's arms and legs and swing him right to the top, shut the gate and that's it.<sup>79</sup>

\*

---

<sup>77</sup> K.Filipow and Z.Wawer, *Passerby, Tell Poland: Narvik. Tobruk. Monte Cassino. Falaise*, (Warsaw, 1991), p76.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mr T (Sheffield), 7 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 3, p3.

<sup>79</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p4. Request for name to be withheld.



We got to know about Polish army being formed in south of Russia, so we bought tickets and we tried to get to Tashkent, but we were held up and had to stay on a floor for a month, family together on floor... for some reason, whether it was change of atmosphere or something like that, most of the children, they all died... my sister died and mother managed to get a cardboard box and buried her in cemetery.<sup>80</sup>

By October 1941, the influx of Poles into reception camps was overwhelming - 41,000 people had amassed and more were arriving. Civilians outnumbered military personnel and their numbers placed a great strain on the supply of practical necessities, like boots and uniforms. In the warmer southern climate, typhus and dysentery also spread fast.<sup>81</sup> One refugee arrived to find the reception camp closed: "There was an epidemic, typhoid, they would not let us in, they could not."<sup>82</sup>

I stayed in a little village, just made of clay, a bit of straw, and lice... it was most dreadful thing, we have to chuck everything out. We found a lady... and in four days she died. She was so badly bitten by lice she wasn't able to help herself, she had TB and she died.<sup>83</sup>

\*

We were allocated housing in quarters in Uzbekistan, huts made out of daub... No windows, it was too small. We were given four hundred grams of wheat, but you had to... grind it all up yourself. There was no fat of any sort. We used to do noodles, sort of add some water to it, then boil the water and drop those things in the water so they stayed clogged up. It created terrible havoc with you, was like glass paper because the flour was with the husks, it was absolutely sharp.<sup>84</sup>

Poles assembling in southern regions of the USSR gathered under the command of General Wladyslaw Anders, who had himself been released from the notorious Soviet Lubyanka prison. Hence, this division of the Polish military was known as 'Anders' Army and the man is much respected amongst Polish exiles in Britain:

General Anders was like Moses to us because he led us from Russia into the free world.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Mr B (Sheffield), 14 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape A1, p2.

<sup>81</sup> Sword et al, op cit., p56.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Mr T (Sheffield), 7 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 3, p1.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p5. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Mr B (Sheffield), 14 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape A1, p2.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Mr SI (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 6, p6.

In the reception camps it was becoming increasingly clear that the appalling conditions could not be allowed to continue. To make matters worse, in March 1942, General Anders was informed that the meagre food rations supplied to the Poles were to be cut.<sup>86</sup> It has been argued that the poor state in which the Poles found themselves was no coincidence; that Soviet authorities deliberately created a situation whereby epidemics would complete the German plan of liquidating the Poles.<sup>87</sup> The severe circumstances in the camps on Soviet soil prompted the decision to transfer operations, in order to save lives. In two large scale evacuations, in March and August 1942, 114,000 soldiers and civilians were removed to Iran; a figure which represented just ten percent of Poles originally deported to the USSR.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.7 Fighting back

In Iran, 'Anders' Army' was received by Polish forces already stationed in the Middle East. The Brigade of Carpathian Riflemen was the first of several formations in the area, assembled from officers sent from France, those evacuated from Hungary and Romania, as well as Poles who made the journey by their own means. Many refugees were extremely ill and malnutrition was rife, but as this interviewee explains, problems continued when food became available:

I left Russia from Krasnovodsk, that's a sea port, and we sailed to Pahalvi, to Iran. As we got to Iran there was thousands tents on the sand, near sea, Caspian sea, and they kept us there. And they were trying to take everything off us again, shave, wash, to stop epidemic. And they gave us some food but we had to be very careful because we were so hungry. Lot of people couldn't manage to avoid food and they died because they didn't have food for a long time and they start eating, grabbing everything, and they had problem with insides and they died. So you have to be very careful, eat very small portions, avoid heavy things. And who wouldn't take any notice of it, wouldn't survive. Even if you drink water, just sip, stop, then after an hour, again. I survive, but hundreds of young people died in Iran.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Filipow and Wawer, op. cit., p75.

<sup>87</sup> The opinion of Pobóg-Malinowski is supported by J.Gula, *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*, (London, 1993), p80.

<sup>88</sup> Suchcitz, op cit., p7.

<sup>89</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 19, p5. Request for name to be withheld.

The refugees were accommodated in Iran and the formation of the Polish army went ahead. However, it became apparent that thousands of officers were missing. It was known that around ten thousand officers, including twelve Generals, had been concentrated in Soviet prisoner of war camps in Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov. Yet, when Anders was recruiting, not one man from these camps enlisted. Anders petitioned Stalin as to the whereabouts of the missing officers and received only false explanations, including one report that they had run away from the camps, and another stating they had been sent home before the Soviet-German pact broke down.

### 3.8 The Katyń massacre

The Polish officers never did return; their mass graves were discovered in the Katyń Forest near Smolensk in April 1943. After the discovery of the remains of the officers, Stalin altered his story:<sup>90</sup>

The Poles had not run away, but had been transferred to the Smolensk area to work on building sites. There the Germans had captured them, shot them, and blamed the USSR for it. A special Soviet commission was set up, with the Boss's own writers, academics, and clergy as members. The commission, of course, confirmed his story. Roosevelt and Churchill had to take their ally's word.<sup>91</sup>



Included within the Polish Cultural Foundation's *The Crime of Katyn*, is the testimony of a Russian witness, Ivan Krivozertzev, who was at work in the Smolensk Forest during the period that the officers were being murdered:

In March 1940 I was working as usual... in the morning... I saw a convoy of cars on the road; first there was a passenger car, then came two prison cars... and finally a half-ton truck. I could not see whether there was anybody in the cars, but I noticed that there was a Cheka man beside each driver. About mid-day I met my sister... she had gone to the railway station at Gniezdova and there she had seen a newly-arrived transport of prisoners-of-war. She thought they were Finns. She told me: 'They brought Finns to be shot'... The same day I met my friend Roman Khrustalev, who also used to drive

<sup>90</sup> Map reproduced from article by G. Whittell, "Katyn killings poison Putin's Polish mission", in *The Times*, 22 April, 2000: <http://www.times-archive.co.uk>

<sup>91</sup> E. Radzinski, *Stalin*, (Moscow, 1996), pp482-483.

manure carts from a place near the station, and I asked him what he knew about it. Khrustalev said that he had seen the prisoners-of-war arriving at the station, but they were Poles, not Finns... he recognised the Polish uniforms... the entire population was astonished and secretly excited, not knowing why the Poles were being shot at Goat's Heights.<sup>92</sup>

In a letter to Stalin in March 1940, Beria had recommended the execution of Polish officers and other prisoners on the grounds that they were "hardened and uncompromising enemies of Soviet authority".<sup>93</sup>

Discussion of this episode in Polish history has provoked a strong response during this research as the massacre at Katyń remains a source of intense Polish anger. One interviewee who expressed such feelings also related a remarkable story as he believed that he narrowly escaped being murdered in the Katyń forest. As an officer, he had been fighting the Soviet advance on Poland's eastern front in 1939 and following his capture recalled:

... we marched for several miles, and then were put on the train. The train couldn't go directly to Russia because there were transports coming from Russia with soldiers, with equipment, even with wounded, already. So we were shunted between two towns, Stanislawów and Tarnopol. We were hoping that we would be released, but when the train took direction to Russia I realised that we were going to be taken to Russia and I jumped off the train. As you remember, Polish officers were killed in Katyń, and I would have been one of them had I not escaped.<sup>94</sup>

At the time, the destination of the train was unknown to the Polish prisoners and they were not aware of their captor's brutal intentions. However, the interviewee was subsequently able to establish that he had effected an extraordinary escape. After fleeing the train he made his way to Wilno, which was his home town and also that of a Captain who remained on the train. A meeting with the Captain's wife revealed that

---

<sup>92</sup>The testimony of Ivan Krivozertev is reproduced in the Polish Cultural Foundation's, *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents*, (London, 1965), pp229-240. Krivozertev came to Britain as a Displaced Person after the war. In 1947, he was found hanged near the Polish D.P camp in Pill, near Bristol, where he lived and worked.

<sup>93</sup> A translation of the letter from Beria to Stalin, along with a copy of the original, appears in P.Sudoplatov et al, *The Memories of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet Spymaster*, (London, 1994), p476.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Mr Z, 15 September 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 9, p1-2.

she had received a note from her husband which stated that he and his fellow officers were being detained at Starobielsk. The letter was the last communication from the Captain before his disappearance and, years later, when more information became available, it was deduced that the train transporting Polish officers was ultimately destined for Katyń.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst the allied appeasement of Stalin over the Katyń affair has generated scathing comments from émigrés, many have been unwilling to record their criticisms. However, Smith represents their feelings:

The Russians were our allies and to publish the facts and accuse them of the crime would upset Uncle Joe. So Katyń was put into cold-storage... but the appeasement of Russia has persisted long after the end of the war at a time when no military arguments can be urged in its favour. An example is the unveiling of the Katyń Memorial in London in 1976. The Labour government of the day refused to be represented at the ceremony and, at the instigation of the Foreign Office, forbade members of the armed forces to attend in uniform. The official explanation of this attitude was that the monument to Katyń was an offence to a power with whom Britain still had friendly relations.<sup>96</sup>

Following his arrival in Britain, an ex-officer recalled encountering a hostile response from the wider British public over Katyń:

When we came here nobody would believe it. Mind you, they said they didn't believe it but they didn't want to admit it to themselves because Russians were our allies... at the end of the war there was a Victory Parade in London, Poles were the third largest contingent who took part against the Germans in the west, but we weren't invited to it.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Sword confirmed that the captured officers had been able to correspond with their families in occupied Poland. This correspondence ceased abruptly in April 1940. Sword op. cit., 1989, p66.

<sup>96</sup> Smith, op. cit., pp17-18. The Katyń memorial is in Gunnersbury Cemetery, Acton.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Mr RR (Chesterfield), 31 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 18, p7. A.Zamoyski writes in *The Forgotten Few: The Polish Air Force in the Second World War*, (London, 1995), that Poles were excluded from the Victory Parade held in London on 6 June 1946 as Attlee's Labour government craved harmonious relations with the Soviet Union. General W.Anders referred to the absence of Poles from the Victory Parade in *An Army in Exile: The story of the Second Polish Corps*, (London, 1949), p299. Also see Appendix 3 for correspondence between H.MacMillan and General Anders, regarding the Victory Parade.

Indeed, the vast majority of the Polish forces were not invited to attend the Victory Parade held in London, on 8 June 1946. A report about the impending parade in *The Times* (6 June) stated:

Unfortunately, it seems that none of the Polish service men who fought in the west under British command will take part. Polish airmen who took part in the Battle of Britain were invited, but they do not wish to march unless Polish soldiers and sailors of the western command can march with them.<sup>98</sup>

The previous interviewee's opinion with regard to why the Poles were not invited to the Victory parade was: "Why? ... Because we'd to keep old Stalin happy."<sup>99</sup>

To prevent Stalin severing relations with the London Poles, attempts were made by Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, to persuade General Sikorski to place the blame for Katyń on the common German enemy. However, Sikorski believed that the Russians were culpable and refused to acquiesce to Eden's request.<sup>100</sup> Fearing for morale in the atmosphere of deteriorating Polish-Soviet relations following the Katyń revelations Sikorski held a conference of Polish diplomats in Beirut before flying to Cairo for negotiations with Allied commanders. This was to be his final assignment as on 3 July, 1943, he died in an air crash over Gibraltar whilst on the flight back to London.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.9 The death of General Sikorski

Suspicious about the cause of the accident that killed General Sikorski grew amongst Poles, and were given a voice in 1967 when Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Soldiers*, implicated Winston Churchill in Sikorski's death.<sup>102</sup> During the current research, these suspicions received reinforcement:

... government supposed to disclose documents after fifty years. But it hasn't happened yet. So why is that?... Government say the story be published in fifty years time but

---

<sup>98</sup> "Britain "unfriendly"", in *The Times*, Thursday 6 June, 1946, p3.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Mr RR (Chesterfield), 31 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 18, p7.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, op. cit., p17.

<sup>101</sup> Sword et al, op. cit., p60.

<sup>102</sup> R Hochhuth, *Soldiers*, translation by Robert David MacDonald, (London, 2000). This play was initially banned in Britain.

fifty years gone and it's not been published. Who actually was responsible?... People still wondering why did he get killed?... They think that it was actually sabotage, it wasn't an accident... But nobody can prove it you see.<sup>103</sup>

Many Poles saw the death of Sikorski as a reason for the subsequent decline in Poland's fortunes, although it has since been remarked that it is difficult to see how the death of one man could change so much.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the impact of Sikorski's death on the Polish troops varied in intensity. An interviewee who spent the war in the Middle East recalled how he received the news:

It was obviously a shock, what happened. It was a tragedy, and it was accepted very badly by Polish forces. But you must understand that Polish Forces in Middle East were far away from Sikorski in London. Although we knew that he was Head of the Polish forces, when you are so far away, your immediate leader, like General Anders, is more of a concern to you than somebody in London. And I know for a fact that forces that were then in England, or in Scotland, to them the shock was entirely different, had a different meaning because they were more often visited by Sikorski... I'm not saying that it didn't shock us, or that in any respect we didn't recognise Sikorski as the leader of the Polish forces. What I'm saying is it didn't shock us as much as people who had more to do with General Sikorski.<sup>105</sup>

Unbeknown to the Polish rank and file at the time, Sikorski's death shifted the political course for Poles and Poland. Whilst Sikorski sought to place Polish troops at the disposal of the allies in order to obtain political leverage, the incoming Prime Minister, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, with the aid of Generals Sosnkowski and Anders, attempted to create an allied debt of gratitude with which they hoped to generate conflict against the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 30, pp8-9.

<sup>104</sup> A.Carswell, *For Your Freedom and Ours: Poland, Scotland and the Second World War*, (Edinburgh, 1993) p21.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 49, p12.

<sup>106</sup> A.J Prazmowska, "Polish refugees as military potential: policy objectives of the Polish Government-in-Exile" in A.Bramwell (ed.) *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, (Oxford, 1988), pp219-232.

### 3.10 Polish forces

Away from the political arena the Polish forces continued to fight for Poland's freedom. The airforce was a particular source of pride and an integral part of the Polish Armed Services abroad. After the fall of France, around 5,500 members of the Polish Air Force were transported to Britain and an Anglo-Polish Agreement of April 1940 provided for the formation of two Polish Bomber squadrons in Britain. Initially, the British authorities had been against the formation of an independent Polish Air Squadron and intended only to let individual pilots serve within British units, but Britain's isolated position in the war against Germany prompted an attitude shift.<sup>107</sup> Polish bomber crews began training in Britain and all available Polish pilots were rushed into the RAF and Polish fighter divisions. Later, the British Secretary of State for the Air Force, Sir Archibald Sinclair was to write:

Our shortage of trained pilots would have made it impossible to man the squadrons which were required to defeat the German air force and so win the Battle of Britain, if the gallant airmen of Poland had not leapt into the breach.<sup>108</sup>

Polish émigrés who served in the airforce have spoken of the fear of flying on bombing missions, and also of the glamour attached to their status as pilots and air crew:

We set off for Hanover, about twelve aeroplanes. As soon as we entered North Sea, Germans were at us and planes were coming down in flames... When we came over our target you could see exactly what was happening, there was such a fire on the ground and all the search lights. Crews were bailing out and planes were being shot down. One of our planes was carrying three thousand bombs and he was only about fifty yards from us. Just before he reached his target he was blown up, there was no sign of a plane left, they were gone completely from the air.<sup>109</sup>

\*

---

<sup>107</sup> Filipow and Wawer, op. cit., pp163-164.

<sup>108</sup> A Zamoyski op. cit., 1995, p97.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Mr Sp (Sheffield), 3 June 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 45, p3.



General Sikorski wanted some volunteers to join the Polish Airforce under the British command. And ever since I was a very young boy I always wanted to be a pilot... Oh, I thought that's something for me.<sup>110</sup>

A number of Poles who volunteered for airforce training whilst stationed in the Middle East did so at the same time as transport was being organised to remove civilian refugees to safer areas in India and Africa. The prospective airmen were employed as guardians for the journey:

We took refugees from Russia... elderly people, women and children, they were brought to India and Africa, away from the front. Kids of seven, about that age, were with us on the boat... And on the Indian Ocean we had a three day storm and I was in charge of going to inspect all the people in the boat... There were no cabins for them and they were in the bottom rooms. There was empty space there, nothing, only structure of the boat... I think there was about 8,000 people together there and I don't think there was a dozen weren't sick.. oh, terrible, so sick... smell was terrible... And those children were in there.<sup>111</sup>

Meanwhile, General Anders was facing difficulties that he later described as seemingly insurmountable.<sup>112</sup> Not least was the problem that he was seriously short of officers to command an army consisting of soldiers who had experienced two years of near starvation, disease and maltreatment. However, their intensive training programme has been remembered with a degree of fondness by émigrés; they had food, friends, a wage, and a purpose: "They send us to school - got one stripe as well... and we were getting paid by the British."<sup>113</sup>

Eventually, the difficult birth of the Second Corps was accomplished although the freshly trained forces in Iraq and Palestine had little idea of where they would be sent to fight. General Anders backed Churchill's idea of attacking Nazi-occupied Europe via the Balkans; a plan that appealed to the Poles as they would personally have taken part in the liberation of Poland.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Mr RR (Chesterfield), 31 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 18, p3.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Mr RR (Chesterfield), recorded by M Winslow, 9 May 1998, Tape 25, p11.

<sup>112</sup> Preface by General Anders in Polish Cultural Foundation op. cit., 1965, ppvi-vii.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Mr T (Sheffield), recorded by M Winslow, 7 March 1995. Tape 3, p4.

<sup>114</sup> K Sword et al, op. cit., p59.

Churchill wanted to attack Balkans, against Germans, have in mind obligation to us - Poles would be organised in free country. But Stalin was against it, he said 'no, let us attack Italy'.<sup>115</sup>

Hence, the Second Polish Corps was intended for operations in Italy, as was the Polish Women's Auxiliary Service, formed in September 1941. These women were an essential resource as there was a desperate shortage of male Polish troops.<sup>116</sup> For many women, the opportunities that the army provided were welcomed:

The army I enjoyed very much... We went to Iraq and I did a special course, how to speak English... and I met my husband on this course and later on we went to Egypt, Palestine, Italy, and - look - how many countries I saw!<sup>117</sup>

Women worked as ferry pilots and in offices, libraries, hospitals, transport, canteens, and organised multitudes of orphans. After attending the British Training Centre of Sarafand in Palestine, many women also travelled to Scotland, mainly with the First Polish Panzer Division, and prepared to move to France after D Day to take part in the allied offensive. Zofia Lesniowska, General Sikorski's daughter, was in charge of the Women's Auxiliary Service and it tends to be neglected that she was with her father on his last flight, and that she died with him.<sup>118</sup>

It is little known that women also flew planes in the Polish airforce:

Yes, women were flying, what you call it, transport flying. They used to bring aeroplanes from Africa, from Canada, you know, various planes. And they were very good pilots because they had to fly all different kinds of aircraft... There were three I think, three women pilots. I just forget their names but Jadwiga Pilsudska, she was the famous one. Pilsudski was our president, you know, and she was his daughter, she was a pilot.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst, Kent), 31 October 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 39, p2.

<sup>116</sup> In 1941, General Sikorski made a hazardous trip to the United States and Canada with the aim of recruiting 200,000 Poles for the war effort but returned with just 722.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Mrs C (Chislehurst, Kent), 29 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 15, pp1-2.

<sup>118</sup> T.Modelski, *The Polish Contribution to the Ultimate Allied Victory in the Second World War*, (Worthing, 1988), pp206-207.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Mr Sp (Sheffield), 3 June 1999, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 45, p6.

### 3.11 The Monte Cassino campaign

After a period of organisation in Italy in early 1944, the Second Corps were thrust into action; they were assigned to break the five month German defence of Monte Cassino, and many émigrés are veterans of this action. A problem facing the Polish troops was deficient numbers which reduced the possibility of rotating front line troops. However, Anders foresaw a solution to the shortfall as he believed that Poles in the Wehrmacht would cross enemy lines; a prediction that proved correct as 35,000 Poles “changed their helmets”.<sup>120</sup> When victory was achieved on 18 May, it was the Polish pennant that flew on the Monastery at Monte Cassino.<sup>121</sup> Émigré recollections of the battle swing from a great sense of pride, “Poles were asked to do the job and they did it”,<sup>122</sup> to distress due to the savagery of the fighting and the loss of friends:

Twelve hundred guns bash for two hours before we went into action. The Germans started firing as we advanced... I was wounded and trying to speak but blood was coming from my mouth, radio was out of action, so I was useless. .. Air was like gunpowder, little bits of black... nothing left of trees only sticks... I finish in hospital, my mate got killed.<sup>123</sup>

It has also been pointed out that to speak of Monte Cassino as a Polish victory does not credit the other forces that took part:

Monte Cassino was considered by Germans and Italian as impossible to conquer... first the French repelled them, afterwards was the Gurkhas in English army, and eventually... they propose for Poles to go... We slightly make it terribly Polish victory. Poles were fighting for eleven days, terribly difficult, I was there I know, but it wasn't quite true... Monte Cassino was common effort.<sup>124</sup>

Further operations, particularly in Ancona, took troops along the Adriatic Coast. The Polish Corps then moved inland for an assault on Bologna. This attack led to Polish forces capturing Imola seven days later and then Bologna itself, on 21 April.

---

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 8 June 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 29, p1.

<sup>121</sup> K Sword et al, op cit., pp61-62.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 9, p2.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Mr T (Sheffield), 7 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 3, pp4-5.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst, Kent), 31 October 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 29, pp2-3.

Following this offensive, the Corps withdrew from action for recuperation, and it was at this point that active military service came to an end for the Poles.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.12 Nazi occupation

The majority of Polish émigrés in Britain experienced the war in Poland from the perspective of the Soviet occupation, as outlined in the previous section. The arrival of these people in Britain at the end of the war was, for the most part, due to their status as Polish military fighting under British command. Indeed, around seventy five percent of the Polish émigré community originate from eastern Poland and experienced Soviet deportation.<sup>126</sup> The bulk of the remaining twenty five percent arrived in Britain having experienced Nazi occupation.

In the racial pecking-order, Slavic Poles were assigned the status of labourers for the Nazi regime. Poles who were deemed suitable for 'Germanisation', a programme which aimed to instil 'German identity' in occupied territories, placed many Polish men in line for conscription into the German military. For this group of émigrés, sharing memories with compatriots is difficult as their backgrounds are not in accord with the memory of the 'community'. Nor were details relating to this sensitive subject easily uncovered during research.

An ex-serviceman who was willing to reveal his German army past recalled how he was forced into the German Army and his family were subjected to Germanisation:

Germans were needing men for their army so they were looking in family trees and if they find German blood they made you German third class... my father didn't want to be a German... but four SS men come to see him. They say they found some German blood in our family tree and they give him forty eight hours to sign. He wouldn't, but asked me what to do. I say 'Well, what can you do, you have to sign it'. I and my brother were over sixteen and I say, 'They take us, but you, mother and two sisters will be safe, we go to front. You can take a horse to water but they can't make it drink'.

---

<sup>125</sup> Suchcitz, op, cit., pp7-8.

<sup>126</sup> This estimate was provided during an interview with the Polish parish priest for Luton, Father Hajowski, 4 March 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 1A, p7.

They can take me to battle but I don't have to fight. In my case it was so, but in my brother's case it was different, he fall. Week before seventeenth birthday.<sup>127</sup>

Although their 'crime' was to live in a German-occupied zone of Poland, the community prefers to avoid drawing undue attention to these accounts. It cannot be overlooked that there were also Poles who were willing conscripts to the German army, which makes the situation all the more difficult for those forced into it, as the opinions of these ex-Polish army veterans demonstrate:

They called them Volksdeutsch, which was sort of German origin and they were made to join the army and serve as Germans. Unfortunately, quite a few done it voluntarily just to make their lives easier and have a good living, and generally they were the proper bastards... quite a number come to Britain in Polish army. If you speak to them, they say , 'well I could do nothing else... I have to join the army, I didn't have any way out'. Well, majority really were like that, but there was also a big minority that could prevent it. Those who really felt like Poles... joined the Polish underground movement... but not everybody is made this way.<sup>128</sup>

\*

Poles in German army ... I don't like them. Just one example, we attacked a little place... and Germans were firing... they were coming up behind us. One of them was a Pole, there was also five Germans. Pole was in German army. And I say, 'get rid of them'. That means, kill them. And suddenly one of them shouts, 'don't shoot, I am Polish'. My driver gets the machine gun... I say, 'finish him'. So he just burst machine gun on him.<sup>129</sup>

The problem of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' memories has deprived a number of émigrés of the support of their compatriots. In order to remain under the 'supportive' community umbrella, silence was probably their preferred option.

Poles living under German incumbency, and who were not taken into the German army or Germanised, were abducted for labour. People were simply taken from the street:

---

<sup>127</sup> Interview conducted 2 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow. Further details withheld.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Mr Ra (Croydon), 30 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 16, p7.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Mr Wa (Aberdeen), 20 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 43, p6.

You go out to buy something and you don't know if you come back home or not, they catch people and take to prison. You know, they closed one street and there was a lorry and people were taken. People must go out, must work, but if you go into town you always take children... you don't know if you come back.<sup>130</sup>

\*

Girls and lads, they was all fifteen, fourteen years of age... there was a lorry with machine guns, the Germans just put us on the lorry and took us to Germany... I never even say good bye to my father because I went to work seven o' clock, they were still in bed.<sup>131</sup>

\*

I lived in Stezgom, a little village near Kraków... when they came to pick me up I run off to barn. I was on top of hay and they were sticking in the bayonet... I heard what father say, 'oh, its only old things in there'... I could hear but I didn't come out. And they took my sister for me... They send me letter again... to go to work... and I gone, because you have to. They say they burn everything, burn house, take father, take everybody... I have to go, is no choice. 1942. I were sixteen. They bring us to factory in Opladen.<sup>132</sup>

People experienced appalling conditions as slave labourers in Germany and have vivid memories of the period. Their labour contributed to Germany's war effort and émigrés have spoken of work in an assortment of industries including leatherwork, Messerschmidt construction and parachute making.<sup>133</sup> One interviewee told how her work alternated between digging trenches and working for long periods with her hands submerged in bleach. She became seriously ill with pneumonia, but illness was dangerous due to poor medical care and because those considered incapable of work were left to die, or were murdered. Hence, when this woman became sick, she escaped from hospital and presented herself back at the labour camp, saying that she was fit for work. Although just a teenage girl at the time, she recalled how the desperate nature of her plight eventually caused her to lose the will to live:

---

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Mrs Sk (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 February 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 1, p1.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 7, p2 .

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Mrs So, (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, pp2-4

<sup>133</sup> At the time of writing (2001), legal representatives in Britain were endeavouring to locate ex-slave labourers, to inform them of the German government's offer to pay compensation for their suffering.

I didn't bother for my life in Germany, no. I wouldn't mind if I were dead because, you see, when you like this, you not bothered.<sup>134</sup>

Another interviewee managed to gain a 'privileged' position within the work camp system, but likewise, his life was continually under threat:

I was the lucky one because I... used to go to different cities, concentration camps, labour camps, and kill the lice, you know. So I had a chance to go through the town and beg bread from the German women and sometime I collect eight or nine loaves of bread... and brought it to the camp... some lads from the camp was waiting outside and I throw it up the wire, or they cut a hole in it... If they caught me they would shoot me, but you never thinking about it when you young and you hungry, life is more important than a bullet.<sup>135</sup>

Rare acts of kindness by German individuals have occasionally been present in accounts. The interviewee who worked in the parachute factory recalled German women bringing stockings and other goods to women in the labour camp: "They don't give to your hands because they were scared, if they get caught they get shot. They not allowed to bring anything, but they do."<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, recollections of cruelty dominates testimonies, and this has particularly been the case when émigrés have given eye-witness accounts of the treatment of Polish Jews.

---

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Mrs So, (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, p11.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 7, pp2-3.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Mrs So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, p5.

### 3.13 “War is war, but this...”<sup>137</sup>

During the course of research, interviews were not conducted with Polish Jews, nor was this an area of intended enquiry. Existing oral history collections and publications have explored and recorded the experiences of Holocaust survivors to a far greater extent than would have been possible within this study.<sup>138</sup> However, many Polish émigrés who contributed to the current research were witnesses to the Holocaust and it is clear that their memories are intensely painful, and on many occasions interviewees have wept whilst recalling the fate of the Jews in Poland.

That been tragic, Jews. You not imagine. They got to go to Jewish ghetto... lot of people in the street die, lot of children, and every day, every night, every morning, the Gestapo come and shoot people. They take people to Auschwitz, Polish people, millions, going to cremation... you not imagine, I cry, everybody cry... the bodies, the smell, terrible.<sup>139</sup>

\*

The factory where I was working was in the ghetto and so I had a permit to go in there. A lot of people were risking their lives smuggling... and I was bringing them money... But do you know, I went in ghetto ... you know what you saw there, people dying. At first you were terrified... I don't know. It was terrible, terrible.<sup>140</sup>

The following contributor, an ex-Partisan who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, specifically asked for his account to be included within this work as, whilst this atrocity was spoken of at the Nuremberg trials, he has failed to find any further record of it:

I saw horrible things in Auschwitz... there was a very big hole, twenty metres long, three, four, metres wide and four metres deep and cement all round. Lorry comes, backs into this and children, full of children, maybe ten, twelve years old. Alive, without gas, they shovel them on fire. Even now, many time when I'm going to sleep, I don't know why, this memory come to my eyes, this cruelty. Only seconds these

---

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 7 November 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 27, p6.

<sup>138</sup> For example, R.Perks and C.Supple, *Voices of the Holocaust*, (British Library National Sound Archive, 1993), and A.Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell*, (London, 1994). See also the outstanding oral history presentations in The Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum (permanent exhibition, launched 2000).

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mrs Sk (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 February 1995, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 1, p2.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 7 November 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 27, p5.



children screaming, when they gone on fire... when I'm talking to you I see this black smoke, coming from fire, then quiet, nothing more.<sup>141</sup>

This man also encountered cruelty from an unexpected source in Auschwitz:

This Kapo once telling us, for killing one person he received a double portion bread and margarine... he is speaking Polish, he born in Poland. And he say, 'Do you know who I am?... I am past law, I am past God, I can do with you what I want to'.<sup>142</sup>

That death camps were sited on Polish soil disturbs many émigrés and they have at times voiced their anger at assumptions that Poles were, and are, an anti-Semitic national group. During research an interviewee produced an extract from the *Sunday Times* that was reprinted in the émigré newspaper *Dziennik Polski* (January 1999), and which was written in response to an article subtitled, "Can a Jew get justice in the country of Auschwitz?". This piece of writing reflects sentiments that have been expressed by interviewees (off tape) on a number of occasions:

Auschwitz and others were GERMAN concentration camps set up by THE GERMANS in occupied Poland. Many Poles, of all religions, including my own mother, suffered the same, or similar fate there as their Jewish compatriots and people of many other nationalities and religions.... It is true that there was some anti-Semitism [in pre-war Poland] and I deeply regret it, but the Jewish population in pre-war Poland was about 10% and I would claim that there were fewer examples of anti-Semitism there than there are of racism in the UK with its 6% Black and Asian population... those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.<sup>143</sup> [Upper case print as original]

Certainly, Britain stands accused of having a stain on its character when it comes to efforts to save Jewish lives during the war, and inaction was not for want of information. As early as September 1940 a Polish Underground member, Witold Pilecki, succeeded in penetrating Auschwitz I, yet the information he gathered was not accepted outside Poland.<sup>144</sup> Likewise, Underground member, Jan Karski, risked his life to record and smuggle information about the camps to Eden in Britain,

---

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Mr R (Lincs.), 6 September 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 37, p2.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p3.

<sup>143</sup> Original letter by J.Mokrzycki appeared in the *Sunday Times*, 3 January 1999, and was reprinted in *Dziennik Polski*, January 11, 1999, p4.

<sup>144</sup> Davies, op. cit., (1997), p1023.

President Roosevelt in the United States, and even prominent American Jewish leaders. However, his reports were either not listened to or not believed.<sup>145</sup> After the war, Karski was honoured as a “righteous Gentile” by the State of Israel, but he was haunted by the feeling that he had failed in his duty to save the Jews, and to save Poland, until his death in April 2000.<sup>146</sup>

The Vatican also knew of the Jewish slaughter but announced in 1942 that it was impossible to verify the accuracy of reports reaching them. When asked specifically to condemn the exterminations by Berlin’s correspondent for *L’Osservatore Romano*, the Pope is reported to have answered: “Dear friend, do not forget that millions of Catholics serve in the German armies. Shall I bring them into conflicts of conscience?” The President of the Polish Government-in-Exile also implored the Pope to break his silence. But no protest came.<sup>147</sup>

In Nazi-occupied Poland, an immense obstacle preventing the assistance of Jews was that non-Jewish Poles also lived in fear; to be found helping Jews meant death. However, it cannot be ignored that, as Davies wrote, Poles have also been associated with anti-Semitism and there were those who actively assisted the genocide by denouncing Jews.<sup>148</sup>

With regard to accusations of Polish complicity in the Holocaust, the publication of a children’s textbook generated serious discontent amongst Polish émigrés in June 2000. Jan Mokrzycki, Chairman of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, copied a letter of complaint to the book’s publishers, to David Blunkett, Minister for Education, and to The Institute for Polish Jewish Studies. The letter was also reproduced in the Polish newspaper, *Polski Dziennik*:

---

<sup>145</sup> For an account of Karski’s wartime missions to reveal the extent of the Nazi genocide to the allies, see T.Wood and S.Jankowski, *Karski: How one man tried to stop the Holocaust*, (New York, 1994).

<sup>146</sup> Obituary for Jan Karski: “Courageous member of the wartime Polish underground who gave the Allies an early first-hand account of the Holocaust - and was ignored”, in *The Times*, July 17, 2000: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk>

<sup>147</sup> E.Maxwell, *Silence or Speaking Out*, The Parkes Lecture 1990, (Southampton, 1990), p10. On 13 March 2000, in an article titled “Pope confesses 2,000 years of Church sins”, *The Independent* reported that the Polish Pope, John Paul II, “sought forgiveness yesterday for the sins committed in the name of the church”. An apology was extended to Jews, and others, but no reference was made to the Holocaust.

<sup>148</sup> Davies, op. cit., (1997), p1020.

Dear Sir,

Your textbook "The Twentieth Century World" Key History for Key Stage 3, has been brought to my attention. On page 58 under "Hitler's final solution" your textbook states; "There were many others who helped Hitler in this campaign of mass-murder including Poles, Ukrainians and those French who worked with...". This statement is an intolerable slur on Poland, a nation which fought side by side with its British allies... The Home Army had a special unit dedicated to saving Jewish lives which worked successfully throughout the war... Yes, of course, there were individual shameful acts of betrayal, which we all are ashamed of deeply and which were punishable by the underground justice system... I would suggest you check these facts with Professor Norman Davies...<sup>149</sup>

\*

Conflicting views have emerged from interviewees regarding the Holocaust and remembrance of it. Reactions have ranged from obvious distress at the fate of Europe's Jews, to more steadfast attitudes: "Poles, Gypsies, Homosexuals were killed in Auschwitz too... they shouldn't claim it for their own".<sup>150</sup>

It is the case that non-Jewish Poles were also exposed to random killings and placed in labour and concentration camps where they died through overwork, lack of food and disease:

I was taken to Flossenbergl, a concentration camp in Germany... you had to lump stones from A to B one day, carry them all day with Kapo shouting 'quick' with a whip... And then next day you carry them from B to A again. Not building anything, was just to wear you out, and obviously they did that. So majority, on the food you were receiving, were so weak that they finally collapse and that's the end of it... I was very fortunate... I carried stones for only a short period... I think they were trying to frighten me to do more work.<sup>151</sup>

What can be said of the situation in Poland during the war is that whilst Jews were subjected to organised annihilation, the lives of other Poles were also cheap. Davies reminds us that:

---

<sup>149</sup> J.Mokrzycki, "Protest Zjednoczenia Polskiego", in *Dzennik Polski*, 28 June 2000, p3.

<sup>150</sup> Personal communication, April 1996. Further details withheld.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 4, p2.

Jewish investigators tend to count Jewish victims. Polish investigators tend to count Polish victims. Neither side wishes to stress the fact that the largest category of victims was both Polish and Jewish. Not everyone, it seems, is content to count human beings.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.14 The Warsaw Rising

There was no shortage of willing individuals to resist Nazi occupation, although as illegal assembly and possession of arms was punishable by instant death the achievements of the Resistance were modest.

In Warsaw, the Home Army planned to rise up against its Nazi occupiers in the belief that to legitimise the Government-in-Exile's claim to govern Poland on the world stage, Warsaw must first be liberated by forces loyal to that government. Bor-Komorowski and the Rising leadership believed that winning Warsaw would pave the way for a final decisive confrontation with Stalin to determine who would govern Poland. This event was to be the crucial moment of the war for Poland; the insurrection would decide the country's destiny.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, in the insurrectionary tradition of the partitioned years, and with fierce opposition to any further partitioning of Poland that would take away the right to self-government, the Home Army acted, and Poles scattered throughout Europe and beyond willed on the fighters.

Two weeks before actual uprising start we were all on alert and I slept a lot. We were on all on sorts of duties... so sometime I used to stay at friends' houses. When Uprising start... at five o' clock, first of August, I come home to gather a few things, basic food for a day or two. We had grenades, very little army it was, but rebels hope to be able to get things from Germans when fighting started. But my sister was at home on her own, my mother went that morning to get some potatoes because they were very scarce. So I told my sister what's happening... and of course she was frightened... I told her not to go anywhere, don't go on the streets after five o' clock, stay at home. Course, she was

---

<sup>152</sup> Davies, op. cit., (1981), p463.

<sup>153</sup> J.M Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising of 1944*, (Cambridge, 1975), p243.

frightened for my mother, I was too because she was caught outside the house... I left a note for my mother, and she finally got through, but she was caught in this fighting.<sup>154</sup>

\*

Russians were on other side of Vistula, wouldn't give us help. We thought we might win at first but after four or five weeks we knew we were going to lose it... everyday was fighting, then Germans attack with tanks, after that, no chance... for the last two weeks we had no water, no food.<sup>155</sup>

\*

Of course, we took German prisoners during Uprising. Apart from the SS men they were well treated. But the SS, why not? Often they were just shot and that's it. Because a lot of us suffered badly and that was the way to pay back.<sup>156</sup>

The desperate street fighting of the Rising lasted for two months, around 200,000 lives were lost and Warsaw was reduced to rubble. Following the defeat of the Home Army in Warsaw and their "honorary capitulation",<sup>157</sup> the Underground Army rapidly disintegrated. The defeat and destruction of Warsaw had a dramatic effect on the national romanticism and irreparably damaged the London Poles, politically, militarily and psychologically. It has also been said that the Rising assisted Communist intentions for power in Poland.<sup>158</sup> Certainly, by the second half of 1944, Soviet rule was a reality.

If the Rising could possibly have a positive legacy, it would be, as Ascherson noted, that it represented "a sixty three day revelation of how Poles could act and feel and behave to one another, which left a hot residue of pride to keep the nation warm thorough the bleak years that followed".<sup>159</sup> Amongst émigré Rising veterans, and the wider Polish population in Britain and abroad, there is a strong sense of pride with regard to the actions of Warsaw's insurgents. A pride that maintains a special position in the identity of the émigré community:

---

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 4, pp9-10.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Mr So (Sheffield), 20 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, p16.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Mr Ra (Croydon), 30 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 16, p8.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 7 November 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 27, p7.

<sup>158</sup> Ciechanowski, op. cit., pp314-315.

<sup>159</sup> N.Ascherson, *The Struggles for Poland*, (London, 1987), p129.

Till this day, these people who are alive, or were not perished or exterminated by Germans or Russian, they're today seventy plus and they are proud for being associated with... that historical event.<sup>160</sup>

Poles who fought in the Rising were captured and imprisoned in concentration camps: "On the first of October I was taken prisoner of war to Stalag 11A, other side of the River Oder, Magdeburg... I was seven months prisoner of war."<sup>161</sup> Spirits were low amongst the prisoners; the Poles had been defeated, friends and family were dead and Poland was partitioned again. Those captured were also in poor physical condition following their privations. One émigré spoke of being emotionally destroyed after the defeat, a condition which grew worse following eight days without food in 'cattle truck' transportation. Concentration camp internment claimed the lives of seven hundred of his compatriots, and he believes that only the support of his friends, who even took him to the lavatory, kept him alive.<sup>162</sup>

As the war in Poland dragged on to its conclusion, the situation for Uprising veterans and other categories of prisoners deteriorated. One man, at the age of fifteen, was forced to march further into Germany as his captors attempted to remove evidence of their crimes:

We had to walk... I don't know how many miles it was from Flossenberg to Dachau, it was long, say thirty kilometres a day and it was about six days we were walking... it must have been bad because at the end of it, from the six thousand, I think there were only about two thousand left... Some of my friends just had no strength. One of my friends died during the march, was just a froth coming out from his mouth. He just lost consciousness and couldn't walk. We dragged him so far but had to leave him simply because we didn't have the strength to carry someone. And every day they used to just keep us in open space, with guards around. There was no water, so you had to drink water where you could find it. I used to drink from ponds where cows go to drink... They gave us a loaf, a normal standard loaf of bread for that march, that's all, but you couldn't eat it. You needed something different you see, you couldn't eat this dry bread. Used to chew grass, slugs, anything you can find. Because when your hungry it's surprising what you can eat. It's something I could never imagine doing today.

---

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Mr K (Sheffield), 6 September 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 36, p2.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Mr So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, p15.

<sup>162</sup> Personal communication, June 1998. Further details withheld.

They wouldn't allow anybody to give you any water. Mind you, majority of the people, they used to be spitting at us, shouting, when we passed through villages, you know. I think I remember only one place where a middle aged lady, German lady with her daughter, come out with a bucket of clean water to give to us. But one of the guards kicked the bucket away and wouldn't let us have it.

When we got to Dachau it was raining... I started feeling a bit rough, you see it's drinking this water. Mind you, I wasn't by myself, there were lot of people feeling worse than I did, but they didn't say anything because if you collapsed, they took you to ambulance place, that was the end. I think we were about three days in Dachau, we didn't do any work or anything like that... And then one day we saw the American soldiers around.<sup>163</sup>

This man recalled starving prisoners receiving food from the liberating troops. The rich food provided by the field kitchen was seized upon, people ate frantically and, "of course, that killed a lot of them".<sup>164</sup> He attributes his own survival to being ill with diarrhoea which put him off eating, although his illness occurred at a time when female relief workers were arriving in the camp, which has indelibly marked his memory:

I finished with diarrhoea and the sight was terrible, I was ashamed of it. The doctors came in and there was a lot of women from Red Cross... supposed to be toilets, but they were all open and there were so many people that they had to just sit anywhere on floor. And some of them collapsing. I still remember, I see these ladies and I felt ashamed. Went beyond embarrassment, I mean, soldiers, that's all right. But you know, the Red Cross ladies coming in.<sup>165</sup>

### 3.15 Victory?

At the end of the war, Warsaw Rising veterans, in common with Polish military units, civilians in labour camps and in allied 'safe' camps, were scattered around Europe and beyond. As the Polish military had operated under British command, a massive operation commenced which was to bring Polish units to Britain, as well as civilians

---

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 4, pp4-7. See Appendix 4 for Dachau detention certificate, issued after liberation of the camp by U.S military.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p7.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

and displaced persons. Mostly, this procedure involved removing troops and civilians from Italy, Germany, France, the Middle East, Africa and India. Labour camp workers who came to Britain as DPs generally did so because they were in the British zone of occupation in Germany. Comments from émigrés about DP camps have centred on their similarity to internment centres: “They were more or less like concentration camps.”<sup>166</sup>

The movements of refugees of all nationalities around Europe after the war was chaotic, and Poles were caught up in the turmoil. Many Poles were heading for Italy due to the allied campaign there and the presence of the Second Corps. Following many traumatic years of war, and with an uncertain future ahead, this brief interlude in Italy has been remembered with fondness:

The best time of my life was after the war ended. We spent about a year in Italy and we didn't have much duties to do. I went to school and we did our share of work, but we were with friends... Used to go dancing with the girls... there was a lot of sport activities, things like that... suddenly you had a lot of time on your hands. You didn't have to work, to worry about anything because you were still being looked after by the army. You got your pay, you were never hungry. That's the nice thing.<sup>167</sup>

Polish forces waiting for transportation to Britain went through a screening process. Taking part in this was an ex-officer who was a Polish Consul in Italy between June 1945 and December 1946, and whose job it was to screen out Ukrainians:

My main task was to select. There was twenty thousand Poles and... we had had quite a few Germans of origin and Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians in Poland. Situation was such that we had to accept them because we treat them as Polish citizens, Poland was decent. But there was many Ukrainians, from proper Ukraine, Russian Ukraine, who were taken prisoners by Germans and were still in Germany. After war they said, ‘we are going back to Poland because we are Poles’. They weren't Poles. They didn't speak Polish. They always say, ‘I am from Lwów’, because they learn from friends that is better to say Lwów because was previously Poland. But I said, ‘in Lwów, what colour trams were there?’... And I selected. But it was approved by British...

---

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Mr SI (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 6, p10.



*Could you spot who you might think was Ukrainian, how could you tell the difference?*

Oh yes, because they spoke Ukrainian. They spoke a bit Polish because they were living in Poland for twenty years... And I had to select. It was an unpleasant task, but what can I do, they were not Poles, they were fighting in Russian army, were taken prisoners by Germans and now find themselves in Germany...

*Did you know what happened to the Ukrainians that were sent back to Ukraine?*

Mostly shot... majority shot.

*And did you know that they would be shot?*

Yes... Perhaps we were a bit dirty but it wasn't our responsibly... you have to do it...

Difficult decision.<sup>168</sup>

In the years after 1945, the shipment of Poles to Britain steadily took place and by 1947, large numbers of Poles were residing in Britain. Units from Italy arrived in 1946, in April and May of 1947 troops were brought over from Germany, and in July 1947 there were arrivals from the Middle East.<sup>169</sup>

However, amongst Poles there was no elation at having won the war. The majority had knowledge of Stalin's style of rule, having "holidayed" in Siberia, as one interviewee caustically referred to his slave labour experience.<sup>170</sup> There was little desire to return to Poland to be branded an enemy of the people again, and face the possibility of reprisals: "We'd been working with the West, we were afraid to go back".<sup>171</sup>

Some people went back because they had families and thought that they should go and look after them, but some probably didn't understand the danger that they face. Definitely it was not advisable for officers to go because the communist system never trusted people who were better educated, they couldn't convert them to their way of thinking. Many of my friends went because some officers told them that they should go

---

<sup>168</sup> Interview, 1998, recorded by M Winslow. Further details withheld.

<sup>169</sup> For further details and statistics see Sword et al, op. cit., 1989, p249.

<sup>170</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sl (Sheffield), 27 June 1997.

<sup>171</sup> Personal communication with W.Szablewski, (Sheffield), 8 May 2000.

back to Poland and form a nucleus in Polish army, to counter-balance this new regime. They didn't last long.<sup>172</sup>

Added to the Poles hurt and disappointment at not being able to return home was their disillusionment with allied politicking. There was also hope amongst the Polish troops that the allies would continue to fight for Poland's independence:

Poles hoped that Churchill would fight Russians. And I will tell you something... some plans of attacking Russia were prepared by allies. But what happened? Americans refused to fight... they wanted to go home, war ended. In my opinion, it seems to me that Churchill became too friendly to Russia. Uncle Joe he was called.<sup>173</sup>

After Britain had declared war over the German invasion of Poland, the handing over of the country to Stalin was a humiliating injustice:

We knew that Poland was sold down the drain you know, to Russians. Churchill and Roosevelt, American and English, they sold us down the drain. We knew we couldn't go back.<sup>174</sup>

In addition, the geographical shift of Poland's borders, which moved the country significantly westwards, ensured that many Poles from Poland's eastern regions had no home in Poland to return to:<sup>175</sup>

The part of the country I used to live in are all Ukrainian now. And in the west of Poland I have nobody.<sup>176</sup>

Many of the Poles who were compelled to settle in Britain did so with a heavy heart and a great deal of bitterness. Whilst the allies celebrated their victory, the Poles had little to be joyous about. Their homeland, the pre-war independent state of Poland, was again under foreign domination and the imposition had been accepted by Poland's allies. Nevertheless, a press release by the Polish Forces Press Bureau in

---

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 9, p2.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 31 October 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 39, p3.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Mr So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 40, p15.

<sup>175</sup> See Appendix 5 for map showing Polish borders before and after the Second World War.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Mr St (Bradford), 21 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 20, p5.

July 1945 stated: “The morale and discipline of the Polish forces remains high”.<sup>177</sup>

And *The Times* reported:

Whilst the Polish forces, individually and collectively, have not yet achieved the aim for which they have fought since September 1939, they feel that they have performed their share of the allied victory in Europe and that they have not fought, bled and died in vain.<sup>178</sup>

Indeed, Polish hopes were pinned on the prospect of further military action to oust the Soviet presence from Poland. However, this aspiration was wishful thinking and tens of thousands of Poles stranded in Britain were compelled to continue the fight by supporting the Government-in-Exile in its opposition to the regime in their homeland, and by preserving their values and culture until changed political circumstances permitted a return to Poland.

### 3.16 Concluding comment

The historical survey of the Second World War in Poland provided by Davies deals sensitively with the traumatic events of this period. However, whilst Davies avoids focusing solely on ‘history from above’, his work does not broadly reflect the experience of the ‘ordinary’ Pole.

This chapter has aimed to redress this balance somewhat although it is recognised that the oral history content has by no means been exhaustive of experience. Nevertheless, it has provided a sense of the experiences and traumas that are in the memories of Polish émigrés in Britain, especially regarding pivotal events of the war. This history has been the driving force behind the maintenance of a particular community identity in Britain. The ‘betrayals’ and losses of the past are central to émigré culture and identity and to attempt an understanding of the Polish émigré population, one must understand its past.

---

<sup>177</sup> “Declaration of loyalty to Mr. Racziewicz, in *The Times*, Monday 2 July, 1945, p3.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Four

### The Polish Community in Britain



Photograph: BHRU

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p86.

Many of those in the Polish resettlement Corps were housed in former military camps spread all over the country. They often lived in barrel-like Nissan huts, as seen here.

## 4.1 Part one: Six decades of Polish community organisation in Britain

World War Two had this huge effect on Polish people, partly because twenty per cent of the Polish population died in Poland... and that meant that every single family lost somebody, usually in appalling circumstances... And secondly, because this very large number of people left Poland and then couldn't return because of the changed political circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

In the years after 1945, the majority of Poles who had arrived in Britain as a result of the Second World War gradually resigned themselves to rebuilding their lives in Britain. The support of compatriots at this time was an absolute necessity for most, and their psychological and physical needs, combined with a political will to oppose the communist regime in Poland, prompted the laying of firm community foundations.

The history and structure of the Polish community has been well documented by Keith Sword in two works that span over half a century of settlement: *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950* and *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain*.<sup>2</sup> Pertinent aspects of these publications will be summarised prior to consideration of émigré perspectives of their settlement, as revealed during the course of research. Again, where appropriate, interviewee accounts are supplemented by publications that are representative of opinions offered.

Whilst the oral history collected for this study mirrors Sword's work in many respects, this research differs in that its method concentrates on émigré experience and their perceptions of the past, and the present. Within this work there is also an unwillingness to take the concept of 'community' for granted; inclusiveness by definition creates exclusiveness.

---

<sup>1</sup> BHRU: B0191/01A/10.

<sup>2</sup> K.Sword, N.Davies, J.Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950*, London, 1989. And K.Sword, *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain*, London, 1996.

## 4.2 The myth of community

The concept of community is itself a contested subject and since Stacey's suggestion, in 1969, that the word 'community' be abandoned in favour of discussion in terms of social systems and how they interact,<sup>3</sup> community studies have flourished.

Benedict Anderson asserted that communities are imagined; the largest of which, the nation, is imagined because its parameters of language, religion and politics have been prescribed, and because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, whilst community appears as a myth from an intellectual perspective, society's widespread recognition of the concept and the importance that individuals attach to their perceived membership of a community makes this an important aspect of life.

Joanna Bornat wrote that communities can be hypothesised to some extent as being systems of shared values and shared interests which confirm identity and provide supportive networks.<sup>5</sup> However, Bornat raises the argument that representations of community avoid the complexities of inter-personal relationships. For example, social class differences are generally kept hidden. Hence, it could be argued that selectivity invalidates oral history accounts and Bornat calls for historians to look for explanations as to why difference and divisions are seemingly difficult to include.<sup>6</sup> In examining the Polish community, the issue of division is not only important in the context of alleged 'reliable evidence', the psychological significance of exclusion from the main body of the community also needs consideration.

There has been a tendency for those who write about Poles in Britain to refer to them, en masse, as the 'Polish community' and the present author's involvement in the exhibition, "Keeping the Faith", has continued this trend. It is recognised in this study that referring to Poles as a community fails to represent those who do not feel part of this concept, but where the word is used it is because the vast majority of those

---

<sup>3</sup> M.Stacey, "The myth of community studies", *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 20, 1969. pp143-147.

<sup>4</sup> B.Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991) pp1-7.

<sup>5</sup> J.Bornat, "The Communities of Community Publishing" in *Oral History*, Vol. 20. No 2. 1992.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p28.

interviewed have believed that Polish émigrés share common interests and consider themselves members of the ‘Polish community’.

### 4.3 The formation of the Polish community in Great Britain

During the war, the establishment of émigré community organisations in Britain was not a necessity since Poles fully expected to return home when hostilities ceased. However, in February 1945 the situation of Poles outside Poland altered when, at Yalta, the allied powers approved Stalin’s government of Poland. Accordingly, legal recognition of the Government-in-Exile was withdrawn, although it continued to represent the voice of Free Poland in defiance of international agreements conducted “over their heads”.<sup>7</sup>

The British government did not force Poles to return to Poland against their will, and to accommodate them the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC) was formed in May 1946, into which 114,000 Poles enrolled. The PRC was a military unit operating under British discipline, but unarmed and non-combatant and providing opportunities to learn English language and receive vocational training.<sup>8</sup> Whilst the PRC was intended as a transitional arrangement to assist settlement into civilian life, Sword writes that it also enabled the authorities to maintain discipline amidst fears that Polish men would, “...certainly cause trouble and make it still more difficult to reconcile the public to tolerating the continuous presence in this country of large numbers of Poles”.<sup>9</sup>

By 1949, as the PRC was being wound up, the general feeling amongst the authorities was that its handling of demobilisation and resettlement had been successful. Figures produced by the Inspectorate General of the PRC stated that 80.2 per cent of those who had passed through the Corps were no longer reliant on the British Treasury for support. Indeed, since the Poles were predominantly male and single, there was a higher proportion of worker-earners than might be expected with ‘normal’ immigrants; an advantage that was recognised in a PRC report which

---

<sup>7</sup> Sword op. cit., 1996, p30.

<sup>8</sup> Sword op. cit., 1989, pp369-372.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp246-247.

calculated that the cost of resettlement was offset by revenue from the new income tax payers.<sup>10</sup>

However, resettlement in British society was not without difficulty and Sword explains that it involved a three-fold process. Firstly, the Poles had to effect transition to the British cultural milieu and learn a new language; secondly, many had migrated from a rural to an urban environment (although several years in the army had assisted their adjustment); and thirdly, after demobilisation they had to become accustomed to life without regulation.<sup>11</sup>

At the head of the new community was the Polish Government-in-Exile, based in London. Sword states that, in spite of its loss of recognition, the exile government operated with an emphasis on the *exile* rather than the *émigré* character of the community: “The integration of their compatriots into British society seems to have been less important to them than the organisation and development of a state-in-exile”.<sup>12</sup> The Government-in-Exile aimed to exert pressure on the Soviet regime in Poland, draw attention to the abuses of human and civil rights there, uphold the ‘true values’ of Polish independence and maintain traditions that the communists were endeavouring to erase from the national memory.<sup>13</sup>

A few Poles stayed with the PRC for as long as possible, and some camps were converted into private accommodation, but the majority moved out, prompted by a need to forego their state of dependency and because they wanted privacy. Also, after years of insecurity and temporary living, there was a keen desire to put down permanent roots. An added incentive was to live nearer to places of work, but finding accommodation was no easy task in a country with severely depleted housing stocks.

In rented accommodation Poles faced high rents and Sword presented testimonies telling of the burden of meeting payments; one man recalled earning between £4.50 and £5.00 a week as a machine operator and paying £3.00 for a shared room that

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp320-325.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp364-365.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p189.

<sup>13</sup> Sword, op cit., 1996, p27.



contained only basic necessities. Further problems came in the form of landlord imposed regulations forbidding foreigners and children in lodging houses.<sup>14</sup>

Problems finding suitable rented accommodation, coupled with petty boarding house rules, encouraged émigrés to buy property. Sword adds that a desire for independence and inherited attitudes towards land and property ownership also spurred house purchase. House buying gathered momentum amongst émigré Poles in the 1950s, attracting envious comments from British neighbours, but there was little understanding of the sacrifices that enabled this first step into the property market.<sup>15</sup>

We had no furniture and no money... for six months we had to take in lodgers - two to a room - whilst the seven of us slept in one room; that is, myself, my wife, our two children, and my wife's mother, brother and sister.<sup>16</sup>

The majority of émigrés found civilian work quickly but employment opportunities were generally restricted to unskilled and manual occupations. Most Poles aspired to better living standards and worked hard to prove themselves worthy of their jobs, however, productivity above that of British workers incited hostile attitudes towards them.

The struggle of making ends meet on a weekly basis, the futility of trying to improve one's employment position, and the strain of Trade Union hostility turned the thoughts of some to self-employment. Émigré businesses found ready markets in export (particularly of food, clothing and medicine parcels) whilst delicatessens supplied Polish foodstuffs and new factories opened to produce commodities for them to sell. Poles also became landlords and made money from renovation, development and property dealing. Others sought financial independence via gambling, indeed, the football pools became so popular that firms printed coupons in Polish.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the reduced economic circumstances of many Poles in Britain after the war, Sword believes their condition was preferable to that experienced in pre-war Poland and, as early as 1949, it was observed that the motivations of émigrés were changing

---

<sup>14</sup> Sword, op cit., 1989, p377.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp377-379.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p378.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp384-386.

from political to economic.<sup>18</sup> Zweig estimated that this was especially true for an estimated 80-85 per cent of Polish workers in Britain who had been rural workers or smallholders in pre-war Poland. Sword explains that whilst life was difficult in Britain, few failed to understand that conditions in Poland were worse.<sup>19</sup>

Since there were many peasants and small farmers amongst the Polish settlers it came as a surprise to British employment departments that so few were willing to be farmworkers. Sword explains that Poles were keen to improve their life chances by opting for work in industry and, in the years since leaving Poland, had learned new skills, borne new responsibilities and broadened their horizons; the settlers were a different body of people from when they left Poland.<sup>20</sup>

The early years of settlement were a time of doubt and uncertainty, characterised by material shortages and deprivation that exceeded the difficulties experienced by the British. In addition, the Foreign Office identified “uncertainty and mental stress” amongst the Polish troops following the transfer of diplomatic recognition.<sup>21</sup> Psychological trauma was further exacerbated by hostility that Poles encountered from some sections of British society.

Poles who prospered in the immediate post-war years were generally those with professional skills, such as doctors, pharmacists, engineers and technical staff, although a pre-requisite for success was fluency in English. Younger émigrés adapted more readily to their new situations, especially if they took the opportunity to study, but above all, Sword writes, people prospered if they looked to the future instead of looking back.

Education has been central to Polish community activities throughout the years of émigré life. Indeed, the Government-in-Exile made it a priority to re-establish educational institutions in Britain following the destruction of Poland’s universities, colleges and libraries by the Nazis and Soviets, and their incarceration and murder of Polish intelligentsia. By 1945 there were five Polish university faculties in Britain; a Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Veterinary Studies at Edinburgh; a Faculty of

---

<sup>18</sup> Observation by W.Zbyszewski cited in Sword, op. cit., 1996, p35.

<sup>19</sup> Sword, op. cit., 1989, p386.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp455-456.

<sup>21</sup> Information revealed in a Foreign Office note dated 27 July 1945. Ibid., p236.

Law at Oxford; a Faculty of Architecture at Liverpool; and a Board of Technical Studies in London;<sup>22</sup> all of which the Polish government intended to transfer back to Poland as 'going concerns' at the end of the war. When this was not possible, the faculties were wound down and the emphasis of education turned to increasing chances of success in the employment market.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst most Poles made every effort to adapt to their new environments, few were prepared to let their children lose a sense of Polish culture and history. Hence, the Polish Saturday school movement came into being, formed in 1948-9. By 1960 there were 150 functioning Polish schools, attended by 5,000 children, which was a third of the 16,000 children estimated to have been born to émigrés since 1944.<sup>24</sup>

The education of Polish adults was encouraged, but long working hours left little time for learning and, in unskilled work, a poor grasp of English was proving less of an obstacle than was feared as often a few phrases sufficed. An understanding of English was required where safety depended on it, and in this respect, the National Coal Board organised English lessons as part of its training scheme for Polish miners.

Sword writes that attending classes after an exhausting day at work was a barrier to learning English, but also, there was little incentive for language learning whilst many Poles remained unsure about whether or not to settle in Britain; a situation which contrasts with Sword's earlier assertion that better living conditions in Britain suspended thoughts of return.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, settling away from Poland was not the preferred option for most, nor was entering British society their only concern. In Poland, survivors of the war were living under a regime imposed by Stalin and, as émigrés feared for the well-being of their loved ones, a priority for many was to extricate families. The position of Poland's new government was that all Poles should return to their homeland rather than have their families join them abroad; it was also aware that the division of families would motivate repatriation and, undoubtedly, many did return for this

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p277. Also see W.Tomaszewski, *In the Dark Days of 1941: Fifty years of the Polish School of Medicine 1941-1991*, (Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp277-278.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp38-39.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp390-392.

reason. It had been possible for some dependants to be brought out of Poland in the confused period after the communist take-over, but the majority of émigrés faced stark choices; resume family life in Poland, wait for the political situation to improve and hope that reunion would be possible, or find a new partner and begin life again, with or without divorce from a previous spouse.

Further misery was inflicted on Polish arrivals to Britain as, following years of separation, many had no idea of the whereabouts of their loved-ones, or knew whether they were alive or dead. Hence, in the years after the war there began the laborious and painful processes of trying to trace people. The émigré newspaper, *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily), published appeals for information about lost relatives for many years.

Sword notes that not all remarriages on the basis that a previous spouse was dead were entirely honest and bigamy was not unknown. Although cases of bigamy were not necessarily clear-cut since single men released from Soviet captivity in order to fight had often claimed they were married to help women and children escape. However, at the end of the war these false marriages were on record and no 'wife' was available to corroborate the story. The only solution for chaplains was to get those concerned to sign an oath pledging that they were unmarried.<sup>26</sup>

In 1951, the Home Office recorded that the Polish population in Britain had a male gender bias of 3:1. However, women were not distributed evenly throughout the country as their settlement was influenced by availability of accommodation and employment. In Gloucestershire, large Polish family hostels attracted a high proportion of females (forty two per cent of Poles registered), and in Bradford, women found work in the textile industry.<sup>27</sup> Hence, some areas had few women and Polish men tended to marry British women, with an advantage of gaining an entrée into British life. Others preferred to wait for a Polish woman in order to maintain links with their culture and bring up children as Poles, and many found wives after the 1956 political 'thaw' in Poland. Despite inadequate financial means, Poles started families quickly in the immediate post-war period, which Sword states was to replace children lost in the war, but equally reflected a need to return to 'normal' living

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp397-400.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp449-451.

amidst a secure family environment. By Spring 1947, an average of five children a day were being born to families in the PRC, and around six to seven thousand children had already been born in Britain.

The years of settlement are well reflected within the pages of the *Dziennik Polski* and Sword frequently refers to articles from this newspaper. The *Dziennik* first went to print in 1940 as the mouthpiece of the Polish government but, after the war, its emphasis shifted from political news items to reporting problems of resettlement and adjustment to British life. The newspaper was an important link between dispersed Poles and their organisational centre in London and, despite occasional expressions of concern from British authorities regarding the ideological tone of the *Dziennik*, Sword concludes that it made a positive contribution to the problem of resettlement.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst a reading of the Polish press might have suggested political cohesion amongst émigrés, the true picture was less positive. When recognition of the Polish government in London was withdrawn, the exiled command received the overwhelming support of the majority of Poles in the West, and many in Poland. However, with no diplomatic recognition or any immediate prospect of regaining power in Poland, the political elite began to disintegrate into squabbling factions. Sword writes that the only beneficiary of this weakened position was the regime in Warsaw. As the political problems of the Government-in-Exile became ever more chaotic, its legitimacy was undermined and many émigrés turned their backs on exile politics.<sup>29</sup>

Since the majority of Polish émigrés in Britain were Roman Catholic it might be thought that the church exercised a controlling influence over them. Yet, the work of the church was taking place in a socially unstable environment and priests were dealing with situations for which they had no training; they were also attempting to organise parishes in a country whose language and culture was unfamiliar to them. The predominance of young men in the PRC also presented a problem; alcohol, gambling and mixing with the “wrong sort of female company” were favoured pastimes. By 1947, the mammoth task of organising the Poles had fallen to two hundred Polish R.C chaplains in Britain, who were as traumatised by their

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp402-411.

<sup>29</sup> Sword, op. cit., 1996, pp31-34.

experiences as their parishioners, but who were expected to cope with psychological problems requiring specialist attention.<sup>30</sup>

The Roman Catholic church is the largest Polish religious body in Britain, but not the only one. Of the 102,000 Poles registered with the PRC in 1948, eighty six per cent were Roman Catholic, under four per cent were Greek Catholic, just over four per cent were Orthodox, just over four per cent were Protestant and nearly two per cent were Jewish. In addition, a very small number of Polish Moslems had settled in Britain. Sword writes that the tendency for non-Catholic Poles to be omitted from historical and sociological studies is because minority groups generally separated from the Catholic community to form their own organisational structures.<sup>31</sup>

With regard to Polish societies, clubs and associations, Sword states that they played an extremely important psychological role during the period of dislocation and atomisation of the Polish military. Examining non-political, voluntary associations that emerged alongside the Catholic organisations, he states that the most striking feature of the associations that emerged was their abundance. Forty two bodies belonged to the Federation of Poles in Great Britain in 1953 and these organisations assisted the adjustment of Poles by providing social space for them. Additionally, the organisations provided “rewarding and prestigious roles” for ‘declassified’ members of the community.

Of the military organisations, the most well-known is the Association of Polish Ex-Combatants (Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów - SPK) whose origins date back to 1945 and the Government-in-Exile’s loss of allied recognition. Many members of the armed forces were determined to play a more active role in deciding their own fate and made it a priority to promote self-help. Hence, the association came into being whilst its members were still in uniform; it was intended to protect their interests and help them to adjust to a new non-military life.<sup>32</sup> Sword asserts that there can be no doubt about the political-ideological character of the organisation, whose aims before

---

<sup>30</sup> Sword, *op. cit.*, 1989, pp428-431.

<sup>31</sup> Statistical source: S.Patterson, “Polish London” in R. Glass (ed.), *London: Aspects of Change* (London, 1963). *Ibid.*, p453.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp440-441.

independence were: “Maintaining and realising among the Polish diaspora and other nations of the world the idea of a free and independent Poland”.<sup>33</sup>

In the long term, the SPK aimed to preserve Polish cultural values and resist assimilation but in the early days it concentrated on disseminating news and information, producing its own newsletter and running a press information bureau. The SPK liaised with British departments and acted as a pressure group in cases of discrimination against Polish workers. Additionally, it started businesses employing Poles and purchased social club premises.<sup>34</sup>

Sword concluded that by 1950 the Polish community in Britain had assumed the proportions and characteristics that were to determine its existence for the next generation. Those who had decided to stay were busy making a new life whilst those who decided to leave had generally done so by that time.<sup>35</sup> In 1956, when the political situation in Poland eased following Stalin’s death, émigrés around the world began to hope that a turning point had been reached. A spirit of hope grew that closer contact with families would be possible, although this was tempered by sceptics who expected the ‘thaw’ to be short-lived, believing it to be a communist manoeuvre to induce the émigré population to drop its guard. However, in the short term, restrictions on movement to and from Poland were relaxed and people were able to visit relatives. Conversely, it became possible to leave Poland, which resulted in the growth of émigré numbers in Britain.

Sword records that in 1955, 2,000 émigrés left Poland, whilst the following year saw 33,000 leave; between 1956 and 1960, the number of Poles leaving Poland reached 585,200. The destinations of the outflow are not stated, except to say that only a relatively small percentage settled in Britain, for example, in 1957, 148,500 left Poland and 10,868 entered Britain. The influx drained the finances of the Polish community since Poles used their saving to bring over family members.<sup>36</sup>

The new arrivals made important changes to the Polish community’s gender imbalance, easing the problem of the shortage of marital partners. The *Dziennik* even

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p442.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp440–443.

<sup>35</sup> Sword, op. cit., 1989, p82.

<sup>36</sup> Sword op cit., 1996, p40.

ran advertisements for husbands, albeit many were placed in the hope of gaining the right to stay permanently in Britain by marrying a British citizen.<sup>37</sup>

During this time there were also reunions of marriage partners parted since the war, and introductions to grown up children. Not all reunions were successful, however, and some wives returned to Poland after finding their husbands fundamentally changed by their wartime experiences, exile and age.

Poles who made the journey to Poland in the late fifties returned with eye-witness accounts of communism and reported on the endurability of socialism, but few were prepared to accept that it was legitimate or represented the views of the Polish people. To return to Poland during this period was not a decision that was taken lightly as a visit to the homeland compromised principles and political exile status. Additionally, a passport was needed and applying for British citizenship was a major decision for a group who emphatically asserted their exile status and their Polish nationality. Émigré political authorities, political parties and social organisations, such as the SPK, strongly advised against naturalisation. Indeed, the Polish Scouting Association (ZHP) removed two long-serving guide leaders from their posts after they travelled to Poland.

Nevertheless, travel to Poland became an increasingly regular occurrence, particularly for people with children and for those indifferent to émigré politics. Sword notes, however, that the tendency towards indifference ought not to be exaggerated, since a visit by Nikita Khrushchev (First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party) to Britain in 1956 incited a 20,000 strong march in London and prompted a 55,000 signature petition of protest.

As people increasingly trickled back to Poland for holidays, it became more difficult for émigré authors to write in wholly negative terms about Soviet Poland. Despite poor material conditions, visitors saw a flourishing cultural tradition and a government which was attempting to eradicate illiteracy and replace the intelligentsia lost during the war. The ability of émigrés to view Poland for themselves weakened the émigré establishment's control over information, and as publications arrived from

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



Poland, their restrictive stance regarding news of contemporary Poland became less tenable. Increased contact with Poland also encouraged business opportunities, particularly in the parcel trade.

A further flow of people out of Poland took place in the years 1968-72 due to a purge against the cultural intelligentsia. The paradox of these expulsions is that the Soviets released into the outside world people with first hand knowledge of the realities of Communist rule, some of whom found jobs in the media and moved in literary circles, and their knowledge informed the second-hand knowledge that émigrés had already obtained via letters and other written sources.

By the late 1960s and 1970s the 'second generation' were starting their own families and Sword regards this period as a landmark decade as whilst new 'Poles' were being born, the old guard were dying; General Bór-Komorowski was lost to the community in 1966 and General Anders in 1970. Many of the first generation were also in their late eighties, which did nothing for the growing impression that the Government-in-Exile was a club of elderly men playing politics.<sup>38</sup>

Away from politics, Polish community organisations were thriving in the sixties; a high point of the decade being national celebrations for the 1966 Millennium marking one thousand years of the Polish state. The decade also saw the commencement of a building intended as a Polish Social and Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, known as POSK, that became a national focal point for cultural and political events and took over from the Polish Hearth as the repository for culture.<sup>39</sup>

In October 1978, international attention was particularly focused on Poland when a Polish Pope was elected. His subsequent return to Poland the following year was the trigger for a series of events which culminated in the emergence of the independent trade union, Solidarity. With the first cracks in the Soviet structure appearing, Sword writes that Poland suddenly became 'fashionable' with the world's news media, and young people of Polish origin in Britain and elsewhere could feel a pride in their roots and become involved in supporting the opposition in Poland.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp41-47.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p48. Also in London, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum contain a mass of Polish memorabilia and huge archives which contain virtually all the files of the Polish Government-in-Exile.

On 13 December 1981, Martial Law was imposed in Poland since the Jaruzelski regime attempted to halt the movement towards democracy and pluralism that was accompanying Solidarity's protests. The events of this era led to a further wave of 'political emigration' as people fled Poland, although the British authorities were reluctant to give them the right to permanent residence. Sword had difficulty arriving at a figure for the number of Poles who entered Britain during this time due to discrepancies in available figures, and cites Kurcz and Podkanski who suggest that between 1983 and 1989 some 6,305 Poles were allowed to remain in the United Kingdom. That the figure is not larger is attributed to the cautious, if not restrictive, policy of the British government towards temporary visitors from Poland. In addition, it was expensive to enter Britain.<sup>40</sup>

The events in Poland in December 1981 stimulated the Polish community in Britain to come to the aid of their homeland, and Sword writes that there was probably a greater level of community and organisational mobilisation for political goals than at any time since the 1950s. The émigré community were involved in fund-raising and campaigning and organisations came into being which provided material and moral support, and publicity, to the banned Solidarity trade union. A highly publicised related event of the period was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain in May 1982. His address in London's Crystal Palace stadium assured the assembled mass that they were still a part of Poland and that their contributions were recognised and remembered; a statement which drew an enthusiastic response from the émigré audience.<sup>41</sup>

The presence abroad of a strong voice of opposition that the Communist authorities could not control was an irritant to them, although they felt confident that they could consolidate their hold on power and outlive their elderly exiled opponents. However, the exiles outlived the communist regime since, in 1989, the Soviet system in Poland fell. Immediately, the relationship between the homeland and the émigré community was transformed as members of Poland's post-Communist government consulted western leaders and the new Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, acknowledged émigrés by meeting community members in London.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp49-51. Z.Kurcz and W.Podkanski, "Emigracja z Polski po 1980 roku", in *Nowa emigracja I wyjazdy zawodowe za granice*, (Wroclaw, 1991), p72.

<sup>41</sup> See page 26 for extract of this speech.

Sword writes that the Poles watched the process of economic and political transition in Poland with a mixture of pride, excitement, disbelief and frustration. However, for the émigré community, the new situation led to self-evaluation. Whilst they were satisfied that they had completed their service to their country, which now recognised their role and invited them back for marches and commemorative reunions, there was no longer any need for a Government-in-Exile; “their day had gone”. In a symbolic ceremony on 22 December 1991, the last President in Exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, made the journey to Poland to formally hand over his office and the Polish insignia which had been kept in London since 1941, to his successor.<sup>42</sup>

Kaczorowski met with Government-in-Exile officials before his departure to agree the winding up of the exile government, which took place over the ensuing months. It was determined that financial reserves, including income earned from the sale of property, would be used to provide help for Polish educational, cultural and scientific ventures both in Poland and abroad.

The emigracja’s role as a political opposition body had come to an end in 1989, but it could reflect on its numerous achievements with pride; it had developed a significant organisational infrastructure to cater for its members needs and interests, and had promoted Polish history and culture by the publication of thousands of books, pamphlets, articles and via lectures.

However, Sword explained that whilst the community had developed from military beginnings, and had been shaped through the years by the struggle for independence and a strong desire to maintain its traditions, culture, history and Christian values, the events of 1989 did not bring about the demise of its organisations. The political struggle was over, but there was still much work for Polish community bodies to do. With The Federation of Poles in Great Britain in place at the head of the community, the 1990s witnessed the continuance of émigré fund raising activities, with a renewed emphasis on providing aid for the reborn Republic of Poland.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Sword op cit., 1996, pp52-55.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp55-56.

#### 4.4 Part Two: Polish community narratives

What to do with the Poles? The general idea was that we should go back. Ernest Bevin who was Foreign Secretary, he advise us to do so. But the Poles were determined they wouldn't go back to Poland, they demanded that the allies do something for their comrades in arms who were fighting on every front and the Battle of Britain... the Poles thought that something was owing to them so eventually the government decided to organise the Resettlement Corps.<sup>44</sup>

The British government decided in March 1946 that the Polish Armed Forces should be disbanded and it was announced that Poles would be urged to return to Poland. In a message to all members of the Polish forces under British Command, Bevin wrote:

[The British Government] consider it to be the duty of all members of the Polish Armed Forces who possibly can do so to return to their home country without further delay under the conditions now offered them in order that they may make their contribution to the restoration of the prosperity of liberated Poland. Only thus can they serve their country in a manner worthy of her great traditions.<sup>45</sup>

The new Labour administration, and particularly Bevin, aimed to break with Churchill's policy of continuing and strengthening the Anglo-American alliance, to counter what he perceived as the increasingly aggressive threat posed by Russia. Bevin was initially more inclined to take on the role of 'honest broker; to be a mediating force between East and West.<sup>46</sup> However, the perspective of the Polish troops differed somewhat:

Bevin wrote a letter to each Polish soldier, advising them to go back to Poland, although it was under occupation... Everybody read this letter and laughed at it. Very funny.<sup>47</sup>

The communist government in Warsaw was also keen for the Polish army to return to Poland. Gula writes that it spread propaganda through the media and newspapers in

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 9, pp2-3.

<sup>45</sup> "Message from the British Foreign Secretary (Ernest Bevin) to all members of the Polish forces under British command (House of Commons, 20 March 1946)", reproduced in J. Zubrzycki, *Soldiers and Peasants: The Sociology of Polish Migration*, (London, 1988), pp141-142.

<sup>46</sup> Sword op cit., 1989, p214.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst, Kent), 31 October 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 4, p39.

Britain and Italy in an attempt to engender hatred towards the Poles.<sup>48</sup> Zamoyski also asserts that: “The new Labour government of Clement Attlee felt little sympathy for what many of its supporters called the Polish ‘Fascists’”.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the Poles interpreted Bevin’s address as, “you’ve got a friend in Stalin, so go home”.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.5 Return to Poland or stay in Britain?

The allies somehow managed to persuade Stalin that he ought to have this free election in Poland, which was duly organised and the answer was that the Polish people wanted communist government, of course it was rigged. But that was it. So now we said, ‘no, we’re not going to such a Poland’.<sup>51</sup>

\*

I *did* want to go back but I thought - I can’t. I can’t stand them. Because a lot of my friends from the Home Army were killed and persecuted by them.<sup>52</sup>

For most Poles, the decision to remain in Britain was political since a return to Poland would have appeared as a ‘vote’ in favour of Stalin. However, there were also fears for personal safety:

I wanted to go back but friends say, ‘For goodness sake, don’t go back because you’ll be arrested there’. If you go there and they know you escaped from the Russians they will take you to jail... I didn’t go back at all. I have never been back.<sup>53</sup>

\*

A good friend of mine, with whom I had many conversations before he decided to go, he was of this opinion that we ought to go and fight from within. He stayed in the forces about a year or eighteen months and they accused him of working against the state and he was executed... many, many were sent to concentration camps and no one heard of them since.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> J.Gula, *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exile Community in Great Britain*, (Dorset, 1993), p146.

<sup>49</sup> A.Zamoyski, *The Forgotten Few: The Polish Air Force in the Second World War*, (London, 1995), p203.

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication with Mrs K (Nottingham), 10 April 1996.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 9, p2.

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 20 April 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mr St (Bradford), 21 January 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 20, p4.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 9, p2.

Indeed, sixteen Polish Underground leaders were brought to trial in Moscow in 1945, “accused of a series of offences against the law of the Russian Republic”.<sup>55</sup> The response of the Polish government in London was that the charges were fantastic: “The most monstrous of them was the allegation of connivance with the Germans”.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, General Okulicki, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Home Army, was sentenced to ten years in captivity; Stanislaw Jankowski, Vice-Premier in Poland of the London Polish Government, received eight years; and Stanislaw Jasukowicz, a member of the council, got five years. Sentences were also given to nine of the remaining accused men.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.6 Origins of the Polish community in Britain

The Polish Forces in Britain sent a clear message to the British government; there would be no wholesale repatriation of Poles. However, as Britain was a country with an acute labour shortage and badly in need of reconstruction after the war, the government soon recognised that the well-organized Polish mass could be usefully employed. Hence, from being an awkward problem, the Poles became a vital labour source. There was also an opinion that the recruitment of foreign labour would reduce trade union power. However, despite this, the TUC agreed to the employment of foreigners, but stipulated that they should not be hired where British workers were available and that local trade unions must be consulted beforehand.<sup>58</sup> Paul has also suggested that Britain’s declining birth rate was a motivation for offering settlement terms to the Poles who, as white Europeans, could blend into the population and eventually become assimilated British citizens.<sup>59</sup>

The majority of Polish troops in Britain enrolled for the two year Polish Resettlement Corps option,<sup>60</sup> with the remainder returning to Poland, re-emigrating to countries

---

<sup>55</sup> “Moscow trial concluded: Varying sentences of captivity”, in *The Times*, Friday 22 June, 1945, p3.

<sup>56</sup> “London Poles and the Moscow trial”, in *The Times*, Saturday 3 June, 1945, p3.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times* op cit., Friday 22 June, 1945, p3. A Polish documentary video, *Szesnastu* (Sixteen Leaders), tells of the trial and imprisonment of Polish Home Army leaders in post-war Poland. Date unknown. ZEM Software Ltd.

<sup>58</sup> See R.Miles and D.Kay, “The TUC, Foreign Labour and the Labour Government 1945-1951,” in *Immigrants and Minorities*, March 1990, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp85-108. Poles were a significant part of a 345,000 strong foreign workforce in post-war Britain, which also included Ukrainians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavians and Italian and German POWs.

<sup>59</sup> K.Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Post-war Era*, (New York, 1997), pp64-89.

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 6 for Conditions of Service in the PRC, as issued to officers.

such as Canada, Australia, Argentina and the USA, or making their way independently into British society.

Aside from 8,000 “recalcitrants” who would neither accept British resettlement terms nor return to Poland,<sup>61</sup> the majority of Poles in resettlement camps around Britain were compelled to accept their fate, although it has been said that many a suitcase stayed packed, “just in case”.<sup>62</sup>

...And suddenly after two years they said, ‘finish, no more army, now you have to disappear into the English community and do whatever you like’... And it was very hard. Everything was on the ration you see, and now we are civilian, what to do? We didn’t even know the language.<sup>63</sup>

Memories of wartime trauma and loss coupled with post-war disillusionment and bitterness engendered affinity between people who, in different circumstances, might have had little in common. Whilst comfort was often lacking in the camps, for many they offered an empathetic environment and a degree of security, and the prospect of leaving was daunting. Hence, the self-help role that Polish organisations were to play was crucial. However, it was the political stance of the Government-in-Exile that predominantly shaped community identity, as it worked at generating a strong and unified opposition to the Soviet regime in Poland:

The aims of the Government-in-Exile were to work for independence, work for truth over the Katyń massacre, to help the people of Poland and keep Polish people in Poland informed via Radio Free Europe and the BBC.<sup>64</sup>

These objectives received emphatic support from many émigrés who believed that it was their duty to safeguard ‘true Polish’ culture, language, religion and traditions.

---

<sup>61</sup> By 1949 these people had either accepted their fate in Britain, re-emigrated or were repatriated. See K. Sword, “‘Their Prospects will not be Bright’: British Responses to the Problem of the Polish ‘Recalcitrants’ 1946-49”, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, 1986 pp367-390.

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with Mrs K (Nottingham), 10 April 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Chislehurst, Kent), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 12, p6.

<sup>64</sup> Personal communication with R. Kaczorowski, Ex-President of the Polish Government-in-Exile (July 1989 to December 1990), 19 February 1998.

Indeed, that they should lay “the foundations for a large and ideological community - a Poland beyond Poland.”<sup>65</sup>

There was a very strong binding force; it wasn't just that there was a single reason, it was also that flame of independence, the desire to maintain truth, historical truth as well as contemporary truth, and all that was seen as a very strong and binding mission.<sup>66</sup>

Not all interviewees recalled positive feelings for the work of the Government-in-Exile, although the following opinion has rarely been offered:

[Government-in-Exile] ...were recognised only by Vatican and other recognised patriots... but they didn't do anything, they were not serious. They always remembered a past, our previous times, a century ago, when they were very important. I don't know, I am Polish patriot, but not for this government here. I am very sorry to say it, but they weren't serious people... For instance, why we have Minister of Defence, what defence? Who is attacking? Many people in Poland didn't even know that a Government-in-Exile existed... it was a symbol.<sup>67</sup>

In Scotland in 1954, a number of Poles lost interest in community life after a leadership crisis created political factions. In Edinburgh, Glasgow and Falkirk, social centres opened in opposition to the SPK. The disputes were relatively short lived but highlight that community unity cannot be presupposed.<sup>68</sup>

On the whole, Polish organisations enabled the Government-in-Exile to maintain influence amongst demobbed Poles; the largest of these being the Ex-Combatant's Association (SPK) whose network of social clubs appeared from Aberdeen to Plymouth.

A political agenda was certainly evident in these institutions. In Huddersfield, “maintaining and realising the concept of an independent and free Poland” was

---

<sup>65</sup> Unpublished paper by T.Kondracki, “The Polish Ex-Combatants Association (SPK) 1946-1994”. 1994. Copy in possession of M Winslow.

<sup>66</sup> BHRU: B0191/01B/35.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 31 October 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 39, p11.

<sup>68</sup> T.Kernberg, “The Polish Community in Scotland”, PhD thesis, Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, University of Glasgow, October 1990. pxi.



central to the local SPK's existence. Amongst its political activities were organised protests against the visits to Britain of Nikolai Bulganin (Soviet Prime Minister 1955-58) and Nikita Khrushchev (First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party 1953-1964 and Soviet Prime Minister 1958-1964). Objections were also raised to a concert given by the Russian Army Choir in Huddersfield and, "the showing of films from Poland which spread false propaganda and against any form of communist infiltration".<sup>69</sup> Equally, the purpose of the Ex-Combatant's clubs nationally was to provide a familiar and supportive environment:

One escape was that we organised Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association, which is national. In every town you have a club, which was a place where they could meet, exchange information, probably grumble a bit... got hot meal, one good meal a week, and then reinforced with the vodka, with a few vodkas inside, went back to tackle next week.<sup>70</sup>

The ease with which Polish clubs became established in their locales varied between regions. For example, a wartime hospitality scheme placed several hundred Polish soldiers in the homes of Bradford people, creating friendships that caused many to remain in the city.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, when a Polish couple were granted a council house in the city in 1950, an uproar was generated in the letters column of the local newspaper.<sup>72</sup> In Reading, however, the local Irish community were particularly accommodating towards the Poles:

The Polish Ex-Combatants Association was a prime model of any social life for Poles in any congregation. It started obviously in camps but then it moved into Reading in 1951. I'm one that joined in 1951... eventually we came to a membership of about two hundred and fifteen people... there was an Irish club, Irish Catholic club, and they agreed to give us the top of their premises for our purposes. We moved a library there, such as it was, from the camp, and we could hold meetings there and things like that...

---

<sup>69</sup> I.Krzyzanowska, "A brief account of Polish Ex-Combatants Branch No.440 in Huddersfield 1948-1998", in *SPK 1948-1998: Kola Nr.440 Huddersfield*, p21. Produced by the Polish Ex-Combatant's Association in 1998 to commemorate fifty years of the SPK in Huddersfield.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 9, p4.

<sup>71</sup> M.Bülbring, "Post-war refugees in Great Britain", in *Population Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1954-55, Part Two, Nov. 1954, pp 99-112.

<sup>72</sup> J.Hanson, "Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility: British attitudes to non-repatriable Poles and Ukrainians after the Second World War and to the Hungarian refugees of 1956", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, pp329-330.

We would also go and hire Huntley and Palmer's even, or Railway Hotel when we had to...<sup>73</sup>

A less helpful reception awaited the SPK branch that formed in Sheffield's Wood Lane PRC camp at Wadsley in December 1947.<sup>74</sup> It was refused permission by the local council to turn potential premises into an Ex-Combatant's club. This refusal caused especial concern amongst Polish leaders as they believed that in the absence of a social centre directed by Government-in-Exile politics, young Poles were being influenced by an alternative political group:

There was a Polish cell of communism in Sheffield, in the east end, Attercliffe, sent from Poland under the name of Cultural Centre. And as they had a local centre people would come, have a cup of coffee, buy some cigarettes or sausage maybe. So they attracted people who had nothing to do with communism. Of course, some where converted, but most of them just went there because they had nowhere to go. They lived in digs in a foreign country, couldn't speak language, worked hard, they were young and they wanted some entertainment.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, a communist sponsored British-Polish Cultural Society had established itself in Sheffield and had recruited 550 members by the summer of 1948.<sup>76</sup> In the rest of Britain, Polish secret services were also making contact with émigrés in an attempt to persuade them to return to Poland, and it was common for pamphlets to be distributed informing Poles of the good life to be had there. In June 1951, thirteen secret service agents in Britain were served with deportation notices.<sup>77</sup>

Some émigrés hold the opinion that the refusal of repeated applications for a club in Sheffield in the late forties and early fifties had much to do with local politics at the time:

---

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 49, p16.

<sup>74</sup> W. Szablewski, "A short history of the Polish Ex-Combatant's Association 439th Branch, Sheffield." October 1997. Unpublished paper. Copy in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p1. Also, The London Information Bureau for Military Affairs of the Citizens' Committee for Poles (communist organisation based in London) called for Poles to return to Poland. It issued propaganda stating that as many as 90-100% of many émigré military units had chosen to return. Zubrzycki op cit., 1988, pp137-138.

<sup>76</sup> J. Hanson, "Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, pp347-348.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p169.

In Sheffield... well, people generally, they were sympathetic towards the Russians and hence the communists... and the Poles who stayed in this country after the war, the soldiers who were demobbed, were kind of a thorn in the flesh of the Russians... who spent a lot of money, not only here but in other countries, to break us up, but they never succeeded... they felt very uncomfortable with us here.<sup>78</sup>

Others deny local politics had anything to do with their application being turned down: "The problem was not because the council favoured 'Uncle Joe'",<sup>79</sup> rather that the proposed social club and the small Polish businesses it intended to support nearby (hairdressers, tailors etc.) were unacceptable in the residential area favoured by SPK representatives. It has also been suggested that there was some intolerance of foreigners arriving en masse: "They didn't know who Poles were and what they were doing here".<sup>80</sup> Supporting the argument that objections were for reasons other than the premises being in a residential area, the Federation of Poles in Great Britain wrote in 1983 that Sheffield's attitude was:

...worse than unfriendly. When an SPK representative asked about the possibility of creating a Polish Club, he was given to understand that the SPK should not count on any help from the local authorities and indeed that a licence for such a club would not be issued.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, when an Ex-Servicemen's club was eventually opened in 1954 by the Lord Mayor, his speech overlooked the aforementioned difficulties:

I am proud that the City of Sheffield has such a big Polish family and I ask you to preserve and nurture your language and your traditions. Do not allow yourselves to lose your identity as you settle within our society. Your culture enriches ours and ours enriches yours. Your courage and faith in a better future is a wonderful lesson to us all.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p1.

<sup>79</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sz, 4 November 1999.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Quotation originates from a ten-page document, "Polskie Uchodźstwo Wojenne w Polnocnej Anglii", produced around 1983. Sword, op. cit., 1996, p36.

<sup>82</sup> S. Dudnik and F.M. Milarski, *10-Lecie SPK Sheffield*, 1964, p3. Publication to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the SPK in Sheffield. Translation by W. Szablewski.

## 4.7 Religion and the Polish community

In 1962, a Polish Catholic Centre opened next door to the SPK in Sheffield, reflecting the national pattern of the Roman Catholic Church and the Ex-Servicemen's clubs becoming the centre of Polish community life in Britain:

The Catholic church is absolutely vital to the organisation of the Polish community here... My family's always had a very open attitude to religion, so in no way can we be described as fanatical Catholics in that sense, but it's terribly deep-rooted. Because, with Poland having been an occupied country for so long, or through being in exile, the Polish church was always the Catholic church... it is one and the same thing.<sup>83</sup>

\*

What keeps Poles together? I think probably religion. Religion, yes. Because right from very young childhood, parents are trying to bring them up properly in religion. As they grow older they go to Catholic school, even in England they go to Catholic school. They are very, very, strong believers you see.<sup>84</sup>

However, not all Poles believe that the Roman Catholic church is fundamental to Polish identity:

Yes, I have kept on with Polish traditions, only I am not religious. I don't believe... Many people are believers because they are afraid, they don't know what will be after death... If they believe it's their own business not mine. I am old, I saw a lot of deaths... and for years I was a believer, of course, but after war, I started thinking... this fight, what for?<sup>85</sup>

Other motivations have also prompted withdrawal from religious life:

I'm Catholic and my husband is Lutheran... and when we wanted to get married I wanted to have the ceremony in the Polish church, with the Polish Catholic priest, and it was very surprising that the priest didn't want to do that. He didn't agree to do the wedding... so we had to go to English Catholic priest, and he didn't see any difficulties

---

<sup>83</sup> BHRU: B0191/01B/32.

<sup>84</sup> Interview, 14 May 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 26, p10. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Mrs C (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 15, p5.

at all... I haven't got much interest in Polish church now, maybe that encounter wasn't very pleasant.<sup>86</sup>

Nor is the culture of all Christian Polish émigrés rooted in Roman Catholicism, as the following observation confirms:

I'm the only Polish Lutheran Minister north from Birmingham, so I serve places like Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Preston and Newcastle on Tyne, that's the parish, and then I used to go six times a year to Glasgow and Edinburgh... We started a Polish Lutheran Youth movement and we had meetings and festivals and children's camp... also teaching kids Polish.<sup>87</sup>

Despite their differing affiliations, Polish religious centres, together with other Polish clubs and associations, provided a solid community base for Poles and inside their doors they could put aside the problems of the outside world for a few hours. However, they had to live and work in British society where initially, as aliens, they were offered unattractive employment opportunities and faced hostility.

#### **4.8 Accommodation and employment**

The settlement pattern of Poles tends to correlate with areas where Polish forces were stationed during the war, or where resettlement camps were located. Hence, airmen tended to settle in Nottingham, Leicester, Blackpool and south-east England, and naval personnel in Portsmouth, Plymouth, Cardiff and other ports. The exception to this trend was in Scotland, the wartime home of most of the Polish Army in the West. Whilst approximately 40,000 Poles were stationed in Scotland during the war, just 9,250 were resident there in 1951. The availability of employment influenced where Poles would settle, however, accounts agree that unskilled work was readily available after the war, whereas finding accommodation was a problem. Hence, settlement patterns were dictated largely by the availability of accommodation:<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> BHRU: B0081/01/21.

<sup>87</sup> BHRU: B0071/01/11.

<sup>88</sup> S.Patterson, "The Polish Exile Community in Britain", in *The Polish Review*, Vol.VI, no.3, 1961, pp76-77.

First house together was in Pontefract because we couldn't get a house in Sheffield, they wouldn't give you a room with child. It was very hard to get a room, them days, 1949.<sup>89</sup>

Even single men and women struggled to find accommodation, as highlighted by Sheffield's local newspaper, *The Star*, in 1947:

The announcement that Polish craftsmen, badly needed in Sheffield industries, are refusing to come to the city because of difficulty in getting lodgings draws attention again to the grave shortage of accommodation for single men and women... There must be hundreds of families with accommodation who do not let it... Even a 'bed and breakfast' arrangement, though a long way from ideal, would solve the problem for many...<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the 'bed and breakfast' solution was far from ideal. Commenting further on accommodation problems *The Star* reported in 1948 that, "one trouble is that there is still prejudice on the part of many landladies against Poles".<sup>91</sup> In addition, lodgings were not always as comfortable as they might be, rents were high and strict rules were often imposed regarding periods when lodgers were allowed on the premises:

I came to Sheffield, work forty four hours a week for four pounds two and six. Lodgings cost me two pounds, then after insurance, tram fare, dinner in canteen, I have ten shillings left... Lodgings I got in Attercliffe Common, there was twenty two of us staying there. You can sleep for an hour till bugs found you, and that was it.<sup>92</sup>

\*

They were living sometimes in very bad conditions, accommodation, in one room... they couldn't do anything in the lodging so they meet on the corner, around the church or in the parks, and some of them, especially the older ones who left family in Poland show kind of a stress, they didn't know if they done the right thing coming here.<sup>93</sup>

In some cases, efforts to send money home to relatives in Poland exacerbated hardship:

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mrs So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 40, p14.

<sup>90</sup> 'Commentary' in *The Star*, Saturday 19 April, 1947, p2.

<sup>91</sup> R. Hankinson, "Here to aid us, but they feel unwanted", in *The Star*, Tuesday 2 March, 1948, p2.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Mr G (Sheffield), 2 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 11, p6.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Mr and Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 10, p1.

Many of them were sending a lot of parcels and money to family in Poland when they found them, and here they were living on fish and chips, or bigos. They couldn't go anywhere, they lived in a bad condition.<sup>94</sup>

As newly weds, the Polish airman who provided this testimony, and his English bride were compelled to live in hotel accommodation, which drained their financial resources:

We couldn't find accommodation, in fact, to the extent that at one time we were living in the Queen's Head Hotel in Chesterfield because there was no accommodation; we paid a pound a day each bed and breakfast, and in those days that was money. I was getting £4.50 a week and because I had about £200 after leaving the forces, we managed for a time.<sup>95</sup>

The national housing shortage, poor quality accommodation, a will for personal independence and a desire to put down roots motivated Poles to take out mortgages as soon as they were able. Some houses were bought with a business opportunity in mind by potential Polish landlords, others bought their properties as a home for their families. However, high outgoings and the difficulty of paying for mortgages and higher purchase repayments pressurised many new home-owners into letting out rooms:<sup>96</sup>

I got married and went to live in Oxford... We were very poor people when we marry after the war. We bought a house and kept lodgers to earn money.<sup>97</sup>

Families growing up with strangers in the house is a common memory amongst the Polish 'second generation':

First one I actually remember was an Indian man, I'd be about nine and he was... visiting steel works in Sheffield... Then later on we had Polish lodgers, obviously. They were with us for a long time, there was three and one moved to Barnsley. And during

---

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p4.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Mr and Mrs RR (Chesterfield), 31 January 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 18, p1.

<sup>96</sup> For further reading on Polish landlords see S. Patterson, *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain 1960-1967*, (Oxford, 1969).

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Mrs C (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 15, p1.

the Hungarian Uprising we had two young Hungarian lads who came to stop for a while. It was a way of earning for my mother I think, taking in lodgers...<sup>98</sup>

The mother of the previous interviewee, who was interviewed by her daughter, was prompted to recall how taking in lodgers to 'make ends meet' was not unusual after the war:

*How did you end up with the Hungarians then?*

I've no idea.

*Is it because someone knew you took foreign lodgers?*

Well, they knew that I took lodgers and I think it was Mrs Cooper who sent them from Green Road, because when I were full I sent people to her house and when she were full...

*So she used to take lodgers in as well?*

Yes.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to the distress of coming to terms with loss, struggling to make ends meet and living in poor accommodation, the émigrés, in common with other aliens, were subjected to the provisions of the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919. This act extended legislation of 1914, initiated by the outbreak of war, which empowered the government to make decisions regarding who could be prohibited from entering Britain, who could be deported and who was to have restrictions placed on where they could live or travel to. The Aliens Order 1920 also included the stipulation that all aliens must register their address and any subsequent change to it. Additionally, employment could be sought only following the issue to an employer of a permit by the Ministry of Labour; a permit that could be used only when no British labour was available.<sup>100</sup>

Interviewees have recalled, under the conditions of the act, being obliged to carry a certificate of registration, registering with the police, having to abide by local trade union terms, only being able to seek employment through the Ministry of Labour, and having to notify all changes of address:

---

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Mr Gr (Sheffield), 6 August 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 31, p3.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Mrs F and Mrs Gr (Sheffield), October 1997, recorded by T.F, Tape 28, p6.

<sup>100</sup> J.Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, (London, 1993), pp46-47.



The matter was raised in Parliament, somebody asked, 'Do you know where all those Poles and others you absorb are, have you got any record of them?'... For two years we were issued a little leaflet by police and it stated, amongst other things, restrictions. That we were not entitled to own our own businesses for first two years. And if anyone change address or get married you had to inform the police immediately.<sup>101</sup>

\*

We were really bitter about it.<sup>102</sup>

The work available to Poles was overwhelmingly unskilled and manual. Some interviewees have recalled being offered 'on the job' training, but in practice this did not always take place: "We were learning things in works; 'go and mash some tea', 'go and bring some tools', things like that".<sup>103</sup>

However, the post-war labour shortage favoured the employee and Polish workers were not compelled to remain in an unfavourable working environment:

At that time... you can pack up job at ten o' clock, two 2 o' clock you have another job, which you can't do now. And I have a few jobs, I never worked a week's notice, when I decided to leave I just leave, then and there.<sup>104</sup>

The abundance of young men without family responsibilities meant that the Polish émigré workforce was particularly mobile:

In 1947... I joined the civilian life. I started work in Leighton Buzzard and Bedford, then I work in Newbury and from there I moved to Leicester and from Leicester I came to Sheffield. At first the work was manual, not very nice jobs. They used to send us to the mines, brick yards, agriculture, things like that.<sup>105</sup>

\*

So I came out of Royal Air Force in 1948 and I started work in steel works as a labourer... I work their until about 1949. I changed that job and went to Sheffield... Dormers. I worked there until the end of '49 then I went to Rochdale because someone there asked me to help him buy a house. So I work for asbestos firm, Turners. I finish that job in 1950, August, came back to Sheffield again. Gone back to that steel works

---

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p1.

<sup>102</sup> J. Scott, "Poles apart but a part of Britain", in *Yorkshire Post*, Wednesday 5 November 1997, p8.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Mr Mj (Sheffield), 25 September 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 8, p7.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Mr G (Sheffield), 2 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 11, pp9-10.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Mr Sl (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 6, p2.

again, you know. And then it was 1962 I think, I found another job in mining machinery.<sup>106</sup>

The majority of Poles were confined to 'dirty industries' as a result of the stipulation that they only take jobs where no Briton was available, and also because of language difficulties. A further problem was that the educational standard of many Poles was low, often due to young ex-servicemen and women having had their education disrupted by war:

The worst part of it was that a lot of Poles didn't have no skills, like myself. I was too young to get any skills... my education wasn't finished. So you had to accept the jobs, whatever, like an unskilled worker.<sup>107</sup>

Some tried to continue their education in Britain, but good intentions frequently fell by the wayside:

I went to college, for Applied Science... but it become so hard... I came home from mine at half past three, had to get changed, washed, get something to eat and be at school for six... three days a week. It was hard work... and I missed going out to dances and enjoying myself, so I started neglecting it a bit and once you neglect it, especially in different language...<sup>108</sup>

Recalling lost opportunities was upsetting for the previous ex-serviceman:

I could have probably made something better of myself. I've wasted the little talent I've had just for simple manual jobs... My mother [in Poland] never knew, I could never tell her that I went down coal mine. When she did ask me what I'm doing, I told her... I told her that I'm working in an engineering firm. Never told her the truth, would have broke her heart.<sup>109</sup>

Underachievement is not uncommon amongst first generation Poles, nor is regret at the situation, and that thousands of Poles were denied an education because they were of school age during the war is tragic. However, at least they had youth on their side

---

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Mr Mj (Sheffield), 25 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 8, p1.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 4, p12.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p16.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p15.

and could generally summon enough strength of will to rebuild their lives, and many did eventually secure fulfilling employment positions. Polish ex-officers, on the other hand, tended to be older and their search for work was difficult and humiliating:

Everywhere he went for job they asked my husband, 'what is your trade?'. And he said, 'I am a professional officer', and they said, 'that's nothing'. You had to have a trade, you had to be a tailor or a bricklayer or a farm labourer.<sup>110</sup>

A number of ex-officers were absorbed into Polish organisations as managers and administrators and a few managed to recover their professional status after mastering the English language, but the sizeable remainder were de-skilled. The psychological impact of this situation was devastating and cases of depression, alcoholism and suicide were high amongst this group.

Ironically, the respect shown for the status of the following ex-Polish officer did nothing to help his position:

I remember advertisement in the paper, for job with accommodation, we didn't have accommodation. They were looking for gardener. I say, 'look Stan, cottage, you could be a gardener'. We went for job, it was at a lovely manor house, beautiful rich people, and that owner asked us in. He said, 'well, what do you do?'. Stan said, 'well, I am an officer but I would gladly be a gardener, I would do anything because of that cottage'. He was very nice man, he said, 'you are an officer, a cavalry officer, and I would be ashamed to give you such a job, I would feel very badly if you be my gardener'. So he didn't give us a job. He give us sherry.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, the general picture of Poles as manual workers is not wholly representative:

In Bradford... there was work available in textiles... it wasn't the best kind of work, but it was work... but we were offered better and better jobs. Some went on to be managers or overlookers or anything like that.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 12, p6.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> BHRU: B0086/01/17

Other émigrés mastered the language, gained qualifications and attained positions such as engineers, academics, teachers, doctors, dentists and lawyers. London, the centre of Polish political cultural life in Britain, and home to around 30,000 Poles, tended to be the focus of employment activity for the Polish ‘intelligentsia’, of the pre-war days. There were also success stories in the provinces; “...some of Sheffield’s leading light engineering firms are Polish, or have Polish managers and directors”.<sup>113</sup>

Engineering was popular amongst Poles but it was difficult to enter initially. Hanson writes that this was due to the skilled nature of the work and the attractiveness of the engineering industry to local men. In Sheffield, Polish men had further problems entering the industry due to the association of leading members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union with the Communist Party of Great Britain.<sup>114</sup>

Other Poles started their own businesses, often providing services for the Polish community and work for its members.<sup>115</sup> In Bradford, an enterprising émigré opened a watch repair business, followed by a continental delicatessen and then a salami factory; the profits from which kept his three daughters in private schooling.<sup>116</sup>

Poles in Polish businesses benefited from working in a sympathetic cultural environment and in their first language; an interviewee who spent most of his working life with a watch-making firm in Croydon recalled the “big family” atmosphere that he enjoyed there.<sup>117</sup> The same man recalled that in the society outside, attitudes could be less agreeable.

‘Bloody foreigner’... it was typical name given to us, behind our backs mostly, ‘oh, he is a bloody foreigner’.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> W.Szablewski and M.Winslow, “Polish Community Cultural Awareness: Information and Learning Pack”, Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, January 2000, p8. W.Szablewski became Deputy Chairman and Technical Director of Tyzack Son and Turner; E.Niesielski joined Sheffield Twist Drill and Steel Company in 1950 and became Director of its subsidiary company, Napier Steels, in 1968; T.Brzuzy was Director of PolBrit Engineering at the time of writing; and the Sheffield based engineering firm, PFC Industries, founded in 1988, has Polish origins.

<sup>114</sup> J.Hanson, “Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility”, PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, p321.

<sup>115</sup> A directory of Polish businesses and organisations, *Polski Informator*, is still published annually by Zjednoczenie Polskie w w. Brytanii (Organisation of Poles in Britain).

<sup>116</sup> BHRU: B0059.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Mr Ra (Croydon), 30 October 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 16, p10.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p11.

## 4.9 Hostility and discrimination

A glance at the headline of Sheffield's local newspaper on 14 May 1947, "Poles help fill city's labour gaps",<sup>119</sup> would have suggested that hostility towards Poles was being tempered as local people realised their value in the labour market. However, less than a week later, the same newspaper was declaring: "Foreign workers 'tabooed' by city foundrymen":

Italians and Poles 'The Star' was told today, are both considered unacceptable by Sheffield workers in the industry... officials believe the manpower problem can be solved with British workers alone... Sheffield firms are offering bonuses of 30s a week or more above the minimum wage to encourage ex-servicemen to return to the industry and to retain existing workers.<sup>120</sup>

Correspondingly, under the heading, "Poles should be sent home", the *Forres Gazette*, published in Peebles, reported the words of Councillor Smith in 1945 when he declared that Poles had overstayed their welcome. Aggrieved by his perception that Poles were better off than "our own fellows", the councillor called for Poles to be "shifted out of Scotland altogether".<sup>121</sup>

After the war, the Scottish people who, during the war, were very, very friendly, said 'why don't you go back to Poland? You'd be taking the job away from our lads by stopping here'.<sup>122</sup>

The favourable reception that many Poles experienced during the war receded when they were perceived as being in competition for employment with local populations. Adverse attitudes also hindered the search for accommodation, as the following émigré experienced in Huddersfield:

I did find it was very difficult to find an accommodation, one room even... It was because of the negative attitudes to the Poles at that time. There was no Race Relations

---

<sup>119</sup> "Poles help to fill city's labour gaps", in *The Star*, Wednesday 14 May, 1947, p8.

<sup>120</sup> "Foreign workers tabooed' by city foundrymen', in *The Star*, Tuesday 20 May, 1947, p8.

<sup>121</sup> A ceremony to honour Poles in Peebles in 1997 was reported by *Gazeta* under the heading, "Mixed Feelings", October-December 1997, No. 11, p2.

<sup>122</sup> Kirklees Sound Archive (KSA) interview: 065 PL. Cited by A.Nocon, "A Reluctant Welcome: Poles in Britain in the 1940s", in *Oral History*, Vol.1, No.24, Spring 1996, p81.

Act, and so in *Examiner* you could read the advert 'Rooms to let - no Poles or East Europeans'.<sup>123</sup>

In common with the experience of migrant groups before and after their arrival, Polish émigrés suffered as a result of the fears expressed by some sections of society for the security of their jobs, and tensions relating to the availability of housing. Fuelling animosity further were perceptions that Polish men were a sexual threat to British women:

English people, especially when I was in Bedford, they weren't understanding what it's all about and a lot of them used to say, 'oh why don't you go back to your country', things like that. Because they were thinking that we were going to take their jobs away, or their women away... some people took it bad... I just shrugged it off... The worst was when we were talking Polish and they didn't understand what we talking about... but I didn't speak English at that time.<sup>124</sup>

\*

Woman in same place where I work said to me, 'I told you, you bloody foreigner, go away from here'.<sup>125</sup>

Local populations were mostly ignorant of the reasons for the Polish presence in Britain and antipathy grew out of memories of Soviet support during the war. Some émigrés rationalised this antipathy, but it did not make it any easier to bear:

Russians were very much involved in the war, their contribution was tremendous, they lost a lot of people, millions of people, and people in this country were very grateful for their effort. Many thought that the communist system was an ideal system that should be introduced in this country as well... but they didn't know that the Communist party was two different things, something which is written on paper and something which is translated into life.<sup>126</sup>

\*

English person have as a weapon... 'go back where you come from', and it hurts.<sup>127</sup>

And hostility extended beyond name-calling:

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p82.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Mr Sl (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 6, p4.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Mrs Szy (Bradford), 4 February 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 21, pp1-2.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 9, p3 and p6.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Mr G (Sheffield), 2 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 11, p9.

In 1949, with my wife, we went to pictures and after I said, 'Come on, lets have a drink'. And we went to the Grand Hotel and I was refused a drink because I was a Pole.<sup>128</sup>

\*

I was refused a job because I was Polish. After training as an engineer I specialised on a milling machine and I went to Laycock's for a job. They gave me a job straight away but not on milling machine. I say: 'Why not milling machine?' - 'We will have strike' - 'Why?' - 'Because you are foreigner'.<sup>129</sup>

Likewise, in 1949, a Pole living in Leek failed to secure work in a textile mill due to union objections to the employment of foreigners; the same man also claims that he was unable to insure his first car, "because I was a foreigner".<sup>130</sup> Further, a Sheffield émigré recalled: "They did not like us. In places like Maltby they would not even let us work down the pit".<sup>131</sup> It has been suggested that experiences of discrimination were behind much of the drinking and gambling that was perceived to be a problem amongst Poles at the time.<sup>132</sup>

Andrew Nocon revealed examples of racist intolerance, discrimination, hostility and abuse in the Huddersfield area, at institutional and individual levels. Referring to trade union provisos that prevented Poles from obtaining particular types of work, Nocon wrote, "...the Government proved unable or unwilling to curtail such practices. Individual employers and owners of privately rented accommodation openly discriminated against them."<sup>133</sup>

Hence, whilst the position of the government with respect to Polish resettlement was officially welcoming, this stance was not necessarily reflected amongst local populations. Interviewees' memories of hostility support the argument put forward by Colin Holmes, that Britain's reputation as a country that is tolerant of its migrant populations is open to question. Yet, as Holmes explains, the subject of tolerance is

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> C.Malkin, "Escape from Stalin's nightmare to make a new home in Leek", in *Post and Times*, 23 August 1995, p16.

<sup>131</sup> J.Vass, "One man's odyssey" in *Sheffield Telegraph*, Friday 7 November 1997, p12.

<sup>132</sup> A.Kucewicz, "The Immigrant Experience: The reception of Polish refugees and their adaptation to life in Sheffield post-1945", BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of Historical and Critical Studies, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988, p36.

<sup>133</sup> Nocon op. cit., 1996, p86.

complex.<sup>134</sup> And certainly, recollections of relations with the British-born population in the early days are not all negative:

As long as we work and behave ourselves we never had any problem. People say this and that, but I've never had any problem. I worked with English people, I couldn't speak English but they were so helpful. If I didn't understand they used to take me by hand and show me, they were very friendly... I've got no wrong word, believe me.<sup>135</sup>

An interviewee who gained a doctorate in law in Poland in the 1930s and who lived his post-war life in London enthused, "Poles were treated very decently here".<sup>136</sup> Likewise, an émigré who lived for thirty six years in Scotland spoke favourably of her experiences of Britain. As "the only Pole in Galloway" she was not able to converse in Polish but denied ever feeling dispirited. Indeed, she "became Scottish".<sup>137</sup> Some interviewees have reasoned that their unpleasant experiences were not significant and merely a 'normal' part of the process of settlement:

At the beginning it was hard, and there were some animosities and frictions. But that is unavoidable, was nothing unusual about it, I can see it now.<sup>138</sup>

\*

It's only natural you know, when foreigners come to different country, English people thinking, especially the workers, 'oh yeah, he's taking our job'. But the jobs we were taking, they wasn't first class jobs, there was a vacancy for it. You know, they were demanding for people to do the job. But still, the lads thinking, 'oh aye, foreign people come and we'll be out of work'.<sup>139</sup>

Were the subject of hostility to be examined further here, the extent to which responses of both 'host' and émigré populations relate to contemporary and historical situations could be considered.<sup>140</sup> However, within the context of this thesis it is sufficient to understand that Poles were subjected to discrimination and antipathy in

---

<sup>134</sup> C.Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?: Immigrants, minorities and refugees in Britain*, (London, 1991), p100.

<sup>135</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 19, pp9-10. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 26 September 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 38, p8.

<sup>137</sup> Personal communication with Mrs B (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 April 1996.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 9, p6.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 7, p6.

<sup>140</sup> As discussed in Holmes, op. cit., 1991.



their early days of settlement, whilst not losing sight of the fact that this occurred alongside more generous attitudes.

In 1961, however, Patterson reported that hostility had come to an end:

Today the passions and misunderstandings of the early post-war years are largely forgotten by both sides. No longer are the Poles conceived of as potential scabs, fascists and Casanovas. Instead, they are seen as good-workers, rate-payers, solid citizens and family men.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, by 1966, the Institute of Race Relations reported that Polish émigrés in the London boroughs were more evenly represented in the British workforce - seven per cent were in professional employment; thirteen per cent were employers and managers; thirty four per cent had become foremen in skilled manual work; seventeen per cent were non-manual workers; and most of the remainder were in semi-skilled and unskilled manual work.<sup>142</sup>

The visibility of Poles in British society was apparently reduced to such an extent that, even in cities with large Polish communities, local officials were said to be barely aware of their presence. In Croydon, Patterson was told, “after all, they’re one of us now”<sup>143</sup>

However, Polish émigrés have not forgotten the hostility they encountered and, for many, negative experiences shape their memories of the early days in Britain. Regarding the decline of hostility, Patterson’s viewpoint received a cynical challenge from one interviewee:

West Indians arrived and then those who employed all Poles now employed them more, and we become not the lowest class.<sup>144</sup>

There has been no sophisticated study of Polish experiences of discrimination and hostility in the years since the 1960s, nor have oral testimonies collected during the

---

<sup>141</sup> Patterson, op. cit., 1961, p96.

<sup>142</sup> S.Allen, *New Minorities, Old Conflicts: Asian and West Indian Migrants in Britain*, (New York, 1971) p214.

<sup>143</sup> Patterson, op. cit., 1961, p96.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 26 September 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 38, p8.

present research referred to problems since that time. However, in 1997, an 'off the record' conversation with a local authority employee in Sheffield revealed an incident where a home-help had refused to visit a Polish food shop for her client. The client's perception of this refusal was that it had been motivated by intolerance of her 'different' cultural needs.<sup>145</sup> Whilst a conversation with a group of 'second-generation' Poles highlighted situations when their Polish surnames had been ridiculed, in public, as unpronounceable; one example took place in a hospital waiting room. Repetition of such incidents caused one woman to alter the spelling of her name, to enable 'English' people to pronounce it.<sup>146</sup> In addition, the father of a fourteen year old reported that his 'third generation' daughter had been subjected to the taunt of 'Paki-Pole', at school.<sup>147</sup>

Evidently, incidents that are perceived as discriminatory by people of Polish-birth and Polish origin continue to the present-day; albeit, occurring in a less overt form than in the forties and fifties. Nevertheless, such incidents generate feelings of frustration and anger, and where people are dependent on carers for their Polish cultural needs, insensitivity and ignorance negatively impacts upon their quality of life. In this respect, comparisons can be made with the experiences of Poles in Britain around half a century ago.

#### 4.10 The question of integration

Holmes commented that as Poles were seemingly in permanent exile by the 1960s, and because their numbers had not risen greatly in the years since their arrival, the British government became less interested in the émigré population.<sup>148</sup> In 1966, diminishing regard for Polish émigrés was reflected in the government's response to three episodes of that year. There was poor acknowledgement of the funeral of General Bor-Komorowski, official coolness towards the Polish millennium celebrations and funding for the Polish Library was withdrawn.

---

<sup>145</sup> Personal communication with an employee of Sheffield City Council, 28 February 1997. Further details withheld.

<sup>146</sup> This discussion with 'second generation' Poles took place following their Polish language class, October 1996. Further details withheld.

<sup>147</sup> Interview conducted in 1998, recorded by M Winslow. Further details withheld.

<sup>148</sup> C.Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971*, (London, 1994), p251.

The latter decision, to withhold the annual £11,000 grant to the Polish Library was not, in itself, a burning issue. However, as the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* reported:

...when the leaders of London's 50,000 Poles interpret the Government's move as a thinly-veiled effort to cajole their tight-knit community into greater assimilation, the library begins to matter to them all.<sup>149</sup>

Regarding the library funding, Holmes similarly concluded that Poles were being sent an official message, 'Become British'; a response he described as an example of "intolerance lurking behind an official face of toleration".<sup>150</sup>

In 1966, a leader of Sheffield's Polish community commented:

What is integration supposed to be? I married an English girl; I have many English friends, I go to football matches, all-English dinner-dances, enjoy English food. Our children do well in your schools; surely we are completely integrated?... The official attitude we sense in this library issue, and towards our Millennium celebrations, is not a tragedy; but it is hurting. I believe that recently a lot of goodwill, built up over the years, has been destroyed... You cannot push people; no pressure on us will result in anything. The truth is that we do not try to separate ourselves at all, and the evidence is that this does not happen. But surely we must be allowed to keep our national customs?<sup>151</sup>

Patterson wrote that negative attitudes from British society only served to heighten solidarity amongst Poles.<sup>152</sup> However, whilst it was important, politically, socially and culturally, for émigrés to gather together, many endeavoured to integrate into British society: "I didn't want to stay just with Polish community, because I was in another country and I'm going to live in that country, so I want to know all about it".<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> P.Bloxham, "The city Poles who came to stay", in *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*, 7 November, 1966, p8.

<sup>150</sup> Holmes op. cit., 1994, p251.

<sup>151</sup> Bloxham op. cit., 1966, p8.

<sup>152</sup> Patterson, op. cit., 1961, p96.

<sup>153</sup> BHRU: B0050/02/24.

Makarczyk contended that most Polish émigrés, world-wide, maintained a “two fatherland” approach to their migration, living like other citizens of the country they inhabited, yet preserving their mother tongue and remaining, “very much interested in what was going on in Poland”.<sup>154</sup> This observation has received reinforcement during the current research. However, interviewees have also referred to émigrés who deny their Polish identity. In some cases, Poles have adopted ‘English’ personas for practical reasons, i.e. the adoption of an ‘English’ name was advantageous when seeking employment as it reduced the likelihood of rejection at the application form stage.<sup>155</sup> A change of name also assisted British people who found Polish names, “completely impossible to pronounce”.<sup>156</sup>

There were also émigrés who severed their relationship with the Polish community absolutely and adopted ‘English’ identities, perhaps as a result of an argument or because they wanted to put the past behind them.<sup>157</sup> A number of interviewees, however, revealed their dislike of compatriots who laid aside their Polish identity:

He is more English than the English. I can't understand. You should remember your roots, it is very important. If he thinks the English like him for it he is wrong, because they know you are not English all right.<sup>152</sup>

\*

You can't forget the country that you come from... You were born there, you were brought up there, and automatically you still feel part of you is Polish. I hate, er, I met a few times, Polish-British chaps whose English is much worse than mine, but they pretend that they don't remember Polish language and they're not Poles. I don't see that.<sup>158</sup>

Concern was also expressed regarding individuals who have denied their roots:

---

<sup>154</sup> W.Makarczyk, “Identity and Cooperation: A case of emigrants”, in *The Polish Sociological Bulletin*, No.2, 1976. p40.

<sup>155</sup> Personal communication (Sheffield), 6 September 1998, Tape 32, p1. This reason was given as the motivation for this man's own name change. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 26 September 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 38, p8.

<sup>157</sup> Personal communication with Father H (Dunstable), 7 February 1995.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Mrs C (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 15, pp6-7.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Mr Ra (Croydon), 30 October 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 16, p13.

... if you look at assimilation... then it becomes negative because you're suppressing something which is very precious to you. Like, I met Polish people who would never speak Polish to me, they speak English to me although their English is rotten, to me that's really a shame. I feel pity for them, I feel sorry for them, that they want to assimilate at all costs, throwing overboard the tremendous heritage they've got. But then it depends in which circumstances these people are...<sup>159</sup>

#### 4.11 Marriage and children

Within their communities, the majority of Polish émigrés have maintained a form of their pre-war cultural identity. Yet, unsurprisingly, half a century of living and working in Britain has impacted on this identity and, in many cases, has been influenced by marriage to non-Polish partners:

Polish traditions? No, no, no, see when you married to English girl, it's different. If you married Polish girl, of course, you would probably do all this Polish culture.<sup>160</sup>

Children of 'mixed-marriages' were also less likely to acquiesce to their Polish parent's wishes that they learn their heritage and language:

I had an English wife and she wasn't interested in Polish language so it was difficult to send the children to the school on a Saturday morning, to Polish lessons, she never bothered.<sup>161</sup>

However, there were many Polish men who delayed thoughts of marriage, preferring to wait for a Polish woman who shared their language, and with whom they could raise a family in the cultural tradition of their common homeland:

I never thought I'm going to get married really. I got married a bit late in life, over thirty I were when I got married. But I suppose it was just me hoping to go back to Poland, or marry a Polish girl.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> BHRU: B0071/02/30.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 27 June 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 7, p7.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 30, p4.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 4, p24.

A shortage of Polish women in Britain after the war, and perhaps other motivations for cross-cultural dating, i.e. “I was only twenty one... and I was just looking for the English girl”,<sup>163</sup> meant that many Polish men took non-Polish wives. Yet, whilst Polish women were in the minority, they were not insignificant in numbers and Polish marriages were not uncommon. To some extent, the imbalance between male and female émigrés was improved when Polish women arrived due to the ‘thaw’ in Poland. Pre-war wives of Polish ex-servicemen also travelled to Britain at this time but marriages torn apart for more than a decade could not always be resumed:

I’d got a wife in Poland, first wife. Who, when I was supposed to die in Russia... she found a boyfriend, and when we found each other after the war there was no possibility of regaining this marriage.<sup>164</sup>

Families where both parents are Polish have evidently played an important role in the maintenance of Polish language and culture:

If they are both Polish, their parents, the children probably would speak Polish. But if there was English mother and Polish father, in ninety nine percent of cases, the children would speak English. And they think differently... they don’t know what father is talking about when he talks of fighting for freedom of Poland, for democracy.<sup>165</sup>

The varying extent to which subsequent generations have embraced their Polish heritage, and the degree to which it might be maintained into the future, is an ongoing concern for the first generation:<sup>166</sup>

They are British, they were born here, they haven’t lost Poland so they haven’t got that sentiment. They don’t think that Polish language is that important because to them it’s a foreign language.<sup>167</sup>

As the first generation grow older, the language issue can become especially difficult:

---

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 30, p4.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 14, p4.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p6.

<sup>166</sup> Also see Chapter Eight, “Upbringing, Identity and Community”, in Sword, *op. cit.*, 1996, pp149-226.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Mr K (Sheffield), 6 September 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 36, p1.

If you will go to our community centre you can see elderly people who can't speak English, and they have grandchildren with them. And you only hear, 'oh yes, good', that's it. It's very difficult. For some of them it's a, how you say, broken heart, when they can't communicate with their own grandchildren.<sup>168</sup>

Nevertheless, many émigrés speak good English and have fulfilling relationships with their offspring. However, there is concern as to whether younger generations will continue with Polish culture and tradition after the passing of the first generation. In this respect, the aims of the Polish Saturday School movement have been constant; to teach Polish culture, tradition and history. Imparting a sense of self-identity is central to the curriculum, although children also have an opportunity to gain Polish language qualifications.<sup>169</sup>

Saturday school was a burden on them obviously, of course it was additional to school... but some of the second generation, and now we are into a third generation, spoke and understood Polish quite well. We didn't expect them to write treaties in Polish but they spoke it. My daughters speak Polish, obviously not very well, but recognisable as Polish.<sup>170</sup>

The Polish Saturday school in Sheffield opened in 1950 and began with a small class of children who were taught in a parish hall in the city centre. As numbers increased, larger accommodation was found and three classes and a playgroup were organised. In addition, in later years, a class for adults was added. At one time there were seventy plus pupils in the school, but numbers have averaged at around forty. In 1999, forty three pupils were registered.<sup>171</sup>

In recent years, Polish schools have experienced a downturn in numbers that Sword attributes to a process of assimilation; an explanation that does not tackle the complexities of the situation as numbers have both fallen and risen over the past few decades. During the years of communism in Poland, a motivation for educating children of Polish origin in émigré history and culture was as an act of defiance against the Soviet regime which barred its expression. In the 1980s, the support that

---

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Polish parish priest (Bradford), 22 April 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 24, p7.

<sup>169</sup> Sword, *op. cit.*, 1996, pp108-109.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 49, pp1-2.

<sup>171</sup> Szablewski and Winslow *op. cit.*, 2000, p12.

emerged in Britain for the actions of Solidarity increased this strength of feeling. In the years after Poland's independence, the headmistress of Manchester's Polish school noted that attendance fell; classes were apparently more popular when, "the things we taught were banned in Poland".<sup>172</sup> Conversely, attendance has remained healthy in some schools and it is likely that this situation has much to do with growing admissions from the 'second generation' who regret their rebellious youthful stance against Polish parents, and want to learn Polish.<sup>173</sup> In addition, with new employment opportunities opening up in Poland in the 1990s, there is a demand for language training:

The children, they've got a better opportunity in Poland, because they've got Polish language and the English language you see. People what educated their children in the two languages are on the winning side now.<sup>174</sup>

Including children and grand-children of the first generation in the preservation of tradition and culture has been, and still is, an important aspect of the Polish émigré community. Interpretations of the past in akademias (performances) enacted by children on Polish national days, reinforce community understanding of why there is a large Polish émigré population in Britain. Whilst many children of Polish origin have not become involved in Polish community activities, there are plenty who have and, in doing so, they have unwittingly assisted in the emotional support of the first generation.

#### 4.12 The Third Republic of Poland

We did have a feeling that it would happen but we didn't expect it to happen so fast, that was a very big surprise. The Soviet Union was still a powerful country.<sup>175</sup>

The 1980s were momentous years in Poland, the main catalyst for change being the national Solidarity free trade union, led by Lech Walesa, membership of which grew rapidly after its formation in 1980. Solidarity's challenge to the Soviet leadership led

---

<sup>172</sup> J.Brosnan, "Home is where the heart is", in *The Big Issue*, no. 193, 19-25 January, 1998. p14-16.

<sup>173</sup> When the author attended Polish language classes (1996-98), a few 'second generation' Polish school students gave this explanation as their reason for attending.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 30, p4.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p2.



to the declaration of Martial-law, which was disastrous for Solidarity, but also damaged the economy and the Communist regime, and was ultimately abandoned. In 1989, when elections eventually took place, Solidarity received massive support and, with the eyes of the world upon it, Poland drew its Soviet era to a close.<sup>176</sup>

The 1980s were exciting and anxious years for Polish émigrés, who could only watch events unfold on their televisions:

They show on telly the soldiers on the street... I was thinking, 'oh God, please don't be war there, all my family is there'... But you could see it on the news, you know, the people, the mood and everything, you could see that something had to get changed. Everybody knew if we get change it will be better. So, well it changed for better definitely.<sup>177</sup>

\*

I think all people in Bradford supported what was going on... It was also very worrying at that time because Polish people weren't quite sure what was happening to their relatives... and naturally we assumed the worst.<sup>178</sup>

Whilst Poles in Britain were powerless to influence the political situation in Poland, they were able to respond to reports of shortages and hardship and an Anglo-Polish Aid Appeal was launched to raise money and collect donated food, medicine, clothing and cash. In Sheffield, British and Polish volunteers sorted and packed goods which were loaded onto freely-donated container units and driven to Poland:

The Polish people in Sheffield helped a lot to get Solidarity going... because there was nothing in shops in Poland, and the government put the Solidarity in prison... So we were helping them to get food and medicine and everything... there were lorries coming out of Sheffield every so often, and from all over Britain, in fact. A special committee was formed for distributing and packing, and sorting out, because some stuff was not worth sending, people just filled the bag with a lot of rubbish.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> R.East, *Revolutions in Eastern Europe*, (London, 1992), pp112 -114.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 23, pp9-10.

<sup>178</sup> BHRU: B0077/01/31.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 30, p1.

At the time, the press reported that in Poland, “the distribution was organised officially and properly to those most in need”.<sup>180</sup> However, émigrés suspect misappropriation:

Sometimes it got into the right hands, it was put into their churches and the church distributed it in Poland, in different cities, between the people. But sometimes it never got in the right place, the army got hold of it or the police got hold of it, or even Russians that were still there. And sometimes a lot of stuff disappeared.<sup>181</sup>

That donations fell into the wrong hands came as no surprise to the émigrés, who viewed losses as another example of Soviet venality.

The aid campaign during the 1980s was the last mass act of emigracja assistance for Poland, before independence. On 22 December 1990, at a ceremony in Warsaw, the role of the Government-in-Exile was symbolically ended when the last serving President-in-Exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, transferred Poland’s presidential insignia to the new president, Lech Walesa:

Our President-in-Exile went to Poland... and presented President Walesa with the presidential insignia, which we took from Poland after 1939 and looked after. They were symbolic things... And he handed over those insignias officially in Royal Palace in Warsaw, and that was on television, I saw that.<sup>182</sup>

During the ceremony, Walesa paid tribute to exiles world-wide:

Mister President, I wish to express my gratitude. To all those who by their steadfastness, strength of spirit, faith and heroism contributed to the fact that the exiled Pole never severed contact with his homeland... Without the work of nameless numbers of Poles, without the feeling of community extending beyond frontiers, it would not have been easy to demolish the walls dividing us.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Z.Zabeski, “From Sheffield - With Love”, in *Sheffield Spectator*, May 1982, pp20-21.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Mr P (Sheffield), 22 June 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 30, p1.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 17, p10.

<sup>183</sup> Extract of speech by Lech Walesa, President of the Republic of Poland, reprinted in, “You carried the banner of freedom with pride”, *Polish Affairs*, No. 127 (Final), 1991, p22.

### 4.13 Change, continuity and growing older

The fall of communism in Poland was the most significant event in the life of the Polish community in Britain; the goal of independence that the émigré community had worked for was a reality. During research it was clear that the majority of émigrés had been overjoyed at Poland's independence and equally relieved that relatives no longer lived under the Soviet system:

Well, they very happy, and we are happy. They work for themselves and they do what they want, and nobody tells them, 'don't touch that or you'll be locked up, and don't go to church'...They are free people.<sup>184</sup>

However, aside from some ex-Government-in-Exile personnel who needed to create a new role for themselves,<sup>185</sup> the lives of the majority of Poles in Britain were unaffected. The dream of return that many harboured in the years after the war had long since faded, as the following émigré revealed in 1975, when he was in his late forties. In common with many of his compatriots he had become established in Britain:

Sheffield is my home. I wouldn't want to go back to Poland even if it changed into the kind of country I could live in. It would mean starting again and that wouldn't be easy at my age.<sup>186</sup>

It came as no surprise to the first generation that following Poland's independence most of their number did not seriously entertain thoughts of return:

[In Poland] I have no family, I have nobody... Now I have house, valuable house... Going to Poland I have to buy furniture, cooker, things like that? I'm too old darling, I am seventy three.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 19, p12. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>185</sup> Personal correspondence with R. Kaczorowski, ex-President in Exile, 19 February 1998.

<sup>186</sup> Cited from a profile of Sheffield's Polish community in, *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*, 16 July, 1975, p8.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Mrs W (Bradford), 4 February 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 22, p7.

However, the daughter of 'exile' parents described her astonishment when she realised that there would be no en masse return to Poland:

All the time we were growing up and going to Polish school and mixing in Polish circles, there was this implicit understanding that we actually weren't staying, that as soon as Poland was free we were all going back to Poland... we were only here temporarily... It was very interesting for me when Poland was liberated... I was thirty something then, and I still expected my mum and dad to go back. I was really shocked when there was no question about them going back. For them, their grandchildren are here... their children are here. My mother was nine when she left Poland and my dad was fifteen, so most of their life was here, and yet the whole time we were in this Polish bubble. I really expected them to go back and was taken aback that they didn't... they don't even talk about retiring to Poland, they talk about retiring to the Polish people's home at Penrhos.<sup>188</sup>

Additionally, aside from an awareness that living standards in Britain could not be matched in Poland, émigrés originating from the east of the country had nowhere to return to as post-war boundary changes had shifted Polish territory to the west:

I have not thought about going back. Nowhere to go. No... this part of Poland which I used to live, they are all Ukrainian now.<sup>189</sup>

The cultural gulf between pre-war 'Polishness' and post-independence 'Polishness' also deters émigrés from returning to Poland. As Smith and Jackson observed amongst Ukrainians in Bradford, identities forged in exile, and sustained by the knowledge that it was 'impossible' to return home, are far removed from present day circumstances:<sup>190</sup>

I'm not thinking for a minute to go back to Poland... I wouldn't go, not at all. I wouldn't even dream about it. Believe it or not, when I go there, I feel, apart from the language, I feel I am a stranger somehow... everything is not familiar to me.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Interview, 6 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 48, p5 and p10. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Mr St (Bradford), 21 January 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 20, p5.

<sup>190</sup> G. Smith and P. Jackson, "Narrating the Nation: the 'imagined community' of Ukrainians in Bradford", in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25, 3, 1999, pp367-387.

<sup>191</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 19, p14. Request for name to be withheld.

\*

Poland is like a foreign country, different people, and the air is different, different atmosphere.<sup>192</sup>

In 1998, Zakrzewski wrote: "There is only one thing worse than losing your homeland; that is recovering it again after a gap of almost half a century".<sup>193</sup>

Interviewees also identified émigrés who have apparently never hankered for a return to the country of their birth; those who were "peasants" in pre-war Poland and who preferred the higher status and living standards possible in Britain.<sup>194</sup> After listening to a 'peasant' who was born into rural poverty in Poland, and whose teenage years were spent as a slave labourer in Germany, commit his life story to tape, his daughter commented: "From stealing bread, to a brand new Toyota, not bad eh?".<sup>195</sup>

An interviewee who was officially involved with the resettlement of Poles in the late 1940s commented: "Financially they were better off, and that's an important point."<sup>196</sup> Peter Stachura also noted that the newly introduced welfare state and Britain's democratic society were attractive to Polish émigrés.<sup>197</sup>

Whilst most émigrés realised that they would not be returning to Poland, maintenance of the identity of the country of their birth was important to them, and central to this has been the commemoration of Polish national days and preservation of traditions barred in Poland. Community activities central to the émigré social milieu, such as Scouting, Saturday schools, sport, Ex-servicemen's clubs and parish life, have facilitated expression of day-to-day émigré identity, and at the same time, asserted opposition to the communist regime:

Independence Day, we observed all the time in this country. They never did it under the communist system... And we had another national day which was the anniversary of

<sup>192</sup> Personal communication with Mrs F (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 April 1996.

<sup>193</sup> R.Zakrzewski, cited in Z.Flammer, "A Generation: The Polish Community in Great Britain after the II World War", in *SPK 1948-1998: Kola Nr.440 Huddersfield*, p43.

<sup>194</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 6 January 1999.

<sup>195</sup> Personal communication, 27 June 1997. Further details withheld.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 26 September 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 38, p10.

<sup>197</sup> P.Stachura, "The emergence of the Polish community in early postwar Scotland", in *Slavonica*, 1997-98, 4/2, p35.

the first Polish Constitution... the third of May. We always observe it in Poland before the war, and as emigrants in this country, and wherever Poles live outside Poland. Under the communists it was not. The only national day was Russian Revolution and the Liberation of Poland by Russians, this sort of thing. Now in Poland, they recognise many other things which they had to abandon. They try to catch up the thread of those days. And we help them, because we continue, we never abandoned it.<sup>198</sup>

In the years since 1989, the celebration and commemoration of tradition continues, with the aim of ensuring that Polish culture and history retains a place in the lives of British-born generations of Polish origin. However, for the first generation, other considerations necessitate the maintenance of the cultural markers of their identity. As émigrés grow older, most experience varying degrees of difficulty with English language and, at this time of life, there is also a tendency towards reminiscence which brings to mind a past that is far removed from that of their British-born peers. Consequently, in this situation, a sense of alienation can develop which intensifies feelings of being a 'foreigner', or, "a guest here".<sup>199</sup>

Hence, for Poles who feel like 'foreigners' both in Poland and in Britain, the Polish community's preservation of an identity exclusive to its wartime émigrés is of inestimable value. The culturally sympathetic environments of community organisations provide opportunities for ageing Poles to meet and share past and present experiences; an activity recognised as important for mental health.<sup>200</sup>

This is not to say that in the years since independence the Polish community has solely become an agent of psychological support. In the aftermath of political change in Poland, the umbrella organisation for the majority of Polish voluntary organisations, The Federation of Poles in Great Britain, has taken on a new lease of life representing Polish émigré interests world-wide.<sup>201</sup> The federation is also unique

---

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, pp9-10.

<sup>199</sup> W. Jagucki, "The Polish Experience: 40 years on", in R. Baker (ed.) *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, (London:1983), pp32-38. At the time of this publication, Jagucki was holding weekly meetings of Polish and Ukrainian mentally ill patients in Bradford, where isolation and alienation were problems arising.

<sup>200</sup> For discussion of narrative, memory and psychological difficulty see N. Hunt and I. Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping With Their Memories Through Narrative', in *Oral History*, Autumn 1998, Vol. 26, No 2, pp57-64.

<sup>201</sup> Sword, op. cit., 1996, p87.

amongst ethnic minority communities in that it has made available its own credit card.<sup>202</sup>

In the 1990s, the Polish community has ended its political protest work. However, charitable endeavours continue, with 'The Medical Aid for Poland Fund' being a focus for activity. Fund raising events such as concerts, dinners, dances, lotteries, bazaars and jumble sales, assist Poland's needy whilst providing the émigré community with a continued sense of purpose. A major fund raising drive was initiated in July 1997 when floods in south-west Poland, affecting over 1,270 towns and villages, caused death and untold damage.<sup>203</sup>

We raised, the whole Polish community in this country, seven hundred thousand pounds for the flood... which is not bad for a community of this size.<sup>204</sup>

Given the high level of home ownership, success in employment and a general willingness to integrate, it could be surmised that, half a century after the Second World War, the character of the émigré community is far removed from that of the 1940s and 50s. However, as has already been noted, some problems amongst the ageing émigré population are uncomfortably reminiscent of the early days and reinforce feelings of 'otherness'. In this respect, community organisations and clubs continue to offer 'safe' environments.

Yet, there is an aspect of community that has had no option but to 'move with the times'; new generations of priests arriving from Poland over the years have brought perspectives less attuned to émigré life. In the 1940s and 50s, Polish community priests were ex-army chaplains who had endured experiences in common with their parishioners, and shared their reasons for not returning to Poland. Hence, they deeply empathised with them. In contrast, priests arriving from Poland in more recent years have been reproached by émigrés for being less understanding:

---

<sup>202</sup> Szablewski and Winslow op. cit., 2000, p19.

<sup>203</sup> "Summer Flood Which Endangers 'Polish Spring'" and "Chairman's letter", in *Medical Aid for Poland Fund*, Summer 1997, Review No 12, pp3-4.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 8 June 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 29, p2.

They simply do not have the same feelings. Because they came here as temporary priests, they were going back to Poland or somewhere else. The ex-army chaplains were here on the same basis as we were.<sup>205</sup>

Interviewees have alleged that 'new' priests do not understand the symbolism attached to commemorative occasions: "Some were willing to be educated, some were not".<sup>206</sup> Supporting this opinion, Jan Niczyperowicz, an Eastern European Welfare Officer, stated: "Many of the Roman Catholic clergy who arrive from Poland find it very difficult to understand and appreciate the life experience, psychological make-up and mentality of the émigré community".<sup>207</sup>

Before 1989, there was a degree of understanding for the reluctance of visiting priests to empathise with émigrés as they feared their actions might be considered 'anti-communist' by authorities in Poland, prompting concern for the welfare of families there. Nevertheless, whilst these anxieties were recognised, complaints have continued that priests trained in communist Poland have been unable to fully support the émigré generation.

The perspective of a young parish priest differed somewhat. He criticised the first generation for placing too much emphasis on their own cultural needs at the expense of other generations, commenting that relationships between older and younger generations suffer as children do not always understand their parents' language or relate to their values and culture; "they can't bridge the gap".<sup>208</sup> In response to criticism that missionary priests do not understand the Polish first generation, he replied that, equally, émigrés do not understand his generation. Recalling his first weeks in Britain, he described being instructed in crossing a road using a pedestrian crossing: "This is the attitude, they think Poland is so backward and ruined by communism... it is true that the standard of living would not be the same for them if they went back, but they don't understand the state of the country".<sup>209</sup>

---

<sup>205</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 8 November 1999.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> J.Niczyperowicz, "The Polish Community in Leeds (A social perspective)", unpublished paper, March 1987, p3. Copy in possession of M.Winslow.

<sup>208</sup> Personal communication with Polish parish priest, 26 June 1998.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.



The opinion that Polish émigrés misunderstand conditions in Poland was also expressed by an interviewee who arrived in Britain in the early 1980s, and who likewise experienced negative attitudes with regard to her homeland:

Everybody here had image of Eastern Bloc as being drab, grey, people waiting in queues, starving, followed by KGB everywhere. I can only speak for Poland but it really wasn't true... All the major industries were state owned, so state took the profit from everything and then divided it accordingly to need. But you were still allowed to run a small business, you could be a self-employed electrician, plumber, you could have small shops, small manufacturer and ninety percent of agricultural land was privately owned... People took it for granted that they were provided with housing, education, it was free right up to any level you went, plus grants, health care, child care, transport, it was so cheap. All the utilities, like water, electricity, gas, were also subsidised... Food prices were subsidised, but of course to get something, something else has to give, there has to be a balance in economy, so what had to give in was consumer choice, you had only one or two types of washing machine, one or two types of TV sets, one or two types of cars.<sup>210</sup>

After years of opposition to the Soviet regime, seemingly there is some reluctance on the part of émigrés to accept that post-war generations in Poland adhere to a style of nationalism that differs from that preserved by the Polish community. Young visitors from Poland to émigré organisations quickly become aware of the contrast between old and new Polishness, with language being a major indicator of difference. The language spoken by émigrés has a pre-war style. Indeed, the changing linguistic character of the Polish language can be an upsetting subject:

One thing which saddens me very much is the language. During the communist times... they wanted to spoil the Polish language by introducing Soviet jargon... and the language became careless... the language is terrible. Now there is another invasion, invasion of American and English language, because of business... For example, a shop in Polish is 'schlep'... now they will say 'shopie'. They add 'ie' to the end of the word and it is so confusing to anyone who doesn't know. That is very annoying to me, very

---

<sup>210</sup> Interview, 4 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 46, p8. Request for name to be withheld.

annoying. Some experts say that is probably a phase and it will pass. It will never pass altogether, it will linger and it spoils the beauty of the language.<sup>211</sup>

\*

I think that the language in present day Poland has deteriorated... it became vulgar somehow... Under communism, uneducated classes came into power, it was power to the people and they could hardly write...<sup>212</sup>

Smith and Jackson, discussing the way in which Ukrainian émigrés have changed their narration of the nation, state that a decade ago the maintenance of Ukrainian identity was not regarded as problematic, as identity was synonymous with practising religion, upholding traditions and by active participation in Ukrainian organisations.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, a just over a decade ago, the same could have been said of Polish émigrés. For the duration of their settlement they worked at maintaining an image of unity. However, with the passing of the Soviet government, a unified identity has become less of a necessity and the survival of the Polish community into the future will depend very much upon whether subsequent generations can bring their own identity to it.

#### 4.14 Community 'outsiders'

This chapter has focused on the 'community' of émigré Poles that has been maintained in the years since the Second World War and, for the most part, observations encompass the experiences of those who consider themselves part of this community. However, the concept of community cannot be taken for granted. Certainly, for a number of émigrés, the notion of a unified 'community' of Poles in Britain is contentious.

Amongst Britain's Polish population there are people who are peripheral to community life, perhaps existing on its margins and harbouring feelings of exclusion. Included in this number are non-Catholic Poles, arrivals from Poland in the decades since the war and first generation Poles who fought with the German military, often against their will.

---

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, pp10-11.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 49, pp2-3.

<sup>213</sup> Smith and Jackson, op. cit., 1999, p380.

The latter group have possibly attached more importance to attaining a position in the 'community' in order to maintain contact with peers, practise their culture and religion and use their first language. Yet, as discussed previously, Poles who fought with the German military have often been at the receiving end of contemptuous attitudes from compatriots:

I'm not proud of it, that past. But yes, in a way, I done my bit just the same. But these heroes from Cassino, they can't see it... and they do dig at you.<sup>214</sup>

The wider community have always been aware of Poles in their midst who fought for the 'other side' and, in their tight-knit communities, could often identify them. Yet, a silence has generally been maintained regarding their presence. The narrative of community that underpins its identity is firmly linked with Poland's history, international politics and the portrayal of Poles as freedom fighters, leaving no room for counter-narratives. Smith and Jackson noted that silence can also be seen as part of an attempt by 'community leaders' to influence narratives of the nation,<sup>215</sup> and before 1989 there was a strong desire to preserve a distinct narrative as a force of opposition.

Community silence with respect to Poles who fought with German forces also guards against attracting unwanted attention, i.e. from war crime investigators. This consideration has presented a problem during research as interviewees have been reticent about offering information that could prove incriminating. Nor were these fears unfounded as, in 1996, it was reported in *The Star* (Sheffield) that a Polish émigré was "understood to have been investigated by Scotland Yard's special war crimes unit".<sup>216</sup> The man at the centre of the allegations denied any involvement in Nazi atrocities and the matter was never concluded as he died before there were further developments. Nevertheless, the fact that the chairman of the Polish Saturday School parents' committee could be subjected to such accusations, "caused quite a disturbance in the Polish community".<sup>217</sup> The response of the Ex-servicemen's club chairman was reported at the time:

---

<sup>214</sup> Interview conducted 2 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow. Further details withheld.

<sup>215</sup> For discussion of silence and collusions, see Smith and Jackson, op. cit., 1999, pp367-387.

<sup>216</sup> "Death of man in Nazi probe" in, *The Star*, Friday 31 May, 1996, p2.

<sup>217</sup> Personal communication with M. Winslow, 20 October 1999. Further details withheld.

There are few here that would believe these allegations. I knew him and I would say it very unlikely, although one can never be 100 per cent sure. But as far as we know he wasn't the type.<sup>218</sup>

Despite this guarded response, an interviewee who knew the man in question reported that as a result of the allegations, and with no supporting evidence, the suspect's membership of the Ex-Combatants Association was suspended.<sup>219</sup> The interviewee who discussed this matter strongly disagreed with the committee's actions of the time, and called for reinstatement on the grounds that no proof was available to support the claim. He was prompted to offer his opinions to the current research after reading the biography of a Pole who murdered civilians whilst fighting as a partisan in the Polish-Ukrainian ethnic conflict, that took place during the Second World War.<sup>220</sup> He deliberated that his compatriot, whom he believed to have been a partisan in the same area at the same time, might have been involved in similar activity. However, he responded in a thoughtful manner to the suspect's possible barbarous background by referring to a section in the book where a partisan's family are slaughtered:

He wanted revenge, and at that point he became a murderer... Nobody understands how life is during war... those were the times.<sup>221</sup>

However, terrible actions have not always had motives that, in certain contexts, might be understood. It was reported in *The Independent Magazine* (1995) that a Pole from Slonim, Stasic Chrzanowski, was under investigation by Scotland Yard, accused of working with German military police. The allegation against him, made by Chrzanowski's stepson, John Kingston, was that he had worked as an interrogator of prisoners and had taken part in atrocities.

Kingston passed photographs and evidence to Scotland Yard; information that was also given to the Belorussian consul in London, and to the Soviet Embassy. The Belorussians passed the details on to a *Sunday Express* journalist who was about to

---

<sup>218</sup> *The Star* op. cit., 31 May, 1996, p2.

<sup>219</sup> Personal communication with M. Winslow, 20 October 1999. Further details withheld.

<sup>220</sup> W. Lotnik and J. Preece, *Nine Lives: Ethnic conflict in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands*, (London, 1999).

<sup>221</sup> Personal communication with M. Winslow, 20 October 1999. Further details withheld.

fly to Minsk, which is close to Slonim, to investigate a different war crimes suspect. Photographs were shown to people in Slonim and many said that they remembered Chrzanowski, then known as Chrenowski, with one woman recalling that he had taken her husband and one hundred and twenty other civilians to an execution pit, where they were shot dead. Later in 1995, detectives from Scotland yard visited Chrzanowski to inform him that they were also visiting Slonim to interview witnesses, but after their return they did not speak to him again. Nor did the Belorussians speak to him, stating that they would only do so with the agreement of Scotland Yard.<sup>222</sup> No further information about this case was discovered during research.

The issue of Poles who fought with German forces is clearly complex and this research has only scratched the surface of a very sensitive subject. However, it is argued here that whilst circumstances and geography played a crucial role in determining on which side individuals fought, those who ended up on the German side have been denied full participation in community life. Crucially, as they have been excluded from the narrative that is the community's identity, they have not been able to take part in the process of making sense of the past through sharing memories.

In effect, a necessary compromise had been reached; ex-German military Poles could affiliate with the community as long as they were silent about their pasts. This arrangement benefited them as they stayed in touch with a familiar cultural and linguistic environment. The wider community also benefited as they preserved the unified image necessary for their ideological stance against Soviet Poland.

Non-Catholic Polish émigrés have, on the whole, tended to form their own organisations and community groups, separate from the majority Polish Catholic population in Britain. A minister for the small but thriving Polish Lutheran population explained:

I have quite a number of Roman Catholic friends... but unfortunately the majority of Polish population are still rather hostile towards a different Christian representation. To a certain extent it is caused by ignorance... There is, in many ways, understandable

---

<sup>222</sup> S.Ward, "Dad, why do people say these bad things about you?" in *The Independent Magazine*, 1 July 1995, pp22-26.

prejudice towards the Lutherans because quite a number before the war, nearly a million people, lived in Poland of German origin, they belonged to the Lutheran Church. But at the same time there was another nearly 2½ million Germans who were Roman Catholics, but for some reason it was very easy and very convenient to label every Lutheran that he is a German, and hence my constant awareness, even in Britain, that as a Lutheran and as a Pole, often I have to justify my Polishness which I'm growing a little bit tired to do.<sup>223</sup>

Nor do Jewish Poles participate in mainstream Polish émigré community life. As was mentioned previously, Jewish Poles have not been interviewed for this research, however, whilst interviewing a Polish Catholic widow it emerged that her Polish husband was Jewish. In the late 1940s, they lived in Manchester and socialised with the local Catholic émigré community, but felt increasingly unwelcome as the result of remarks such as, "the Jewish question in Poland has been resolved". The couple interpreted this comment as anti-Semitic and chose to avoid future contact with Polish Catholic community organisations.<sup>224</sup> Whilst one example does not represent the community as a whole, for this interviewee and her husband, attitudes were perceived as hostile and brought about their disassociation from the Polish community.

Émigrés who have arrived in more recent years have also complained of not feeling part of the Polish community as their culture and interests are not represented. Indeed, in 1986, Anna Zebrowska identified a split between the established community and recent arrivals from Poland, and called for research to investigate attitudes on both sides.<sup>225</sup>

Although wartime émigrés are the focus of this study, it is worth digressing to consider the comments of Alina Siomkajlo who was 'purged' from Lublin Catholic University, where she worked as a lecturer in the Department of Literary History, for not co-operating with the communist regime. As a result, she began her "forced exile" in London in 1985.<sup>226</sup> Her first years as a political émigré were difficult and her health deteriorated due to the stress of not finding suitable work or accommodation.

---

<sup>223</sup> BHRU: BOO71/01/05.

<sup>224</sup> Personal communication with Mrs F (Penrhos, North Wales), 4 April 1996.

<sup>225</sup> A.Zebrowska, "Integration or assimilation: A study of second generation Poles in England", PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, December 1986, p428.

<sup>226</sup> A.Siomkajlo, unpublished paper, 1998. Copy in possession of M.Winslow.

Exacerbating her distress was her inability to find support amongst the émigré community. In 1998, Siomkajlo published her concerns, reporting that the dominant stereotype of Poles in Britain created exclusions. Hence, she called for the émigré 'community' to liberalise their exile discourse, as more recent Polish emigrants wish to make their mark on the patriotism and culture of the Polish community.<sup>227</sup>

Certainly, celebrations marking half a century of community life that have been taking place during the latter part of the 1990s, have emphasised that the prominent community identity remains that of the first generation. Subsequent British-born generations hesitate to turn their backs on their parents' culture as, on the whole, they value their cultural mix. However, their own experiences have little place in a community that is still dominated by the experiences of the political émigré.

#### 4.15 Concluding comment

The role that the community has played in the lives of Polish émigrés needs some consideration, since there is no doubt that the organisations which developed in the years after the war have been of inestimable value to the majority. Whilst a significant aim of community organisation was to maintain political cohesion, or an impression of it, togetherness has also been a social and cultural necessity, especially in the early days when most Poles knew little English. The hundreds of clubs that became established throughout Britain provided 'safe havens' away from an unfamiliar and occasionally unfriendly alien society. The value of organisations such as the Ex-servicemen's Association also extended beyond social and welfare support. Ex-officers, whose only employment options were in manual labour, could restore their self-esteem by becoming club managers and by taking positions on various Polish committees.

As time passed, most émigrés became less reliant on Polish organisations for support. However, émigré clubs and associations remained at the centre of Polish life in their locales. Saturday schools and Scouting activities catered for the 'second generation' and the first generation maintained their identity by continuing with the traditions,

---

<sup>227</sup> A.Siomkajlo, 'Liberalisation of critical discourse (Communiqué concerning 'Polish London')' in K.Kmjawinska-Courtney and R.M Machnikowski (eds.) *Liberalism Yesterday and Today* (Institute of International Studies, University of Lodz, 1998).

culture and religion of the pre-war Polish nation. A community leader wrote that Ex-Servicemen's clubs have been viewed by Poles as, "a bridge between their history and the future".<sup>228</sup>

However, participation in community life has not been universal amongst émigrés and during research a myriad of experiences have emerged. The spectrum ranges from Poles whose lives have centred on organising community activities, for political and social ends, to those who have straddled British and Polish cultures, gaining the best from both worlds, to those who have distanced themselves partially or completely from their compatriots. And, as discussed, there are a significant number whose positions in the community are conditional on their conformity with it. This question of exclusion is an important consideration for oral historians as there is a risk that 'community' histories can reinforce a specific representation of 'community', which is the experience of the majority.

Nevertheless, the community to which the majority of émigrés have subscribed has been an invaluable provider of social, political, and emotional support. The latter consideration of emotional support was especially necessary in the early days when feelings of uncertainty and loss were most acute. However, after half a century of life in Britain, as émigrés grow old and reminisce, the need for emotional support from compatriots remains crucial.

The dominant view of the Polish community in the 1990s, offered by interviewees, is that it remains important in their lives. There is also an opinion that community solidarity is disappearing:

A lot of people, in spite of us having a club that is doing things, they are afraid to come in the evening, they stay at home.... they don't want to go out in the dark... I was doing a lecture at dinner time and again, not many came to it... This is wrong, because they're losing the sense of the community... This is the problem that we have and I'm afraid that as we grow older we're going to have more and more of this problem... it's difficult to understand them, that when something is going on in the club or the parish, they don't want to come. Before, they had the idea, fight for something, and they did at

---

<sup>228</sup> W.Szablewski, "Polish political refugees in Sheffield 1945-86". Unpublished paper, 1993. Copy in possession of M. Winslow.



every possibility. Although, if there's any crisis now, they are very generous, we collect for the flood... but, more or less, there is a kind of apathy at present moment.<sup>229</sup>

Advancing age and frailty are recognised as problems affecting cohesion, but the loss of a strong political objective since Poland's independence is also blamed:

Catholicism was a demonstration of their patriotism. Now it becomes less. Poland ceases to be Communist and their Catholicism is slowing down, not so ardent, they start to slowly become similar to English.<sup>230</sup>

Nevertheless, the Polish community has been the bedrock of émigré life and in the 1990s émigrés are still able to express their identity within it. Homi Bhabha believes that solidarity and community encourage political empowerment and that the construction of a community helps to facilitate an understanding of the past, in order that the present may be understood.<sup>231</sup> Certainly, for Polish émigrés, their community has provided a framework within which they can understand their experiences, past and present. As Poles age in a country where they never expected to grow old, the latter consideration is increasingly relevant to their sense of self and, probably, their mental health.

---

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Mr and Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p4.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 14, p4.

<sup>231</sup> H. Bhabha, *The Relocation of Culture*, (London, 1994), p3.

## Chapter Five

### War, Settlement and Mental Health



Photograph: Tim Smith.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p117.

Making a toast at a summer get-together in Fenton, near Newark, 1999.

## 5.1 Part One: The development of research

Given the traumatic histories of Polish émigrés in Britain, it is not surprising that they have suffered psychological difficulties in the years since the Second World War. Mental health problems have been evident amongst Poles since their arrival in the 1940s and were, at first, directly associated with experiences of war, trauma, loss and bitterness at the allied politics that brought about their resettlement in Britain. In later years, reduced social and economic status and experiences of discrimination and hostility were also identified as being associated with mental illness, in addition to continued psychological distress due to the events of the war years.

As Polish émigrés have aged in Britain, problems have continued as learned language skills deteriorate and isolation from Polish compatriots, and wider society, increases. A diminishing capacity to communicate, and in some cases, a complete loss of ability to speak English, have exacerbated the cultural gulf between many first generation émigrés and their offspring. Similarly, interaction with British speaking friends and associates has grown increasingly difficult. As a result of this situation, a feeling exists amongst émigrés that, after contributing to the allied victory, and living and working in Britain for over fifty years, they are once more, 'foreigners' in British society. Moreover, where cultural misunderstandings and language problems have made health and welfare services difficult to access, many Poles sense that they are neglected 'foreigners'.

Mental health problems amongst immigrants have not been neglected by past researchers and, as a consequence, awareness of the psychological impact of migration has grown considerably during the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Included in this body of work are studies that have particularly focused on Poles and mental health and, in order to assist an understanding of the impact of war and displacement, these will be considered in part one of this chapter. Following this discussion, part two re-examines the period from 1945 to the present day from a mental health perspective, using oral history and information amassed from first generation émigrés, as well as from professional and family carers.

---

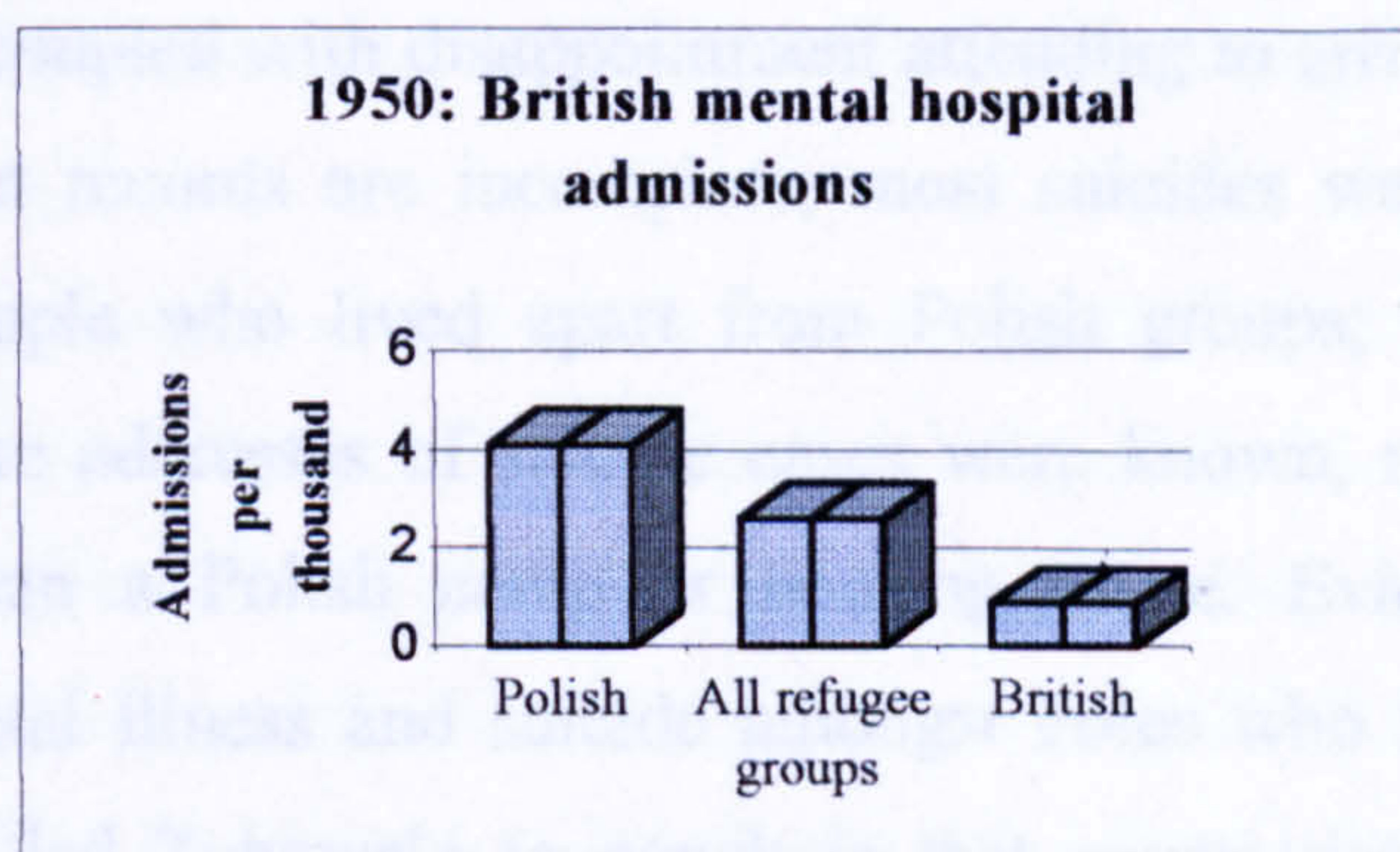
<sup>1</sup> For further information see, G.Karmi and P.McKeigue (eds.), *The Ethnic Health Bibliography*, (London, 1993), and M.London, "Mental illness among immigrant minorities in the United Kingdom", in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, 1986, pp265-273.

\*

It should be stressed that the majority of Poles in Britain have not been diagnosed as mentally ill, but it is generally recognised by psychiatrists that social circumstances and psychological experiences play an enormous part in engendering mental distress.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, given the enormity of the trauma experienced by Polish émigrés, both during the war and afterwards, it is likely that in addition to those who have become ill, there are many individuals whose lives are negatively affected by their memories.

\*

That émigré Poles in Britain, as an ethnic minority group, have suffered a disproportionately high incidence of mental health difficulty throughout their years in Britain is not in dispute. In 1950, an analysis of Ministry of Health records of admissions into psychiatric care by a British psychiatrist with experience of EVW problems, revealed that mental illness amongst Poles was an especial problem; Polish admissions were 4.1 per thousand (male 4.42; female 3.78), more than four times higher than the British rate of 0.86 per thousand, and almost twice the rate of 2.6 per thousand for all refugee groups in Britain.<sup>3</sup>



Source: Zubrzycki, 1956.

Writing in 1956, Jerzy Zubrzycki suggested that mental problems amongst Polish émigrés were associated with war-time persecution; war-time frustration; cultural difference; cultural isolation; and occupational and social degradation. The Federation of Poles in Great Britain also offered an opinion regarding the frequency of mental disorders, based on evidence collected by their organisation in the 1950s. Their conclusions were twofold; firstly, that war-time oppression was the prime cause of

<sup>2</sup> T.Heller, J.Reynolds, R.Gomm, R.Muston, S.Pattison (eds.), "The nature of psychiatric disorders", in *Mental Health Matters: A Reader*, (London, 1996), pp17-26.

<sup>3</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain. A Study of Adjustment*, (The Hague, 1956), pp186-187.

mental illness amongst Polish refugees;<sup>4</sup> and secondly, that EVWs were more susceptible to mental disorders than the ex-military group who benefited from the provision of special facilities to ease their resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

Zubrzycki does not suggest a reason as to why Poles were suffering more mental difficulty than other refugee groups. Yet, he noted that Latvians in Britain experienced a much lower rate of admission for mental illness and suggested that this was due to their being, “much the closest to the British cultural pattern and that their war-time persecution was not particularly severe”.<sup>6</sup> Given that Latvia was occupied by the Soviets in 1940 and experienced German occupation between 1941-44, with its population undergoing deportation, arbitrary arrest and terror in common with the Poles, the similarity with British culture appears unlikely.<sup>7</sup> However, Zubrzycki offers no further insight as to how he arrived at this conclusion.

Amongst Poles, twenty six cases of suicide were recorded in 1951, with the majority suffering a mental or psychosomatic disorder before their death; their problems were exacerbated by, “worry about relatives in Poland, bad health, inability to cope with some heavy work coupled with disappointment attending to arrival in Britain from a DP camp”.<sup>8</sup> Whilst records are incomplete, most suicides were seemingly taking place amongst people who lived apart from Polish groups; the *Dziennik Polski* recorded that where addresses of suicide cases were known, most lived in private lodgings rather than a Polish camp or housing estate. Evidence regarding the prevalence of mental illness and suicide amongst Poles who lived away from the Polish community led Zubrzycki to conclude that compatriot support provided a safeguard against, “individual disorganisation”.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Zubrzycki’s indications that resettlement was proving stressful for many Poles, wider research into migration and mental illness in the 1950s tended to conclude that high illness rates were a transient phenomenon, more to do with loss of

---

<sup>4</sup> Zubrzycki emphasises that this proposition was not statistically verified, but was the view of many Polish doctors working in Britain.

<sup>5</sup> Zubrzycki, op. cit., 1956, pp186-187.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of Latvian experience during the Second World War see, V. Skultans, “Remembering Time and Place: A case study in Latvian narrative”, in *Oral History*, Spring 1998, Vol.26, No.1.

<sup>8</sup> Zubrzycki op. cit., 1956, pp186-187.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp186-189.

homeland than with adaptation to new surroundings.<sup>10</sup> However, the problem was not transient and, in 1971, the Polish Ex-Combatants Association wrote of their concern that mental illness was exceptionally high amongst Polish refugees.<sup>11</sup>

A study by Peter Hitch in 1975, motivated by the substantial representation of immigrants in the hospital population, included Poles in its inquiry. Questions were raised regarding the reliability of Zubrzycki's work on mental illness, which had little palpable evidence on which to base its conclusions.<sup>12</sup> Aside from an unpublished paper by Murphy,<sup>13</sup> Zubrzycki's opinions were formed to a great extent from the evidence of case studies and opinions of Polish organisations and medical personnel. Hence, Hitch concluded that whilst he was in no doubt that émigré Poles had suffered stresses and deprivations of a severe kind in the past, they also experienced the usual problems of an immigrant group. He recognised that there was some evidence of mental illness but was concerned that a "phenomenon of Polish psychiatric illness" was influencing opinion; that psychiatrists had "gained the impression that Poles are particularly subject to certain kinds of mental illnesses". Given the lack of methodological evidence, Hitch concluded that the question of a raised incidence of mental illness amongst Poles was in need of empirical investigation.<sup>14</sup>

In 1980, Hitch produced a study with Philip Rack that aimed to measure the psychiatric breakdown rate of a sample of people of Eastern European origin living in Britain, twenty five years after they had been refugees. The sample included Poles and wartime arrivals from Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; excepting the Poles, all nationalities were referred to as "Russian" in the study.<sup>15</sup>

A comparison was made between British-born admission rates into psychiatric hospitals and foreign-born admission rates; the results revealed that for all disorders

---

<sup>10</sup> Particularly the research of F.F Kino, "Aliens Paranoid Reaction", in *Journal of Mental Science*, 97, 1951, and H.M.B Murphy, "Refugee Psychoses in Great Britain: Admissions to Mental Hospitals", *Flight and Resettlement*, (UNESCO, Paris, 1955). Cited in P.Hitch, "Immigration and Illness in a Northern City: An investigation into the relationship between ethnic group membership, area of residence, residential mobility, social class and hospitalisation for diagnosed mental disorder", PhD thesis, (University of Bradford, 1975), p8.

<sup>11</sup> The Polish Ex-Combatants Association, *The Poles in Great Britain 1971*, (London, 1971), p6.

<sup>12</sup> Hitch, op. cit., 1975.

<sup>13</sup> H.B.M Murphy, "Mental health of political refugees in Britain", unpublished paper, (September, 1952). Cited in Zubrzycki op. cit., 1956, p186.

<sup>14</sup> Hitch, op. cit., 1975, pp287-291.

<sup>15</sup> P Hitch and P Rack, "Mental Illness among Polish and Russian Refugees in Bradford", in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 137, 1980, pp206-211.

admissions were significantly higher amongst the latter group. Further, it was noted that Polish migrants showed a higher first-admission rate for psychiatric illness than all other foreign-born people in the Bradford area with comparable wartime experience. For women, the rate of admission was particularly high; first admissions of Polish males between 1968 and 1972 amounted to 277 per 100,000, whilst for females the figure was 481 per 100,000.<sup>16</sup>

Social workers' reports supported Hitch and Rack's theory that Polish women who spoke little English, and who had been shielded from British society by their Polish husbands, were severely disadvantaged if their partner died. The loss of the person who dealt with everyday business in the outside world meant that the bereft wife faced adaptation to a largely unfamiliar cultural environment, at an age when the task was particularly daunting. For unmarried Poles of both sexes, a similar situation might arise if friends moved away or died.<sup>17</sup>

The raised incidence of illness amongst Polish women does not correspond with that provided by Zubrzycki earlier, which denoted that women had a lower rate than men. An explanation for the difference might be that Zubrzycki's figures represented a national picture whilst Hitch and Rack's focus is on Bradford, an area with a higher than average population of Polish women due to the region's textile industry.

The study by Hitch and Rack also noted that cases of paranoia were more frequent amongst Poles than other foreign-born groups. The results of an epidemiological survey (bearing in mind that they were not based on standardised clinical interviews), revealed that paranoia featured in the symptomology of 55.5 per cent of the Polish sample, in contrast with 35.3 per cent from other foreign-born groups and 4.2 per cent of the British-born sample.<sup>18</sup> Checks on paranoia diagnoses during the course of the study continued to indicate that it remained a conspicuous problem amongst Poles.

Hitch and Rack were not convinced that mental illness amongst Polish born people was a consequence of their adaptation to a new environment. Many years after their arrival in Britain this group still remained especially vulnerable to first-time illness:

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p209.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p210.

<sup>18</sup> Of 27 Polish cases investigated, 15 were diagnosed with paranoia; of 17 'Russian' cases, 6 were diagnosed with paranoia; and of 522 British cases, 22 were diagnosed with paranoia. Ibid., p209.

One possibility might be that the combination of wartime experiences and culture shock may have been met by adequate coping mechanisms, but nevertheless rendered the personality vulnerable to later stress.<sup>19</sup>

However, this rationale does not account for the lower illness rate of other foreign-born groups with similar experiences.

Absent from this study, in respect of Polish mental illness, is discussion of the extreme bitterness that many émigrés experienced following formal recognition of the Soviet government in Poland in 1945, which they perceived as a 'betrayal'. Nor did Hitch and Rack address the issue of 'Polish paranoia'.

It might be suggested that paranoiac tendencies amongst Polish émigrés are not without their roots in reality. For example, it was common knowledge amongst Poles in Britain that communists from Poland had worked amongst them,<sup>20</sup> and that a number of repatriated Poles had been arrested in Poland by the same political organisation. It should also be remembered that these people had experienced persecution under the Soviet and Nazi regimes.

Central to Hitch and Rack's analysis of mental illness amongst Poles was their opinion that the Polish community in Bradford was less known for mutual support than the Ukrainian community. In support of this claim, a study by social work students was cited: "Polish-born residents said they know of none others in their locality, although there was in fact a fair concentration".<sup>21</sup> Lack of social cohesion was suggested as an explanation for the raised incidence of illness amongst Poles:

Ethnic social support not only affords a protection against environmental stress; it also bestows identity. The idea of being (for example) 'a Pole' in Britain for 25 years can only be sustained by a sense of 'captive nation' identity. The Ukrainians appear to have maintained this concept, but it is less strong among the Polish community.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Hitch and Rack, op. cit., pp209-210.

<sup>20</sup> J.Zubrzycki, *Soldiers and Peasants: The Sociology of Polish Migration*, (London, 1988), pp137-138. See page 116 for further details of communist infiltration.

<sup>21</sup> Hitch and Rack, op. cit., p207. This is an unpublished study by University of Bradford social work students. Title, date and authors' names were not provided.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p210.



Hitch and Rack concluded that Poles were more likely to experience a conflict of identity in middle age and beyond due to their “weak social network”, and that they had been unable to gain reassurance from, “what is in effect a marginal identity”.<sup>23</sup>

These findings in respect of community cohesion in Bradford are at odds with those of the present study, and indeed, with the work of Sword and other commentators on Polish émigrés in Britain. The alternative view regards Bradford’s Polish community as affording emotional and practical support to émigrés, and facilitating the maintenance of identity by bringing people together for social, political and religious purposes. Further, as discussed previously, community leaders were especially keen to achieve unity amongst Poles as an act of defiance against the Soviet regime in Poland.

That such a marked contrast of opinion is apparent requires some investigation. The following suggestions are offered as speculative explanations for the disparity. Firstly, research samples may have been drawn from different backgrounds. Hitch and Rack were predominantly in contact with the mentally ill and, as Zubrzycki pointed out, these were more likely to be isolated individuals. Therefore, their experiences of settlement may have been distinct from the broader émigré population. Secondly, contrary to the findings of Hitch and Rack’s study, there were sufficient Poles in Bradford during the 1970s to create a community infrastructure, including two Polish community centres.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the émigrés who were approached might have been unwilling to involve their community in research since many Poles viewed authoritative bodies with suspicion,<sup>25</sup> and candid discussion might have proved difficult if those researched were aware of a psychiatric angle to the study.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> J.Hanson noted that in addition to the Polish Parish Club in Bradford, bought in 1965/6, premises for an Ex-Serviceman’s Club were purchased in 1973, in “Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility: British attitudes to non-repatriable Poles and Ukrainians after the Second World War and to the Hungarian refugees of 1956”, PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, p169.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Father H (Dunstable), 4 March 1995, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 1A, p5. See page 27 for discussion of suspicion as a problem during oral history research.

<sup>26</sup> This problem has been recognised during research and is discussed on page 32. See also M.Winslow, “Polish Migration to Britain: War, exile and mental health” in *Oral History*, Vol.27, No.1, Spring 1999, p60.

Further discussion of Polish émigrés and mental health took place in 1981 at a unique conference on the psychosocial problems of refugees. In a post-conference publication,<sup>27</sup> Hitch contributed a review of research relating to the mental health of refugees. In respect of Poles, he asked why they remained vulnerable to mental distress after the first stage of breakdown (the initial years of settlement), when culture shock and memories of trauma were most acute. He explained, “perhaps the mistake is to think that once you have settled down you cease to be a refugee”, and highlighted that problems do not decrease with age as children move away, marriage partners die, and isolation can increase. In this situation, the importance of a support group was recognised by Hitch, and he restated that (in Bradford) Poles were not particularly cohesive.<sup>28</sup>

A further contributor at the conference, Walter Jagucki, a Bradford social worker for Eastern Europeans, emphasised that the vast majority of Poles who came to Britain after the war led successful lives as regards employment, home ownership and raising children. However, in retirement the situation might change as previously busy working days could become quiet and isolated. For some, feelings of uncertainty return:

Others experience the return of old memories; of being forcibly uprooted and deported into enemy lands; of being compelled to work for the enemy as a slave, or even drafted into his army, of being confined in a concentration camp; separated from loved ones, forced to work in dreadful conditions, and often humiliated for being of a different race. Memories of those dreadful years are still painful today.<sup>29</sup>

Materially, the Polish émigré might be well off, but there was no adequate compensation for the loss of family, home, one's youth and the opportunities it offered. Jagucki adds that for some ageing émigrés the past slowly took over from the present and, in spite of the fact that decades had passed, they still felt compelled to talk about their traumatic experiences of war. The psychological vulnerability of the émigrés still remained:

---

<sup>27</sup> International Conference on the Psychosocial Problems of Refugees, 6-9 August, 1981, took place at Keffolds (Britain). Conference publication: R.Baker (ed.), *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, (British Refugee Council/ European Consultation of Refugees and Exiles, London, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> P.Hitch, “The Mental Health of Refugees: A review of research”, in Baker (ed.), *Ibid.*, pp44-45.

<sup>29</sup> W.Jagucki, “The Polish Experience: 40 years on”, in Baker (ed.), *op cit.*, 1982. p33.

As long as circumstances are favourable the person in exile will lead a normal life. But change in family life like death, separation or divorce, changes on the economic front because of unemployment, changes in health because of a crippling stroke or other infirmity, makes this group of people very susceptible to a breakdown, which can result in mental illness.<sup>30</sup>

As a social worker and Polish Lutheran minister, Jagucki occupied a position that enabled him to offer informed comment on the situation of Polish émigrés in his area.<sup>31</sup> He believed that those who maintained links with their ethnic community whilst also integrating with the wider population had been able to lead a comfortable life; problems were identified where people become isolated. Alcoholism and compulsive gambling were said to be prevalent amongst single people, especially those who existed for years in hostels and bed-sits. Where these “lonely people” visited Polish social clubs, their motivation for doing so was apparently to drink alcohol and gamble rather than to seek closer social relationships with their compatriots.<sup>32</sup>

Jagucki cited loneliness as the most common cause of misery for many who never learned the language of the host country and who remained unmarried, and believed that detachment could lead to manifestations of obsessiveness and paranoia. Yet, mastering the language was not always a necessity as the nature of employment in Bradford did not necessarily require a knowledge of English. Local Polish organisations provided opportunities for communication and housed Polish libraries, and when the second generation arrived they became translators. In contrast to Hitch and Rack, Jagucki did not conclude that the sizeable population of Poles in Bradford lacked social cohesion, rather, that Poles, as a group, had chosen to remain “different” in order to preserve their identity.<sup>33</sup>

It might appear that research has focused on Bradford, however, a further contributor to the 1982 conference publication, George Bram, gained his extensive experience of mental illness amongst Poles as a psychiatrist at Mabledon Hospital in Kent. Bram

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> At the time of writing (2000), Walter Jagucki was still working as a social worker for Eastern Europeans, and as a Lutheran minister.

<sup>32</sup> Jagucki op. cit., 1982, p36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp36-38.

defined two categories of refugees: those who experienced the trauma of displacement and who would not, or could not, be repatriated; the second group consisted of ex-concentration camp victims who suppressed their memories of trauma, but which then resurfaced. Bram noted that the first group managed gradual integration, which was an easier process when families were together. 'Single' people, on the other hand, experienced guilt for leaving family behind in Poland and for 'betraying' their homeland by not returning. It was observed that the ex-concentration camp group also suffered guilt due to having survived when relatives and friends had not.<sup>34</sup>

Bram noticed that the first manifestations of breakdown amongst the group without concentration camp experience often surfaced soon after retirement. Amongst those from the camps, symptoms might begin ten years earlier, with individuals forgetting their learned English and reverting to Polish. Bram described a process whereby retired refugees withdrew from established contacts, neglected their appearance and became pathologically suspicious; a paranoia that many have called the 'Polish Disease'. Regarding paranoia, Bram (of Polish origin himself) explained that Poland's history of invasion, partition, oppressive occupation and failed revolution over the past two hundred years has given Poles "good reason" to be paranoid.<sup>35</sup>

Further, the level of integration into British society achieved over many years of settlement (superficial in some cases) might be forgotten and ailing émigrés start to live in the past - "the pre-war past". Bram explained that the British environment became progressively alien and hostile and as émigrés slipped back into the past, and became absorbed in their memories, they gradually developed dementia. Environmental factors were identified as significant in the process of dementia and, when negative, they accelerated normal cerebral ageing to a considerable degree.<sup>36</sup>

Addressing the question of how dementia might be delayed in older refugees, Bram wrote that prior to psychiatric intervention, there should be an attempt to prevent mental decay. In delaying the process, Bram found it useful to have groups of retired refugees meet in day centres where they could have a meal, be involved in

---

<sup>34</sup> G.Bram, "Breakdown in Elderly Polish Refugees", in Baker (ed.), op cit., 1982, p39.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp39-40.

conversation and meet younger people. Such a parish centre was in operation in London during the early 1980s and very few of its sixty clients required hospital admission for psychiatric illness.<sup>37</sup>

Bram was keen to stress that where hospitalisation became necessary it was essential that Polish speaking staff were on hand due to a tendency for émigrés to revert to their first language. Indeed, Bram called for hostel accommodation rather than hospitalisation since dementia is an irreversible and untreatable process (except where an organic cause is responsible, e.g. heart failure or thyroid dysfunction). However, Bram's aspirations were blocked by a ruling against nursing staff working in hostel accommodation.<sup>38</sup>

Writing in the same year, Michal Levin expressed concern at the prevalence of mental health problems amongst Polish émigrés and noted that whilst Poles were generally in good physical condition when they first arrived in Britain, their mental health was a cause for concern. Levin associated early problems with language difficulty and an inability to continue with normal life whilst harbouring memories of recent war experiences and flight. Additionally, hostel life, a sense of insecurity about the future, anxiety for families left behind and the suspicion of Communist agents in their midst were presumed causes. Other contributory factors were identified as interrupted careers that were impossible to resume, and the physical and emotional strain of having to learn new skills in middle age.<sup>39</sup>

Levin stated that the incidence of mental breakdown amongst Polish refugees persistently grew, but quantification was difficult since people with problems have tended to withdraw from the outside world: "Anyone in uniform, official-looking vehicles, the process of filling in forms: all become frightening because of associations with the past, now remembered with a new vividness".<sup>40</sup>

Whilst Polish mental health problems have not been adequately addressed by British statutory services, they have not been ignored by Polish organisations. Levin

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p 40.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> M. Levin, "In the Past", in Acton Society Trust, *What Welcome? Reception and Resettlement of Refugees in Britain*. (London, 1982), pp37-38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p39.

highlights that one of the principal medical resources available to Central and East European refugees has been groups of Polish doctors, nurses and non-specialist medical staff, which includes Bram's specialist medical care at Mabledon Hospital. Unfortunately, at the time that Levin was writing, public expenditure cuts were threatening the hospital's future.<sup>41</sup>

Levin reported that a problem hampering efforts to keep open specialist beds for Poles was a rather strict interpretation of one of the clauses of the 1947 Polish Resettlement Act; this stated that any refugee who had employment could be considered as integrated. Consequently, any individual who had *ever* been employed could be regarded as integrated and, hence, a patient of their local hospital, rather than Mabledon.<sup>42</sup> Levin concluded:

The present problems of aged refugees are an indication of how important initial reception and resettlement procedures are, as well as aftercare. No one undertook long-term analysis of the experience of post-war refugees which would have reduced the problems of later influxes.<sup>43</sup>

By the 1980s, studies were considering matters of policy with regard to the health and welfare of ethnic minority groups with traumatic histories. In 1985, Alison Norman highlighted that growing old in a second homeland placed people in *Triple Jeopardy* because they were at risk due to age, as well as the conditions under which they lived and also because services were not accessible to them.<sup>44</sup> With regard to those who have lived through terror and torture, she introduced a fourth jeopardy recognising the likelihood that, due to the violence they had endured, they may be "scarred for life".<sup>45</sup>

Primarily concerned with service delivery, Norman aimed to inform ethnic minority communities, statutory health and social services, grant-giving agencies and voluntary organisations of the problems of ageing ethnic minority group members and how the risks faced by those with histories of trauma and loss could be reduced:

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p40.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> A. Norman, *Triple Jeopardy: Growing Old in a Second Homeland*, (London, 1985), p1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p13.

These ex-refugees may need a very special kind of understanding and support in their old age which neither the statutory nor the voluntary agencies are at present geared to provide. We need much more research to pinpoint the effect which experiences like this have on people's lives and the kind of help which will be of use when health and learned languages begin to fail.<sup>46</sup>

Norman recognised the importance of community social centres in meeting the needs of ageing Poles. However, she noted that there were inherent problems when Polish clubs were the sole centres of support. A particular difficulty was the irregularity of care due to the reliance on concerned and willing individuals, who were often aged themselves. Moreover, licensed club premises were failing to meet the needs of women who refused to attend them unaccompanied, and of people who had no wish to drink alcohol or could not afford to do so.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst remonstrating that health services in general were uneven in quality and resource allocation, Norman pointed out that, where they existed, older émigrés were not necessarily benefiting from basic services relating to medical treatment, day care, domiciliary support, information provision, and libraries. Several recommendations were made to improve this situation: that health authorities, local authorities and voluntary organisations should change the way in which they recruit staff, publicise facilities, use interpreters, and consult with the ethnic minority communities in their area, so as to make their general service provision more sensitive and open, all featured among the proposals.<sup>48</sup>

Norman concluded by calling for ethnic minorities to be allowed access to services on an equal basis to that of the indigenous elderly: "All of us must cease to connive at the 'double message' which offers elderly members of ethnic minorities equal use of services in principle, but denies it to them in practice."<sup>49</sup>

The oral testimony which has been contributed to the present research lends support to Norman's claim that Polish émigrés were 'scarred for life' by their traumatic experiences. Furthermore, in 1989, Malgorzata Kmita confirmed the findings and also

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p37.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p148.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p149.

highlighted that Poles were traumatised as a result of their resettlement away from Poland. Pragmatically, she considered that some émigrés, “may have used the war to change their lifestyles and run away from the past”, but states that the overriding majority had no other choice, on grounds of personal safety, but to refuse repatriation assistance. In common with previous writers, she believed that many émigrés found their traumatic memories of war and settlement unresolvable: “For some it took over forty years before they could begin to come to terms with their painful experiences of war, others never came to terms with it at all.”<sup>50</sup>

As a Pole, born and raised in communist Poland, Kmita brings an invaluable perspective to research. She writes that, in her experience, “the Poles in Poland mentioned the war less frequently than the Poles in Britain”. Émigrés apparently talked more about the difficulties of their lives during and after the war and of how their survival in “top gear... exhausted and often annihilated them”. Decades later, many remained stateless and angry and, revealing feelings of guilt that had frequently been overlooked, Kmita wrote that many Poles continued to blame themselves for choosing to stay in the West and opting for a better life.<sup>51</sup>

In a departure from previous work, Kmita took the issue of exclusion into account. In the previous chapter émigrés were discussed who were, to varying extents, excluded from ‘Polish community’ support, with the focus on non-Catholic Poles, arrivals from Communist Poland and Poles who fought with the German military during the war. Kmita added the mentally ill to this list:

The mentally ill Poles present another phenomena since they are not only rejected and stigmatised by the British for being mentally ill and immigrants but they are often rejected by their own community, the Church, or the ex-combatant’s home. They are rejected because they are not regarded as well-to-do immigrants. Status amongst the immigrant community is a very tangible source of pride.<sup>52</sup>

A female patient provided a case study for the above theory. After leaving Poland at the age of sixteen, possessing few literacy or numeracy skills, she married and had

---

<sup>50</sup> M.Kmita, “The effect of the Second World War on the mental health of the Polish Immigrants in Britain” in B. Holyst (ed.), *Mental Changes*, Polish Psychological Society, Warsaw, 1989, p204.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp205-206.



children in Britain. However, her husband committed suicide and her children became addicted to drugs. The Polish community and church proved judgmental and unsupportive and the woman was admitted to hospital on sixteen occasions, twelve of which were compulsory and with police intervention. With the help of a Polish-speaking social worker, the patient was able to express her feelings and gradually regained some meaning in her life; after this point, very few compulsory admissions were necessary.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst Kmita recognised that many Poles built successful and stable lives in Britain, she wrote about the less fortunate who found themselves lonely, rejected and isolated. Mental illness could be a consequence of this situation and precipitating factors were cited, including; lack of confiding relationships; the death of friends and family; not being able to travel to funerals in Poland - "grief with no goodbye"; low incomes; and inability to communicate in English and cultural difficulties. Additionally, there was "unresolved business".<sup>54</sup>

Unfinished emotional issues from the past penetrate bitterly into the consciousness and unconsciousness; for men it may be the concept of death and killing; for women sexual abuse that they experienced and kept silently for years to themselves, thinking they were the only ones. Often regression to childhood or the blocking of emotions were the only defence mechanisms and the only way of surviving this 'grey' reality of life.<sup>55</sup>

Kmita viewed Polish émigrés as clear candidates for "social action". However, she believed that as they had not presented a racial or law and order threat, they were not prioritised for this.<sup>56</sup>

In a 1993 publication, Rack addressed *Race, Culture and Mental Disorder* across a range of ethnic minorities. With regard to Poles, he continued with the opinion that Polish immigrants were vulnerable to mental breakdown and especially prone to paranoia.<sup>57</sup> He presented a case study of a woman born in Eastern Europe who developed a physical illness in 1975 that required treatment by injection. She reacted violently to the proposal, which seemed bizarre to her doctors until they discovered

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p209.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p206.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> P.Rack, *Race, Culture and Mental Disorder*, (London, 1993), p27.

that she had been in a concentration camp where experiments were carried out that involved injecting prisoners with noxious substances. In the circumstances, this woman's paranoia was not incomprehensible.<sup>58</sup>

Rack was in agreement with other commentators regarding factors likely to precipitate illness and wrote that a usual form of therapy would involve a therapist who would help the patient pass through a therapeutic period of mourning. However:

...faced by total disaster, with loss of *all* loved ones, and of country, complete disassociation from the past, destruction of all the external resources that a bereaved person might use to reconstruct identity [... ] then the task may be too great to be faced, and mourning - or sufficient mourning - may not take place immediately or at all.<sup>59</sup>

During the 1990s, concerns grew regarding the fast growth of the entire ageing population in Britain and research into this topic was strengthened by the importance it attained in government perceptions.<sup>60</sup> However, studies of ageing amongst ethnic minority groups received less support, even though older people were increasing more rapidly amongst this sector of society.<sup>61</sup> Research that has taken place has tended to concentrate on services available to ethnic minorities and one such report, compiled and published by Age Concern in 1995, assessed the needs of four groups, including East Europeans in Berkshire, and particularly Poles in Reading and Slough.<sup>62</sup> This report aimed to identify specific problems and examined the provision of care in the community and the extent to which information was available. Much of the research was carried out via interviews with carers involved in the Age Concern project, which included members of ethnic minority community organisations and older people themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Detailing problems amongst East European groups, the report noted that being 'white' had not prevented experiences of racism and, just as negatively, it also found

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p140.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p158.

<sup>60</sup> T.Warnes, "A decade of gerontology's development in Britain", in *Contemporary Gerontology*, 5, 4, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> A recent demographic picture of the Polish community in Britain showed the proportion of elderly people as greater than in the wider population. K.Sword, *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain*, London, 1996, p117.

<sup>62</sup> B.Bowling, *Elderly People From Ethnic Minorities: A report on four projects*, (Age Concern and Institute of Gerontology, Kings College, London, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp1-4.

that being 'white' obscured ethnic difference. This ambiguity did nothing to counter the 'outsider' notion of cultural homogeneity amongst East Europeans; a perception that might have gained support from their tendency to resist the classification of 'ethnic minority'. Opposition to this term, claimed the Age Concern report, was especially evident when necessity prompted communication with statutory organisations, such as the department of Health and Social Security, the police and local authority social services.<sup>64</sup>

Specifically, the report focused on the problem of isolation amongst East Europeans. However, interviews with officers from local statutory and voluntary organisations disclosed that they did not consider isolation to be a relevant problem. A DHSS officer was of the opinion that, given the length of time East European migrants had been living in Britain, they ought to be able to speak English and communicate with English speakers, and where they did not, they had no one to blame but themselves. The author of the report claimed some logic to this statement but recognised that in the context of their history, and their position at the economic, social and political margins of British society, the inability of many East Europeans to speak English was understandable.<sup>65</sup>

The report acknowledged that difficulty mixing with the indigenous population, and a dearth of educational facilities for learning English, contributed to communication problems and encouraged ethnic separation. Further, it understood that reversion to the first language could occur with the onset of old age, even amongst competent English speakers.<sup>66</sup>

Past trauma was recognised as a particularly prominent cause for concern: "East Europeans who deteriorated mentally seemed often to have been psychologically damaged as a result of war experience."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, interviews revealed a relationship between paranoia in the present and experiences in the past. A woman who had worked as a slave labourer in Germany believed that she was suffering at the hands of her neighbours:

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p7.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp6-7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

They do all sorts of things to me - sticking hot needles and nails into my bath, they made a hole where the bath was, they would pipe there gas... Now they don't have to come round here any more, they're doing it by witchcraft.<sup>68</sup>

The woman's project worker commented:

...because of the harrowing experiences of World War Two, the instance of mental anguish are becoming more apparent among our elderly. Their tragedy and misery from that time is continuing and the number of sufferers will increase.<sup>69</sup>

The report found that, until just prior to its publication, Reading Social Services had no special provision for any ethnic minority group. Social workers became aware of people in need only when their situation reached a crisis point. Those who attempted to provide some form of crisis intervention were hampered by poor knowledge of the person's background, culture and religion, which rendered diagnosis and intervention difficult. Nor was anyone available who could speak the necessary language. Age Concern in Berkshire acknowledged that there was practically no special service for ageing East Europeans and that it was not equipped to provide such a service. Unremarkably, the report found that support for such groups came principally from within their own communities.<sup>70</sup>

As a result of the report's findings, Age Concern embarked on a project that aimed to strengthen links between communities and local services. No funding was available for training or resources in respect of this initiative and project workers had no one to whom they could refer cases. Indeed, social services were so ill-equipped to deal with the problems of older Poles that they referred them to the project workers. Attempts to recruit Polish-speaking volunteers met with difficulties since few people could afford the time or were willing to commit themselves to voluntary work. Towards the end of the project's life, in 1989, project workers realised that the acute funding shortage meant that the services being developed had no future.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp8-9.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp9-16.

Despite the unhappy end of a project that aimed to fill a void in statutory service, the report's postscript offered a note of optimism; as an awareness-raising exercise, the project had achieved some success.<sup>72</sup>

The latter three decades of the twentieth century have witnessed increasing interest in the health and welfare of migrants in Britain. The situation of Poles came under scrutiny as a result of this development and particularly because of the growth of trans-cultural psychiatry. At the start of a new century, health and welfare professionals possess more knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding the plight of migrants and refugees than ever before. However, where motivation to help might exist, the funding and resources necessary to turn words into action remain in short supply, and fifty years after their arrival in Britain, Polish émigrés still generally rely on their own community structures, and each other, for support.

In this situation of neglect, the value of informal reminiscence, and more formal reminiscence groups led by qualified facilitators, deserves more recognition. In 1997, Littlewood and Lipsedge, psychiatrists specialising in psychological ill health amongst ethnic minorities, stated that, "...all individuals try to make sense of their predicament. They are driven by a quest for meaning."<sup>73</sup>

With this statement an unwitting link is made with oral history. In a recent study, Hunt and Robbins sought to examine relationships with the past and how it is remembered, by conducting interviews amongst Second World War veterans, discovering that many were still troubled by their memories of war. However, coping strategies differed significantly. Many used avoidance, that is, they attempted to avoid all reminders of the war so they would not be upset by it. Although effective, this strategy did not enable the processing of negative and emotional information in the traumatic memory. This processing was achieved most effectively by veterans who developed narratives about their traumatic experiences, who mulled over the past and who gradually developed a version of events that made some sense; by so doing, they

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p16.

<sup>73</sup> R.Littlewood and M.Lipsedge, *Aliens and Alienists: Ethnic minorities and psychiatry*. 3rd edition. (London, 1997), p243.

took control of their memories and were able to deal with them without too much distress.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to the belief that émigrés need to understand their past in order to encourage a process of coming to terms with it, it is argued here that there is a necessity for carers to know the histories of their patients, clients and family members if they are to understand their present difficulties. Previous research has made the connection between illness and past experience, and there has been recognition of the importance of reminiscence within a system of culturally sympathetic care. Oral history can contribute to an understanding of the problem by exploring the relationship that the past has with the present. The remainder of this chapter pursues this theme.

---

<sup>74</sup> N.Hunt and I.Robbins, "Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping With Their Memories Through Narrative", in *Oral History*, Autumn, 1998, Vol. 26, No 2, pp57-64.

## 5.2 Part Two: The past in the present

The Popular Memory Group described memory as a past-present relationship, whereby the past maintains a living, active existence in the present.<sup>75</sup> For Polish émigrés in Britain, this opinion is particularly pertinent as the relevance and meaning of the past is regularly and collectively expressed in the present. Those who participate in community life publicly interpret their lifetime of war and exile as a fight for the freedom of Poland; a positive historical narrative that has enabled many to express pride at having fought for their country, and for maintaining their national and cultural identity in defiance of its suppression in Poland.

Amongst researchers of Polish mental illness there is a consensus of opinion regarding the psychological benefits of involvement in community activities, and the present research supports this view. However, the unity that is a conspicuous component of émigré community life has not been quite so apparent during interviews with individuals. Whilst there is public subscription to the community narrative, in private, many are less clear in their understanding of their historical fate.

With the exception of the initial inclusion of observations on mental illness in the early days of settlement, the following section aims to reflect the experiences of interviewees who have not generally attracted the attention of health and welfare agencies. These are people who have managed to rebuild, or at least continue with, their lives in Britain. Some have integrated successfully, whilst others have rarely ventured beyond their Polish environments. For the most part, these interviewees can be perceived as the psychological survivors of their unexpected and unwelcome migration. However, since many of them evidently remain negatively affected by their past, this an arguable proposition.

Where appropriate, the testimonies of first generation Poles and their carers, including professional, family and non-statutory volunteers, are supplemented by unpublished documentary evidence. Due to the sensitive nature of discourse at times, interviewees have occasionally requested that recording equipment be turned off.

---

<sup>75</sup> Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, politics, method", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.) *The Oral History Reader*, London 1998, pp75-86.

Sentiments offered during these unrecorded periods are represented in a manner which the author believes to be faithful to their feelings.

### **5.3 Coping with mental illness in the early days of settlement**

The mental condition of a significant number of émigrés deteriorated before they managed to establish new lives in Britain. Hence, before exploring the experience of Poles who have been apparently successful in their resettlement, it would be expedient to acknowledge those who were unable to cope with their new situation.

As early as 1943, a Neuro Psychiatric Division was formed for Polish forces as it was recognised that amongst the Polish troops being moved to Scotland there were servicemen in need of psychiatric medical provision. Initially, the Division used wards in a British hospital and developed two rehabilitation centres, but following the withdrawal of recognition from the Government-in-Exile, in 1945, Polish psychiatric operations were taken over by the British Ministry of Health. A special unit, Mabledon, was created in 1947 in Tunbridge, Kent, for mentally ill Polish servicemen and ex-serving soldiers.<sup>76</sup>

The Polish exclusivity of the unit was not to last because the Tunbridge area was without psychiatric services and local patients were admitted into the hospital. The hospital was subsequently requisitioned from the Poles and in 1955 relocated to a hospital near Dartford, retaining the name of Mabledon. The new Mabledon served the whole of Britain's Polish population, whilst also serving the local non-Polish population.<sup>77</sup> Admissions were overwhelmingly of Poles, male and female, although male admissions more than doubled those of women, reflecting the larger male Polish émigré population. Ten percent were under twenty one years old, with the majority being between forty and fifty years old. Patients were of mixed social class, with previous occupations reported as professors, doctors and manual workers. Amongst the women, fifty per cent had previously been housewives who did not work outside

---

<sup>76</sup> Unpublished report, "Mabledon", p24. The report is undated and without a name. However, it was probably produced in the early 1970s, with Bram as the likely author. Copy in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp42-25.



the home. The existence of family relationships in Britain varied between individuals.<sup>78</sup>

In 1952, George Bram, Physician Superintendent of Mabledon, wrote in its Annual Report that the hospital was experiencing a drop in admissions; Bram expected the downtrend to continue in the following years, however, the hospital also housed a number of chronic patients with poor prospects of recovery, for whom discharge into the community was “impossible”.<sup>79</sup>

Inka Nowotna worked with Bram at Mabledon in the years after the war and recalled her work at the hospital:

I used to work with Dr Bram at the out-patient clinic in London every Tuesday afternoon. We started at two in the afternoon and we finished, seven, nine, sometimes eleven at night. And the patients who were discharged from Mabledon Hospital and came to London were my responsibility, to look after their welfare, but Mabledon Hospital could admit Polish patients from Sheffield, from Devon, from everywhere...

I don't agree with the new community care approach to mental illness, I think it's wrong, but I'm old fashioned of course... I believe that people must be given a proper home... I know Victorian huge hospitals were certainly not very good... but Mabledon Hospital... it was one of the best hospitals that I have ever seen.

*Did the Poles need that asylum situation for support?*

Absolutely, absolutely, and security.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the admirable work of hospital staff, all was not well. Amongst other problems, Bram was concerned that the poor condition of the buildings used to house patients was affecting their recovery. In 1951-52, he wrote:

The first and most important of these difficulties is the dilapidated condition of the, so-called, dormitories. The construction of new dormitories cannot be started and this is

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p7.

<sup>79</sup> G.Bram, “Mabledon Park Hospital Annual Report 1951-1952”, p5. Copy in possession of M.Winslow. During the period, there were 211 male admissions and 87 female admissions. Male discharges totalled 191, with 78 female discharges. Two men and two women died in the hospital. Outpatients totalled 659.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Mrs I.N (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 44, pp9-10 and pp15-16.

most detrimental to the progress of patients. They feel dejected when put in a Nissen hut, which is dark and grim, and giving limited living space to each of the occupants. The shabby dormitories are a deterrent from getting better. The present condition of the huts is not helpful in dealing with some of the symptoms, such as depression and neglect of personal appearance. It is most difficult to deal with these cases in the circumstances I have mentioned, and, in some instances, when this is discussed with the patient he points out that were the treatment of his condition important he would definitely be given a better room.<sup>81</sup>

By 1978, beds were still available for mentally ill Poles at Mabledon, but the number had been greatly reduced, despite Bram's complaints that chronically ill and geriatric cases were increasing:

Each week requests are made to myself and Mrs Nowotna, the Social Worker, for admission to Mabledon, of dementing Poles. Many of them without families... we must remember that the rate of mental breakdown among refugees is much higher than among the native population. Where the elderly are concerned, many years ago I found that the mental breakdown among the elderly was far more for Polish as compared with the native population. It was more than fourfold and the process is accelerating now as the Polish population is ageing.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to the need for beds for additional patients, Mabledon in the 1970s was still housing a few admissions from the 1950s. By 1995, some of these long-term patients were being cared for in a specialist Polish unit in Stonehouse Hospital, Dartford. The Consultant Psychiatrist in charge of the unit, Dr Cybulska, reported that most of her patients were young when they arrived in Britain and had not settled, and when they became ill they never recovered. In Dr Cybulska's opinion, their illness was caused "not by war battles, but by forced immigration".<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Bram., op cit., 1951-1952, pp16-17.

<sup>82</sup> Unpublished source: "Memo: Re Mabledon Hospital", by G. Bram, Hon. Consultant Psychiatrist to the Dartford and Gravesham Group of Hospitals. 13 June 1978. Copy in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>83</sup> Personal communication with E. Cybulska, 1 March 1995. Dr Cybulska made patient records available for research (with names deleted for confidentiality), and it was noted that many long-term patients had been admitted during the 1940s and 1950s with varying manifestations of illness. Many had been agricultural or industrial labourers in pre-war Poland; others included skilled craftsmen and a policeman.

#### 5.4 Mental health and the Polish émigré majority

Poles who were cared for in hospitals and residential institutions after the war were significant in number, but it should be borne in mind that they represented a minority of émigrés. However, this is not to say that the majority all enjoyed good mental health; psychological scars were far-reaching and problems extended into the 'well' population, although the extent of distress amongst them will never be known. Many people tried to cope alone with their problems; they did not seek professional help and felt unable to talk about the past. The stigma surrounding mental illness further encouraged silence.

In the early post-war years, the pain caused by massive losses and the circumstances which prevented their return to Poland should not be underestimated:

Our settlement in Britain was made all the more difficult by our feeling of betrayal. The Yalta, Tehran and Potsdam treaties seemed, especially to those who had served in the British services, as a betrayal. The soldiers who had fought in the underground army, and in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 were now regarded by the Polish-Soviet Communist government as 'enemies of the state'. They were accused of collaboration with the Nazis and other crimes. We read in British and French newspapers of the persecution of AK soldiers still in Poland and we felt extreme bitterness towards our allies who recognised the puppet Polish government which was killing our own people, who had fought for the freedom of our country. Withdrawal of recognition of the legitimate Polish Government-in-Exile was a bitter blow. We were completely lost and this did not help us to settle. We did not trust our allies any more and no longer felt safe. All this made our settling very problematic.<sup>84</sup>

An event that provoked much bitterness amongst Polish émigrés was the absence of the Polish army from the Allied Victory parade held in London on 8 June 1946. The non-attendance of the army had more to do with political considerations than any failure to recognise the achievements of the Poles, as the officially recognised Polish government in Warsaw had been invited to send representatives.<sup>85</sup> An invitation was extended to twenty five Polish airmen who took part in the Battle of Britain.

<sup>84</sup> Personal correspondence with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 6 January 1999, who preferred to express these feelings on paper, rather than on tape. Copy in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>85</sup> J.Hanson, "Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, p196.

However, they refused on the grounds that they could not attend a ceremony from which the Polish army was excluded.<sup>86</sup>

Most of my compatriots are still very, very bitter about how the Polish forces were treated... my husband, who was in the Polish army under the British command, was not at the victory parade and we felt, well, betrayed, if you want... Of course, one can understand the political situation was such that Churchill probably didn't have any other choice, but it was very painful and it still is for very elderly people, still is a wound which is not cleaned at all.<sup>87</sup>

Lack of public acknowledgement of the Polish contribution during the war did nothing to alleviate distress amongst émigrés. A further 'wound' resulted from the long bureaucratic struggle to gain permission to erect a memorial to the Katyń victims; a monument that was unveiled eventually in Britain in 1976.

A similar situation was highlighted by Martin Evans, who wrote of the experience of French conscripts during the Algerian war of decolonisation (1945-1962). They too were subsequently marginalised in the national memory; their experiences overshadowed by memories of the First and Second World Wars; the failure of the French government to recognise the Algerian conflict as a war; and because of a conscious will to 'forget' in 1960s France. This public exclusion and neglect fostered "terrible social and psychological wounds".<sup>88</sup>

Whilst their histories differ, Evans' analysis of the Algerian veterans' is applicable to Polish émigrés:

Undoubtedly such official non-recognition has been central in defining the shape of Algerian veterans' remembering. Their absence from public remembrance provoked widespread bitterness amongst veterans...<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> See page 71 for further information about the Victory Parade.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Mrs IN (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 44, p1.

<sup>88</sup> M.Evans, "Rehabilitating the Traumatized War Veteran: The case of French conscripts from the Algerian War, 1954-1962", in M.Evans and K.Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1997), p73.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p75.

However, in the case of the Poles, with the war over, they were at least presented with an opportunity to regain a sense of security in their new environment. As many of the newcomers were young, they also found time to rekindle their 'lost youth' by enjoying social time with friends and romantic partners, and by experiencing the excitement of discovering a new country.

Yet, these were people who had experienced horrific traumas and many struggled with feelings of guilt for having survived when friends and family had not, and for not returning to surviving family members in Poland. The following interviewee explained how he sought professional help for his troubled state of mind in the late 1940s, with unsatisfactory results:

I was living another life, I was happy, we had started to plan, yet at night I had nightmares, dreams, all towards the war and uncertainty about relatives... well anyhow whilst we were living at [a friend's house] she realised that I was living through something and she advised me to go and see doctor, and for some time I used to go to hospital. I think, once a week, for an interview... psychiatrist, to help me. But I knew they couldn't help me because I knew what I went through. I knew what was the reason for it, but they didn't think it was true... Because they weren't aware at that point, they didn't know what had gone on in the war... I was haunted by nightmares. Nobody knows, only those who went through it.<sup>90</sup>

Émigrés who had reached a time of life when 'starting again' was a particularly daunting prospect were especially vulnerable to mental distress, and many of these older people remained in the PRC for as long as possible. After most people had left Ilford Park camp, near Newton Abbot, Devon, some widows, orphans, invalids and others refused to leave as they felt unable to cope with life in Britain. These people were allowed to remain in the camp, which became Ilford Park Polish Home. In 1990 there were 128 people residing there;<sup>91</sup> by 2000, there were still 101.<sup>92</sup>

The PRC camp at Penrhos, North Wales, was also converted into a residential home:

---

<sup>90</sup> Mr RR (Chesterfield), 31 January 1998, interviewed by M. Winslow, Tape 18, p6.

<sup>91</sup> J. Hanson, "Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, pp159-161.

<sup>92</sup> Personal communication with Ilford Park Polish Home, 20 May 2000.

At first the camp housed Polish soldiers, the majority officers, under the umbrella of the Polish Resettlement Corps. However, once these people became civilians a problem arose with invalids, late middle aged and unemployable ex-servicemen. The Polish ex-combatants organisation undertook to look after the welfare of these Poles and to administer the camp with agreement with the British government to provide pensions and funds for all Poles injured or disabled while fighting under British command. Penrhos camp was rented from the Air Ministry at £3,000 per year, but afterwards the rent was reduced to £1,000 per year and eventually the camp was bought from the Ministry of Defence as a freehold for £7,500. Thus, the Polish Housing Society was established as a registered charity with the aim of looking after and caring for Polish elderly people.<sup>93</sup>

Andrew Kicman, author of the above and manager of Penrhos residential and nursing homes from 1988 to 1996, believes that the psychological problems prevalent amongst Polish residents have always been directly linked to trauma suffered during the war:

There seems to be a link between dementia and the trauma suffered during and after the war, i.e. actual experience of war, war wounds, incarceration in prisoner-of-war camps and concentration camps, loss of home, family, friends and homeland, in fact, practically all that they held dear. When this is added to the trauma suffered in attempting to settle down in a new country, difficulties with language and in finding jobs, making friends and endeavouring to hold on to established values and traditions, it is small wonder that most were suffering from a degree of disorientation which for some was to last for the rest of their lives, and for others to return in old age.<sup>94</sup>

It was reported by Kicman that the disorientation of many residents, when they first arrived at Penrhos, often dissipated as they settled into the familiar cultural and linguistic environment of the residential home. Hence, émigrés who were unable to cope in British society began to regain some quality of life.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, a resident who chose Penrhos as her retirement home, rather than being referred by Social Services, viewed living there with some despondency: "This is not family life... it's an

---

<sup>93</sup> Unpublished paper by A.Kicman: "Informative lecture about Poles in Great Britain, for Community Psychiatric Nurses". January 1995. Copy in possession of M .Winslow.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Personal communication with A.Kicman (Penrhos), 5 February 1995.

assembly of old people who've lost everything... lots of people here can't reconcile to it... they talk about the past all the time because they've got no future".<sup>96</sup>

A further resident of Penrhos, who also chose to live there in his retirement, revealed that when he first arrived in Britain he felt incapable of starting a new life; the prospect of learning a new language was especially distressing. He recalled that it was older Poles who had most difficulty settling down to their situations. This man eventually learned English, found a job and married, but admitted that he had never come to terms with his past, and has continually asked, "why me?".<sup>97</sup>

Ex-servicemen's clubs were a steady source of psychological support for Polish émigrés, and whilst these institutions were of great value to the vast majority, they became a 'lifeline' for many ex-officers. Within the ex-servicemen's club environment, and that of the Polish Catholic centres, the lost status of many ex-officers could be restored. Those who were employed as club managers also improved their employment status along with their self-esteem.

Links that were forged between Polish and British ex-servicemen's organisations provided further social space for émigrés, and ex-officers particularly benefited:

A lot suffer, couldn't get used to it and became alcoholics, but gradually we settle and then our ex-servicemen's association branches co-operated with British ex-servicemen, and that was the link you see, because there was a great respect... mutual respect, because they met on the battlefield.<sup>98</sup>

A number of ex-officers were interviewed during the course of research. These men told of the difficulties they experienced when seeking work befitting their pre-war professional status, and described their dissatisfaction at being offered manual employment. However, many of these interviewees were young men at the end of the war and their ability to learn English relatively quickly enabled them to eventually seek a more satisfying career path, with a higher salary. One man became a photographer, others became engineers and the following interviewee managed to rescue his academic career:

---

<sup>96</sup> Personal communication with Mrs F (Penrhos), 4 April 1996.

<sup>97</sup> Personal communication with Mr H (Penrhos), 5 February 1995.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 9, p4.

I had a 'false degree' in this country, I was Doctor of Law in Poland, but here I was a clerical officer. But I became Master of Law and I was engaged in a University as Lecturer, and afterwards, Senior Lecturer.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, the unfortunate plight of many older officers is well known to Polish émigrés and has been mentioned on several occasions during interviews. In her social work capacity, Inka Nowotna was familiar with the situation:

They were called the 'Silver Brigade'... in hotels, polishing silver, and also silver haired... in those days a man over sixty was considered to be old, he couldn't be retrained. How can you explain to a full General in the Polish army that he can do nothing else but polish? ... It was degrading.<sup>100</sup>

Another interviewee described moving to Nottingham with her ex-officer husband after their initial post-war venture into farming had failed. The only employment available to him was factory work and he remained in the same place for twenty five years, on the night shift. His widow related that he was never happy and always struggled with the language; that his ethnic minority co-workers were also second language speakers did nothing to alleviate this problem. Life had changed dramatically for this ex-officer:

[He] always talked of fighting for freedom and Poland. In Italy they were somebody, in England they were nobody... he took menial factory work, he was never happy... he died of nostalgia.<sup>101</sup>

Unhappiness drove others to defy their principles and return to Poland:

A lot of officers after the war, they couldn't stand living the life here, they went home to wives and family, they disappeared, nobody knows what happened to them. I suppose they were taken somewhere and disappeared.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 31 October 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 39, p6.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Mrs IN (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 44, p5.

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication with Mrs K (Nottingham), 10 April 1996.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 12, p9.



In 1951, a residential home was established in Beckenham, Kent, for ageing Polish émigrés 'of status'. Antokol provided a comfortable environment that maintained the Polish language, "and those traditions to which the residents were accustomed in their younger, more active days, thus giving them a sense of security and peace in old age despite continuing exile".<sup>103</sup> Antokol subsequently transferred to Chislehurst and began taking residents from all walks of life, but in the early days the clientele were specific, as the current Polish manager explained:

It was just for the upper class originally. The way I see it, the diplomats, the members of the Government-in-Exile, the aristocracy, the upper military echelons, officers, they found themselves stranded here and they lost the environment that supported their image, their status. They had no status, and they officially were even called 'status-less'. And they needed it, it was something they needed to thrive on. That's why they set up Antokol as this little Poland, as this little enclave, where they could keep up appearances, the image, the self-image. In the original Antokol, people used to dress to dinner in dinner jackets and long frocks, they would play bridge in the afternoon, they would have trips to theatre... address each other by their title.

If they went into British society they wouldn't have any of it, because they were not recognised for it. People hardly spoke any language, they were too old to learn, so they created this oasis for themselves. And it went on like this for sometime. There was a lady whose husband was a minor Polish diplomat... When she learned that Antokol admitted a new resident who was of the lowest officer rank, not of the highest but of the lowest, she refused to come to the dining room... There was a lady who worked here as a cook for many years, when she got old she wanted to come here as a resident, she wasn't admitted... but in the seventies it all had to change because there were no more diplomats and officers left. The only way for Antokol to survive was to take in the 'commoners'.<sup>104</sup>

Problems associated with loss of status, pre-war profession and lifestyle, in addition to the loss of family and home, were not confined to the 'elite'. The vast majority of émigrés had lost a great deal, including opportunities to pursue their ambitions. Their dreadful losses were compounded by deep feelings of bitterness and disillusionment

---

<sup>103</sup> "'Antokol': Home for Elderly Polish People", p1. This is an unpublished information booklet for residents and their relatives, given to the author in December 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Interview, 4 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 46, pp13-14. Request for name to be withheld.

at having been 'betrayed' by those in authority, and also feelings of disorientation in their new cultural environment. Contact with local populations, and the attendant hostility it brought, resulted in additional problems.

All of the above have been recognised by psychiatrists and social workers as contributing to mental health problems during the early days. However, as the majority of Polish émigrés grew accustomed to their conditions, began raising families, and found employment more suited to them, they appeared to adapt within their neighbourhoods and settle down to life in Britain. Indeed, they became altogether less visible in society.

### **5.5 Becoming 'invisible' in society: A disadvantage for mental health**

Articles appear periodically in the local press that relate the lifestory of a Pole who lives in the area. The non-Polish population generally know very little of the reasons for the Polish presence in Britain, and stories from this group make interesting reading. Headlines such as, "Escape from Stalin's nightmare to make a new home in Leek",<sup>105</sup> draw readers into learning of the tremendous journeys undertaken by Poles before they arrived in Britain and of their military achievements. It is also commonly emphasised that these are local people who witnessed and experienced atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and Soviets during the war.<sup>106</sup>

However, public attention has not always been paid to the traumatic backgrounds of Polish émigrés. Indeed, with no reference to the history of Poles, a Croydon council official stated in 1961 that Polish émigrés in the district, "...don't have any problems or make any trouble".<sup>107</sup> This comment was probably influenced by political preoccupations at the time with the social and political consequences of migration from the colonies, and white European migrants were not generally drawn into the immigration debate. Nevertheless, whilst attention in this negative sense was best avoided, it could be argued that the Poles' 'invisibility', as far as local authorities

---

<sup>105</sup> C.Malkin, "Escape from Stalin's nightmare to make a new home in Leek", in *Post and Times*, 23 August, 1995, p16.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Malkin reveals one man's experience of deportation to a prison in Charkow, USSR, where many prisoners were tortured and murdered.

<sup>107</sup> Op. cit., Patterson, 1961, p96.

were concerned, forestalled the provision of health and welfare measures to address their needs.

Indeed, a Refugee Council statement of 1984 stated: "The East European refugees have integrated and settled into the social and economic life in Britain"; an opinion described by Donna Lodge as an over-simplification. With reference to Bradford Council, she also remarked: "By alleging that integration has occurred, the Council has reduced its own burden of responsibility for these people."<sup>108</sup>

To an extent, responsibility for their inconspicuous position in British society also rests with the Poles. As an ethnic minority group, they have tended not to involve themselves in British politics, at local or national level, and many individuals have refused to accept the state help to which they are entitled.<sup>109</sup> Jan Niczyperowicz, Eastern European Welfare Officer, wrote of the Polish community in Leeds:

On the whole no great demands have been made by the Poles on the various statutory or voluntary agencies. Coupled with the fact that all the Eastern European Communities in general have no loud voice nor carry any "political clout", certain problems have been overlooked - most of all by the communities themselves.<sup>110</sup>

In contrast, many interviewees have asserted that the Polish community has been keenly self-supporting; an attitude ostensibly borne of distrust of authority, and pride:

We will survive, I think, for many years. Because we have good material base, we are completely independent. We've got our own church, our own community... But in another ten years it will be very hard work, with the elderly people, to help them. Because, not all of them want to accept the help of the English community... some of them are too proud to accept help... Because some of them think that if somebody help you it means that you are poor.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> D.Lodge, "European Volunteer Workers in Bradford since the Second World War", MPhil., University of Sheffield, November 1991, pp117-118.

<sup>109</sup> Bradford differed from the general trend in that, in the 1970s, an Anglo-Polish Labour Society and an Anglo-Polish Conservative Association existed. Plus, a Polish woman emerged as a National Front candidate. J.Hanson, "Sympathy, Antipathy, Hostility", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995, p345.

<sup>110</sup> J.Niczyperowicz, "The Polish Community in Leeds (A social perspective)", unpublished paper, March 1987, p3. Copy in possession of M.Winslow.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Father G (Bradford), 22 April 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 24, p10.

Returning to public policy towards the Poles, research into the specific problems of Polish émigrés, and more generally, migrants with traumatic backgrounds, has been available to health departments for many years. Therefore, lack of action has not been due to lack of information.

Financial considerations will have almost certainly influenced the very limited statutory response to the needs of Poles. However, the charge has also been made during the course of research that local authority funding bodies have frequently neglected Polish needs, as there has been a tendency to view them as 'like the British'.<sup>112</sup> Yet, as Inka Nowotna has highlighted, the lives of Polish émigrés have differed significantly from the experiences of their British-born peers:

Poles were deported to Russia and eventually they joined the Polish forces in the West - what they have suffered and their families suffered. My dear, can you imagine a woman, married with four children, four, deported to Russia; her husband was somewhere, she never knew what happened to him - perished. She had four children, one died, the second one died, the third one died, the fourth one died, and she couldn't bury them because the soil was so frozen. So you see, everyday she was looking at the corpses. Can you be normal afterwards?<sup>113</sup>

Stating that Poles are 'one of us now', clearly overlooks the reality of the situation. Whilst, by the 1960s, many Poles were integrating with the wider British population, particularly the younger émigrés, their past experience and their cultural background was generally very different from the experience of their colleagues at work, and in other everyday situations. Additionally, a significant number of émigrés had minimal contact with the world beyond Polish friends and acquaintances, and the networks of Polish retailers, churches and social centres.

---

<sup>112</sup> Personal correspondence with a local authority employee of Polish origin, who confided this opinion in 1996. Further details withheld.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Mrs IN (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 44, p3.

## 5.6 Issues specifically concerning women

Writing about female migrants, Buijs comments that one consequence of forced uprooting from familiar patterns of life was the struggle to recover continuity and control, and the frequent desire to remake abandoned lives.<sup>114</sup> Such a reconstruction might have been achieved in the home as housekeeping and raising children enabled some continuity with the past. However, whilst this role gave women an opportunity to gain a sense of purpose that their male partners may have lacked, as they were mostly unable to continue in pre-war employment spheres, a life centred on the home was an insular existence for many women.

Pre-war Polish family life was generally patriarchal. Men were the heads of their households and commanded respect; a situation that tended to continue in Britain.<sup>115</sup> Maintenance of this traditional role meant that men dealt with household 'business matters', leaving the women with few opportunities to learn English or adjust to their new environment:

Mostly, the man was ruling the family. They worked, they knew better language, the women rather stay at home, that was the Polish way. They were not going to work, not many of them. The man was dealing with the taxes, with the insurance, house, everything, and they were cooking Polish way, or whatever. Well, later on when the husband die, women were left on their own and they were very disturbed because they were not understanding and they were isolated, not even meeting another woman of Polish origin.<sup>116</sup>

\*

In Penrhos you meet a lot of widows who suffer from that problem, from the difficulties. Everyday problems for them are too much, they are afraid of everyday problems, of the letters, official letters. Penrhos is a place where they feel more secure.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> G.Buijs, "Introduction", in G.Buijs (ed.), *Migrant Women: Crossing boundaries and changing identities*, (Oxford, 1993), p2.

<sup>115</sup> W.Szablewski and M.Winslow, *Polish Community Cultural Awareness: Information and Learning Pack*, Community Information Unit, Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, January 2000, p27.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 10, p2.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Father H (Dunstable), 4 March 1995, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 1A, p2.

A research trip to Penrhos confirmed that female residents who were interviewed felt more secure in the environment of the residential home. However, one interviewee explained that she had refused to come to Penrhos when the idea was first suggested to her, in 1988. At that time, the buildings were those of the original PRC camp, which was reminiscent of her a prisoner-of-war experience after the Warsaw Uprising. She agreed eventually to move in after new purpose-built homes were constructed.<sup>118</sup>

An interviewee who works as an interpreter also offered an example of the distressing insecurity that can develop when ageing female émigrés have become isolated in their own homes:

I went with a social worker as an interpreter to visit this woman and she came to me, she didn't want to know who this woman was and why she was there. She was hiding and she gave me her pension book, and she'd scribbled and written stuff all over it - 'they're after me, they're looking for me, what do they want to know...?'. SS - it stands for Social Security, but to her it was *the SS*, you know.<sup>119</sup>

A Polish voluntary outreach worker also recounted the suicide of a Polish widow who had depended on her husband, "for everything... language, bills, dealing with the outside world"; after struggling to cope alone she hanged herself.<sup>120</sup>

Malgorzata Kmita, a psychologist who has worked extensively amongst Poles in Britain, offered her perspective on the situation of women:

They lost their homes, their country, their culture and their families... they often found the pain of learning English unbearable. They were hanging on to their past by using their native language. This was considerably more common amongst East European women than men."<sup>121</sup>

Additionally, Kmita reminds us that women might be concealing memories of trauma that are difficult to talk about:

<sup>118</sup> Personal communication with Mrs F (Penrhos), 4 April 1996.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, p11.

<sup>120</sup> Personal communication with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 9 September 1997.

<sup>121</sup> M.Kmita, "Good practices for mental health for Eastern European women in the UK". Unpublished paper. Date unknown.

Women also brought with them a wide spectrum of wartime life events; experience of concentration camps, labour camps, violence, sexual and emotional abuse. One woman commented, “if I did not sleep with the Nazis I had to pick potatoes bare footed, if I did they let me wear shoes. Then I tried to describe to my Catholic priest my experiences but he did not want to listen and told me that I sinned.”<sup>122</sup>

An interviewee who grew up in Bradford with Polish parents recalled, as a child, being aware that something was amiss amongst her mother’s Polish friends:

The women would talk amongst themselves and you’d hear them say, ‘Mrs so and so, oh yes, she’s gone to Menston’. And it was a long time before I knew what it was. But I think all the while there must have been a mental problem in the community, and it just seems like that was one of the most severest places to go to. I never went to Menston, I never saw this place, I just knew of it at the time and it just seemed to me like a lot of women ended up in Menston.”<sup>123</sup>

Similar bleak depictions of the situation of Polish women have been repeated during the course of research. However, it should be noted that many female contributors also worked outside the home and gained a good knowledge of English. Many of these women were in the younger age range when interviewed, around seventy years old, having arrived in Britain in their late teens and early twenties. Probably their youth, and not having family responsibilities, influenced their capacity to rebuild their lives, in common with many ex-servicemen.

Positive examples of women contributors to this study include Krystyna Kawecka, who experienced deportation to Siberia and arrived in Britain with the Polish forces. She attended college and gained a teaching qualification in 1966, after which she embarked on a teaching career and later published her lifestory.<sup>124</sup> Inka Nowotna gained a PhD in Law and Social Science in Strasbourg before the war started, joined her husband in France during the war, and escaped to Britain following the country’s occupation. Her working life was spent as a social worker with mentally ill Poles.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, p15.

<sup>124</sup> K. Kawecka contributed to research and also published *Journey Without a Ticket: To England through Siberia*, (Nottingham, 1994).

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Mrs IN (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 44, p16.

Employment taken by other female interviewees has included factory work, general hotel duties, secretarial work, receptionist work, catering, interpreting, and keeping lodging houses. In addition, many have continued to offer their services voluntarily after retirement, working with charities, organising Polish luncheon clubs, and working as carers, outreach workers and interpreters.<sup>126</sup>

However, whilst many Polish women were preoccupied with the demands of their employment and their families, the past continued to impinge on their daily lives. The following interviewee arrived in Britain aged twenty four and found work in a textile factory in Bradford. During the war she had been deported to Siberia where her health suffered severely in a labour camp, and never fully recovered. She married in Britain and, after years of childlessness, discovered that she was pregnant at the age of forty four. During the pregnancy she suffered considerable anxiety as this was the early 1960s when the Thalidomide drug, prescribed for morning sickness, was causing birth defects. At the time, the consequences of taking the drug were not publicly known, hence, those who had not taken it were unable to make the link between the toxic effects of Thalidomide and babies born with limbs missing.<sup>127</sup> This Polish woman arrived at a distressing conclusion about her unborn child:

At this time, when babies being born, you remember, there was some kind of tablets and women were having no good babies, have hands only and finger. So I'm looking at these ladies, English ladies, smart and with a strong bloke, and they have a baby that's bad. And I'm thinking, 'oh my goodness, what kind of baby will I have when I've been so poorly, have no health, nothing. Maybe it be a monster'. When they bring my baby, oh, I was so happy... nothing go wrong with daughter, nothing.<sup>128</sup>

Fear of birth defects was a general problem for women during this period, but Polish women were especially vulnerable to stress during pregnancy as they feared that their own poor health, on account of their distinctive history of trauma, would impact adversely upon that of their unborn child.

---

<sup>126</sup> Tapes and transcripts in possession of M. Winslow.

<sup>127</sup> As early as 1960, suspicions were growing in drug research circles that Thalidomide was excessively toxic. However, in the public domain it was considered so safe that in many European countries it was available initially without prescription. For further information see paper by Frances Kelsey, "Historical Perspective", at "Thalidomide: Potential Benefits and Risk, Open Public Scientific Workshop", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rockville, 9 September, 1997. <http://www.fda.gov/oashi/patrep/nih99.html#kelsey>

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Mrs Szy (Bradford), 4 February 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 21, p4.



## 5.7 Issues that have negatively impacted on the settlement of Polish men

The opportunity to marry, have children and rebuild family life was not always possible for émigrés. It has already been noted that many men wanted a Polish bride but faced a problem as there were fewer Polish women in Britain than Polish men. Sword wrote of men bringing wives over to Britain from Poland.<sup>129</sup> However, Jagucki explained that many unions which involved women brought from Poland in the 1960s were marriages of convenience, and the failure of many of these marriages exacted a heavy psychological toll.<sup>130</sup>

... you have quite a number of young women or young men who came and intermarried with the second generation of Poles, or sometimes the first... who came from Poland with high expectations and what they found is not what they thought, and they just crack up. I've got in my dealings with mentally ill Polish people, I've got fifteen people like this, and that's those who I found or rather found me, people who came from Poland with expectations and had a dreadful marriage, broken marriage, broken promises, and they're trapped, because they can't go back, they could, but they would not, for obvious reasons, you don't go back as a failure.<sup>131</sup>

Many Polish men took non-Polish wives but a Polish voluntary outreach worker explained that in "English-Polish mixed marriages", should the husband become ill in later life, loss of language and perhaps confusion impeded communication with their wife and children: "The sick man cannot express his feelings in the acquired language; frustration and depression follows, and resignation."<sup>132</sup>

Some émigrés could not pursue the marriage route at all due to their financial and caring responsibilities:

In 1948 I got demobbed, and my mother found me before I got demobbed, through the army... And then the army says, if I have somebody I want to bring in, I can bring one person. I want my mother. Then she comes over here, but I have to sign that she will be my dependant person, I will never ask British government for anything for her, and I did it, I keep her for twenty years... And I never get married, because every time I

<sup>129</sup> Sword, op cit., 1996, p40.

<sup>130</sup> Personal correspondence with W.Jagucki, 1 October 1996.

<sup>131</sup> BHRU: B0071/01/16-17.

<sup>132</sup> Personal communication with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 6 January 1999.

mention I have a mother, they say, 'you have to get rid of mother, I don't want mother'.  
What can I do, I had to be a son and keep mother.<sup>133</sup>

Niczyperowicz identified problems which were prevalent amongst men living alone:

The Poles are quite hard working people, proud of their achievements at work. There are, however, exceptions to this rule, mainly among single lonely male members of the Community. The biggest social illness among Poles is alcoholism and, to a certain extent, a compulsion for gambling. The recent recession made approximately 65% of the male members unemployed [Leeds].<sup>134</sup>

That alcohol has been a problem amongst émigrés was an opinion corroborated by interviewees; one man recalled a companion who seemingly coped with everyday life, but when drinking he would reflect on traumatic experiences, especially an incident during the war that killed his friends, and become distressed.<sup>135</sup> Other interviewees have referred to alcohol drinking as 'Polish culture'; a conviction upheld by an interviewee who claimed to have created a new 'record' in his Polish club for downing eighty four vodkas in one evening (prior to suffering a stroke).<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, whilst drinking has evidently been an integral part of the social lives of many émigrés, there are others for whom alcohol is not a big attraction: "I wasn't really a drinking fellow... I wasn't very keen on getting drunk".<sup>137</sup> And a Polish priest added that although he knew of the alcoholism problem within his Polish parish, "it's no more of a problem than it is amongst the Irish or English".<sup>138</sup> Additionally, as émigrés age, many are compelled to alter their drinking habits:

People used to drink more, nobody had a car so they could afford to drink... But gradually the people started using the club less and less, people acquired cars, they couldn't drink because they would drive. People got impoverished because they were

---

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Mr St (Bradford), 21 January 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 20, pp2-3. At the time of writing, the Red Cross were still endeavouring to find people torn apart by the Second World War. Between 1 January 1980 and November 1998, 323 cases, involving 580 Polish individuals, were reunited. Personal communication with Red Cross Headquarters, London, 12 November 1998.

<sup>134</sup> J. Niczyperowicz, "The Polish Community in Leeds: A Social Perspective", 1987, p3. Unpublished study.

<sup>135</sup> Personal communication with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 7 October 1999.

<sup>136</sup> Personal communication with Mr Wl (Sheffield), 5 March 1995.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Mr Si (Sheffield), 16 August 1996, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 4, p24.

<sup>138</sup> Personal communication, 26 June 1998. Further details withheld.

retiring. You know, a retired person can't afford to go and buy whiskey and beer at present day prices.<sup>139</sup>

Attempts to discuss alcohol amongst émigrés has often not been possible as interviewees have displayed an unwillingness to do so. Similarly, discussion of unemployment has generally been uncommon, possibly because many interviewees have not been out of work for a sustained period: "I was not one day unemployed",<sup>140</sup> is a common reflection. The exceptions were demobbed officers as many experienced difficulty finding work. Respect for military rank made some employers uneasy about placing an officer in a menial position: "Not job for you". He was honest. I said, 'thank you very much'... I was unemployed for some time.<sup>141</sup>

Unemployment has only been mentioned in the context of the immediate post-war period; interviewees have not volunteered information about difficulties involved in finding work during the later years of their settlement. Albeit, one man was involved in the miner's strike (1984-85) and spoke of its impact on him:

I was on strike, you had to... I was about nine months on strike and then I went back... It was terrible, because of money... There was no ballot, nothing, just only a show of hands, that's all... majority said 'yes' by putting hands up. If I'd gone to work they'd have killed me, or send me to hospital with broken legs... so police used to take me to work... I go back because I was fifty nine... I had to get my money.<sup>142</sup>

The previous interviewee's wife, who was a slave labourer in Germany, recalled the period when her husband was a 'strike-breaker':

I was scared... people were scared to death because they breaking windows and everything. And do you know, Polish people send me letters, Polish people, saying, 'tell him not to go to work'... and students from university knows he's going back to work and send a letter saying not to go... he gave that letter to police.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mr Zs (Reading), 8 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 49, p18.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Dr L (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 14, p1.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 15 September 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 9, pp4-5.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Mr So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 40, pp17-18.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Mrs So (Sheffield), 6 February 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 40, pp18-19.

## 5.8 Growing old in a 'second homeland'

Difficult issues that arose during the course of life in Britain exacerbated the psychological burden of living with painful memories of the past amongst Polish émigrés, who were viewed by local authorities as 'settled' and 'integrated'. Polish organisations were aware of the problems and were attempting to address them, but the task was too great for a lone ethnic minority community. In 1971, the Polish Ex-Combatant's Association wrote:

Mental illness is exceptionally high among refugees. The Polish Ex-Combatant's Association, which runs a department for employment and assistance, has under its care, in London alone, over 100 mentally disabled. Others are looked after in homes and hostels run by the Relief Society for Poles, and within the capability of their slender resources, these and other organisations do magnificent work. The same care is extended to the old [...] But again funds do not permit a comprehensive scheme, and many are in a distressed condition.<sup>144</sup>

Nevertheless, the ill were in the minority, it has been emphasised; the majority were striving to get on with their lives and raise their families. They had employment, were in contact with their ethnic group and many enjoyed a reasonable standard of living. During the busy period of their working and family lives, émigrés were able to place the past on the 'back burner' whilst they dealt with present day contingencies.<sup>145</sup> However, with advancing age, psychological stability became an increasing problem amongst the Polish émigré population as a whole.

It is true that many émigrés have achieved a great deal in the years since their arrival in Britain. However, the circumstances of ageing Polish émigrés in their retirement, as perceived during this research, have differed. A significant proportion of interviewees have been homeowners, often with supportive children, who are ostensibly economically secure in their retirement. Others have appeared less financially secure and lived in rented accommodation, whilst a further group of interviewees were in residential and nursing homes due to physical frailty.

---

<sup>144</sup> Polish Ex-Combatant's Association op. cit., 1971, p6.

<sup>145</sup> Winslow op. cit., 1999, p64.

As regards economic security, it was mentioned previously that émigrés sent funds to families in Poland in the years after the war, and in doing so often deprived themselves of everyday essentials. Half a century later, in the years after retirement, memories of war experiences still compel some émigrés to go without necessities, such as food and heat, in order to amass savings for their own security, and especially that of their children; notwithstanding that, “the Polish tradition is that the children take care of their parents, both emotionally and financially”.<sup>146</sup> Concerns have been expressed by interviewees regarding this self-imposed deprivation; a Polish outreach worker in Bradford explained the problem as she had experienced it:

Yes, the saving is in their mind. They are afraid of spending money, that is a fact. I keep telling them, ‘don’t worry about it, just put the fire on, don’t freeze in the house’. Because I go there and I’m shivering, I’m with my coat and I’m shivering in their house. I say, ‘why you saving money... I’m sure you have enough to pay for the bill, don’t worry about that’. But it is in back of mind that they have to save and have to prepare.<sup>147</sup>

A social worker for East Europeans, with experience of eccentric behaviour, was puzzled by this situation:

I came across a Polish man in Shipley, a well known character out there... a beggar, all his clothes were torn, everything about him was like a down and out, a true down and out. And there was nothing in his house, he would go out begging for food, for money, even I sent clothes for him, I thought, ‘my God, he needs some gloves, or whatever’... And when he died, in his house they found sixty thousand pounds... why was he like that?<sup>148</sup>

Few émigrés associated with this research have displayed such frugality. However, the need to ‘prepare’ has been evident:

They’ll always hoard food, they’ll always have cupboards full of ‘just in case’ food. My mum had a drawer full of ‘just in case’ clothes that she never wore. She should have really worn better clothes but there was always that ‘just in case’... jars, empty jars are something that I’ve found in a lot of people’s homes and I don’t know why. I

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Mrs IN, 13 March 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 44, p6.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 23, p12.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, p14.

don't know whether it's for storing food or for what, but empty jars, it's something they don't throw away.<sup>149</sup>

The manager of Antokol also explained that hoarding was common in the residential home:

We have to accept a lot of people hoard things. We had a lady who didn't feel safe unless she had a sandwich in the desk, in the draw of her desk there used to be a dried up sandwich. And a lot of people are like this. We had a lady here... we had to clear her room of biscuits, she hoards biscuits... before, in her house, they had nothing, they deprived themselves of everything... she would boil a big pot of rice once a week and they would live on it. It's not that they did not have money, they managed to save money, they managed to pay mortgage, now she is able to pay her own fees... but she came here with cases of things that were twenty years old, soap, biscuits, some herbal tonics, things like that...<sup>150</sup>

Another resident wears excessive clothing on a daily basis:

She was always wearing five or six pairs of knickers. And we always thought it was odd... recently I put two and two together, she's spent time in Siberia and it was the only way to keep warm, and only way to keep all your clothes, so you didn't lose them, so they were not stolen from you. You had to wear everything you had on yourself.<sup>151</sup>

The above extracts highlight that, amongst ageing Polish émigrés, the past is living on in the present. The experiences presented here all relate to people who were considered mentally well. Hence, their behaviour was not the result of mental impairment. It was the memory of past deprivation which compelled them to prepare for the unexpected.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p17.

<sup>150</sup> Interview, 4 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 46, pp5-6. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p5.

Amongst patients with dementia, carers have also described extreme behaviour that connects with the past. Research with dementia patients has revealed that links between memory and emotion are very strong, and that many demented people retain their lifestory narrative;<sup>152</sup> contributions to this study support this work. The matron of the nursing home at Penrhos told of a resident who hides her belongings under her mattress and reclines on the bed all day to disguise their whereabouts. Another patient believes that his feet are badly burned after he fled a burning tank, and a further man ‘sees’ parachutists landing in the living room of his sheltered accommodation.<sup>153</sup> The manager of Penrhos divulged:

The dementia of Penrhos residents manifests in a variety of ways. Symptoms appear in the form of extreme suspicion, hallucinations, reversion to childhood experiences, violence, compulsive behaviour, and complete disorientation.<sup>154</sup>

Norman wrote of her concerns that psychogeriatric care for the indigenous elderly suffers from being “uneven in its quality and resource allocation”. Hence, the likelihood of specialist care being provided by local authorities for minority groups is unlikely in the foreseeable future.<sup>155</sup> Amongst the Polish population in Britain, however, the need for care has long been recognised:

The Poles fought alongside the Allies during the Second World War and suffered greater horrors than many of us can conceive. Many of those traumas resurface in later life as major psychiatric problems which require specialist professional services.<sup>156</sup>

A network of residential, sheltered and nursing homes for ageing Polish émigrés exists in Britain, mostly managed by Polish organisations’; a directory produced by the Federation of Poles in Great Britain lists in excess of six hundred care beds available.<sup>157</sup> It has frequently been highlighted by professional and family carers that removing émigrés from their isolated home situations and placing them in culturally

---

<sup>152</sup> M.Mills, “Using the narrative in dementia care”, in J.Bornat (ed.) *Biographical interviews: The link between research and practice*, (London, 1999), pp15-23.

<sup>153</sup> Personal communication with Matron of Penrhos nursing home, 4 February 1995.

<sup>154</sup> Kicman op. cit., 1995.

<sup>155</sup> Norman op. cit., 1985, p69.

<sup>156</sup> The Federation of Poles in Great Britain made this statement in their unpublished directory of Polish residential and nursing homes. Copy supplied to author, February 1998.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. See also *Polski Informator*, produced by Zjednoczenie Polskie w w. Brytanii, 238-246 King Street, London W6. Updated annually, this directory of Polish organisations and businesses in Britain includes care homes.

sensitive surroundings positively benefits their mental health; isolation and inability to cope are cited as principal reasons for social service referrals to Penrhos. Deteriorating language ability obstructs pension and benefit claims and greatly impedes social communication, leading to a situation whereby individuals might be assessed as incapable of managing alone.<sup>158</sup>

In addition to physical and psychological needs, many émigrés opt into Polish residential care in order to live in a familiar cultural and linguistic environment. The care homes visited during the course of research have been staffed by Polish speakers who understand the histories of their residents; an important aspect of care as knowledge of patients/clients narratives increases respect and understanding amongst those who care for them.<sup>159</sup> However, homes run by Polish organisations offer more than supervision and empathy. Penrhos, in North Wales, provides an outstanding example as it has become a ‘Polish village’ with its own church and Polish library, a restaurant that serves traditional meals and an on-site Polish food shop. Polish satellite television and videos are available to residents and they regularly receive visits from Polish entertainers. Antokol in Chislehurst also has a Polish kitchen, a well stocked library, a resident Polish priest, and has Polish nuns amongst its staff. Greenbrae Residential home, near Aberdeen, also provides a homely Polish environment, with residents offered opportunities for holidays and extended stays in Poland.<sup>160</sup>

The standard of care observed in the Polish homes visited has been commendable.<sup>161</sup> However, it seemingly encourages an assumption amongst authorities that ethnic minorities “look after their own”, implying that communities take on collective responsibility for the care of their elders.<sup>162</sup> A report by the Northern Refugee Centre supported this opinion.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> Kicman op. cit., 1995.

<sup>159</sup> Mills op. cit., 1999, p20.

<sup>160</sup> For more information regarding Greenbrae, see website: <http://www.greenbrae.co.uk>

<sup>161</sup> The author writes as a qualified ex-nurse with experience of geriatric care in hospitals and care homes.

<sup>162</sup> J.Adamson, “Carers and dementia among African/Caribbean and South Asian families”, in *Generations Review*, Vol.9, No.3, September 1999, p12.

<sup>163</sup> Report based on research by M.McCarthy, *Elders in Exile*, (Northern Refugee Centre, 1995), p10.



Beckfield Residential Home in Bradford, visited during this research, is a local authority run unit. The home is open to all nationalities, but houses a recently opened 'Eastern European wing': "...meant as a centre for them in their old age, to have them all together, because they were scattered".<sup>164</sup> Clearly, this home differs from Polish-run homes in that problems might arise when nationalities are merged who have historical grievances against one another. However, a significant difference between Beckfield and the Polish homes visited is the ability of staff to speak the language of their clients. Attracting Polish speaking staff into care work is a difficulty that faces all homes with Polish émigré residents, although Polish-run homes have an advantage as their contacts assist recruitment from Poland.

Nevertheless, at least specialist care provision for East Europeans is on the local authority's agenda in Bradford. Most other regions in Britain have not, as yet, progressed so far. In Sheffield, in the mid-1990s, the Polish Catholic club took steps to establish a Polish luncheon club and made a request for local authority assistance. After a series of difficulties, including a council representative's assumption that the needs of the Poles were "the same as the English", momentum for the luncheon club was lost.<sup>165</sup>

Also in Sheffield, a voluntary Polish outreach worker expressed concern that Poles were being placed in residential care homes with non-Polish speakers. As he liaised with social services, he suggested to a council worker that Poles might be placed together in residential homes. It was alleged that the retort of a council official was uncooperative: "What do you want, Polish ghettos?".<sup>166</sup> Support for this response emerged from an unexpected source as a young Polish Catholic priest claimed that the Polish community was, "too close". He asserted that émigrés should have made more effort to mix with the 'English' during the past half century, and had they done so their circumstances, as regards support, would be more favourable; they would not be, "feeling like foreigners".<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, p12.

<sup>165</sup> Personal communication with an employee of Sheffield City Council, 28 February 1997. Further details withheld.

<sup>166</sup> Personal communication with Mr Ms (Sheffield), 26 February 1995.

<sup>167</sup> Personal communication, 26 June 1998. Further details withheld.

Yet, the post-retirement period is not the most suitable time for Poles to be seeking out new English speaking acquaintances. Their language skills are in decline and there is also a tendency for émigrés to reflect more on their traumatic life experiences.

Specialist care provided by organisations who understand the impact of the past on the present lives of Polish émigrés is clearly necessary. All too frequently, this assistance is not available and responsibility for the support of Poles in their old age falls to concerned émigrés, who are themselves experiencing problems associated with ageing. This situation involves a small number of volunteers attempting the practically impossible task of visiting an ever-increasing population of ageing and infirm émigrés. The work of the following voluntary outreach worker, carried out at her own expense, involves visiting Poles isolated in nursing homes that are geographically scattered around the Sheffield area:

In the nursing homes they have a lovely little room, very clean and everything, and their physical needs are very well served and they are warm and fed, but sometimes people need other people don't they? So that part is quite disturbing, yes. You know, there are round about twenty five people in nursing homes at the moment and I can't get to see them more than three times a year because they live so far away. One lady is in Barnsley, a couple are in Grenoside. So, it's just, you know...<sup>168</sup>

## 5.9 A growing necessity to communicate in Polish

The language issue, on differing levels, is crucial to ageing difficulties. The previous worker commented that language is “a problem that exacerbates everything”.<sup>169</sup> Where language is completely lost or never learned, everyday life becomes difficult. Paying bills, collecting pensions and shopping become arduous tasks. Conversations with neighbours are avoided and relationships with relatives, particularly English-speaking grandchildren, lose a degree of closeness.

Whilst contributors to this research have mostly possessed a good knowledge of English, they have admitted that forgetting words is a source of embarrassment and

---

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), who is also a Polish voluntary outreach worker, 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p12.

<sup>169</sup> Personal communication with Mrs Sz, 9 September 1997.

frustration. Almost without exception, this problem has been complained of by interviewees, from ex-university lecturers who once spoke English fluently, to émigrés with no formal language training who picked up the language in their workplace. On one occasion, an interviewee who was recovering from a long-term illness became so exasperated at not being able to recall certain words that the interview was ended prematurely.<sup>170</sup> Inka Nowotna recognises this problem:

Lets face it, in old age we lose memory very easily... everything is slower... and very often we just have flu and the language is gone.<sup>171</sup>

It can be argued that language loss reinforces feelings of being 'foreign', and conceivably motivates stronger identification with Polish nationality: "I know I'm Polish and I know I'm foreigner, although nobody tells me".<sup>172</sup> As language has been described as a major indicator of ethnic identity,<sup>173</sup> this is an aspect to take into account when thinking about the connection between reminiscence and language.

Evidently, Poles who play an active part in community life by regularly visiting their local club for a drink, continually re-affirm their identity by recollecting with compatriots. In the sense that language makes order possible in the world,<sup>174</sup> the repeated mulling over of events helps the survivors of trauma to make sense of the circumstances that led to permanent 'exile'. Polish outreach workers in Bradford and Sheffield, voluntary and statutory, spend much of their time talking to isolated people:

I try to listen... I spoke with Walter Jagucki a few times and he said, 'just let them talk'. You see, they're not mentally ill, nothing like that. But sometimes they need a good talk, because they are so isolated, it do them good. I spoke with my boss in Social Services, I said, 'I cannot just pop in for half an hour with somebody, it's just impossible, because as

---

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Mrs N (Chislehurst), 29 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 13.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Mrs IN (Brixton), 13 March 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 44, p14.

<sup>172</sup> Interview, 29 January 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 19, p14. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>173</sup> M.Lanca, C.Alksnis, N.Roese, R.Gardner, "Effects of language choice on acculturation: A study of Portuguese immigrants in a multicultural setting", in *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol.13, No.3, September, 1994, pp315-329.

<sup>174</sup> N.Chomsky, cited in L.Grinberg and R.Grinberg, *Psychoanalytical Perspectives on Migration and Exile*, (Yale University, 1989), pp109-111.

soon as I go, they start talking, I cannot just say, 'I'm sorry my hour is gone I have to go'. I cannot do that.<sup>175</sup>

\*

A man of seventy or seventy five, who was born in Poland, he is Polish inside, he is not English and he wants to speak Polish... when I see this man in the nursing home, I cannot get away. He wants to talk and talk about all sorts of things.<sup>176</sup>

A Residential Social Worker who was employed at Beckfield also encountered a need to reminisce amongst residents:

We would sit at dinner and somebody would say something about Siberia - 'when I was in Siberia'. And then another lady would say something and suddenly there was this discussion with them all talking about their lives. Then one would cry and another would start crying and I'd say, 'now ok, we won't talk about this, these sad things, we'll talk about something else now'. 'No, no, we have to talk about it, I want to talk about it'. And no matter how much they cried they wanted to talk about how their mother and father had died in Siberia, and children and, you know, everything. They had to talk about it.<sup>177</sup>

Hunt and Robbins explain that the ordering of memory, over time, into a narrative that is comfortable to recall assists understanding of experiences. 'Forgetting' details and aspects of the past that do not fit the story is also part of this process since playing down, omitting, or even upgrading events, assists in an ordering of the past which helps bring it under conscious control; a process said to be important in sustaining mental health:

...narrative development is the most effective way of reducing the emotional stress of traumatic memories that flood into the traumatised person's mind in an uncontrolled fashion.<sup>178</sup>

In the experience of Hunt and Robbins, veterans who were told by clinicians at the end of the war to "go away and forget about their experiences" did not manage to do this successfully. Suppression of verbal communication did little to reduce the trauma

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M Winslow, Tape 23, p7.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p12.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Mrs D (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, pp12-13.

<sup>178</sup> Hunt and Robbins op. cit., 1998, pp57-64.

that accompanied remembering.<sup>179</sup> Echoes of this scenario were noted in an anecdote given by a Polish volunteer outreach worker. He recalled a phone call from the son of an émigré requesting that he visit his father, as he had, “gone into himself”. It transpired that the émigré had spent his years in Britain as an “Englishman”; taking an English wife, adopting an English name and not referring to the past. However, after his children left home and his wife died he became despondent and spent isolated days chain-smoking indoors. During the visit, the man became unusually talkative, recalling his experience of the war at great length.<sup>180</sup>

This study supports the view that talking about traumatic personal histories promotes a process of coming to terms with the past. However, it also recognises that this process might never be completed as the past has left indelible scars in the memories of Polish émigrés:

We are resilient up to a point, we can stand a lot and still survive, but somehow you have to pay for it. It comes back, you have nightmares, sometimes you experience fear, for no reason at all. It is a fear that somehow you experienced in the past and it is still there, still persisting.<sup>181</sup>

Andrea Sabbadini wrote that psychotherapy with victims of torture could offer support, containment and healing. The subjects of her case studies (Asian and African who experienced torture in their homeland) felt a desperate sense of permanent loss and needed to be listened to and believed, but had an ambivalent relationship with memories that they wished to forget. Psychotherapy involved recreating the frightening and confusing scenarios in the context of transference and countertransference dynamics, and Sabbadini found this to be rewarding work that made the unbearable more bearable.<sup>182</sup>

However, the Consultant Psychiatrist responsible for the Polish unit at Stonehouse hospital, and who worked for nine years at “The Polish Clinic” in Harley Street

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Personal communication with Mr M (Sheffield), 26 February 1995.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 17, p5.

<sup>182</sup> A. Sabbadini, “Psychotherapy with victims of torture: From wounded victims to scarred survivors”, in *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 12, 4, 1996, p520.

(providing NHS treatment), argued that Polish émigrés rarely respond to psychotherapy:

By their initial enthusiasm for psychotherapy Polish patients may have been hoping to receive much needed care but when the relationship required real commitment, the fear of being exposed vulnerable and then abandoned pushed them towards flight. Some have been emotionally frozen, due to failure to mourn... a desire to be close may become irrevocably coupled with a defensive wish to remain unreachable...<sup>183</sup>

An argument for increased emphasis on facilitating reminiscence, with appropriately qualified people, might be elicited from this opinion. From this perspective, the development of personal narratives which explain the past in the terms of the individual can be viewed as a positive route to follow, particularly as there is less likelihood of a person being exposed as vulnerable. Attaching personal meaning to life experiences with the support of an empathetic ear, and in a non-intimidating environment, might assist individuals to make sense of their life in a 'foreign' country, and their heavy losses.

However, the provision of specialist facilitators, necessary for traumatic reminiscence with Poles, requires financial and purposeful commitment from local authorities. The overall lack of provision in these areas contrasts starkly with the surfeit of problems amongst Polish émigrés.

In Bradford, the provision of specific services for the Eastern European population is greater than in most areas of Britain, but remains insufficient as the needs of the city's large population of Polish clients are too great to be met by the small number of workers available to them. However, émigrés in Bradford are fortunate in that they have the support of a thriving luncheon club, held in the Polish Community centre. In this environment, they meet and communicate with their compatriots:

I work as Outreach Worker, Monday and Tuesday, and I visit Polish people around Bradford. I'm supposed to be the link between Social Services and Polish Community... I translate, explain, if there's anything they need, I sort it out... for home

---

<sup>183</sup> E.Cybulska, "Poles - unsuitable for psychotherapy?", letter in *Psychiatric Bulletin*, October, 1993, p629. Also, subject discussed during personal communication at Stonehouse Hospital, 1 March 1995.

care, shopping, cleaning, bringing the pension or whatever; Meals on Wheels, anything like that. If I meet new people, I always also ask if they want to come to day centre, because if they're very lonely, that's their first contact. I will ask them, 'can you start coming to day centre every Friday... we've got transport for the Friday', so we bring them here and they meet some people, they talk, they feel much better then. Because for years they have been completely lonely, they're lost and very lonely. They're frightened, they're thinking, 'oh, nobody wants me', you know. All neighbours are English, they have no contact.<sup>184</sup>

The day centre held in Polish Community premises in Bradford was, however, a community, as the Polish parish priest explained:

We were the first Polish parish to organise a day centre. My colleague priests ask me a lot of questions; 'how did you do it, how did you find this and that?', you know. I think we've been lucky, because we started by ourselves, without any help. I only ask a woman to help me to cook and organise, and after that we contact Social Services and showed them what we had here, and they've been very happy to see something going on.<sup>185</sup>

The opportunity to meet in the day centre gives émigrés a chance to share and rationalise their problems, including their ailments:

Maybe their mental health, their physical health is a result of what they've gone through. Some of the people realise that I think... They say, 'well, we've been in Siberia where it was minus 40 degrees and we chop the wood... our legs are bad now because there was no proper shoes or anything'. You know, they've got bad arthritis and things like that as a result of things that they've gone through. Some of the people realise that I think, that's why they keep bringing it up, this subject.<sup>186</sup>

'Bringing up the subject' has also been deemed a necessity. Tim Woods commented that story telling has long acted as a means of bearing witness to events of the past, and that in this way, history is preserved as personal history which takes on shape and meaning through personal interpretations.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 23, p1.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Father G (Bradford), 22 April 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 24, p9.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 23, p4.

<sup>187</sup> T.Woods, "Mending the skin of memory", in *Rethinking History*, Vol.2, No.3, Autumn, 1998, p347.

The need to talk about the past, in Polish, is understood by the Polish community and the problem of Polish elders isolated in local authority homes provides Polish volunteers with much work.

### 5.10 The problem of inadequate support

Lonely people, by themselves, with poor knowledge of English... lack of contacts, they live in a shell, don't communicate, they lack the extended family, they're alone... <sup>188</sup>

The support of an extended family is generally absent is due to the loss of relatives in the war, or because they live in Poland;

The problem is they have just two children, or one child, and nothing else. In normal life you have extended family and they haven't got it... They haven't got a big family life. I find now myself, if I want help, I can't find anybody, because they are incapable of doing the job or they're living far away, so it's difficult... It's not because they will not do it, but because they are in a worse position than I am. <sup>189</sup>

A Polish psychiatrist explained that the absence of an extended family contributes to the isolation of many ageing émigrés, which is a considerable problem as amongst the socially isolated there is a prevalence of paranoia and depression. <sup>190</sup> In addition to the lack of a family network, isolation might also be due to individuals having discontinued their contact with Polish associates, perhaps due to a rift or because a conscious choice was made to do so. A Polish Outreach Worker in Bradford described a common cause of isolation:

Most of the people who come to the luncheon club used to live in the streets around here. That's why the church is here, the club is here, they bought all that... I don't know when it changed, they've maybe gone better, they've bought houses away from here. The children grow up, they move away, looking for jobs and things like that. The family move away and they are very lonely in their old age they are really... very

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Mrs Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p12.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Mr Sz (Sheffield), 1 October 1997, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 10, p4. Similar problems, caused by the lack of an extended family culture amongst Vietnamese refugees, were described by J. Shieh at a Mental Health Support for Refugees seminar, hosted by the Red Cross in Birmingham, 10 September 1997.

<sup>190</sup> Personal communication with Dr Siba, 7 January 1997.



isolated. Nobody to talk to... and I think their health going... they cannot share it with anybody else... So the day centre is very important. What we could do with definitely is more funds from Social Services, so we could employ more people and more buses to bring them.<sup>191</sup>

Where family live in close proximity, émigrés might still feel isolated due to not being able to communicate sufficiently with younger generations. This problem can be exacerbated by the former perceiving the latter as adopting alien values and different codes of behaviour.

There is a gap amongst British families youngsters and generation, no communication, they don't understand each other. Now this is still intensified when it comes to Polish people. If the children have families they have to look after them, they probably cannot spend too much time looking after their old parents, and the parents may feel neglected, probably bitter. There's all sorts of complications... there is a sort of psychology develops among them. They say, 'look at this, we have done so much... we been fighting on every front possible, from 1939 to 1945, and now they've forgot about it, nobody thinks about us, we're neglected', and so on. And if you think on this line you get bitter and more bitter. And you find such people too, they are recluse, sitting at home, not wanting to see people. Its not a majority but quite a big percentage.<sup>192</sup>

A group of Poles for whom sharing memories poses especial problems are those whose histories are not in accord with the majority of the Polish community. These people are often a part of the 'community', commemorating and celebrating their 'collective history' alongside their ex-servicemen compatriots. However, as their personal histories are not compatible with the history underpinning exile identity, they are not able to share in the process of making sense of the past through narrative. Although, many take solace in being a part of the community's Polish cultural environment. Thomson also highlighted that individuals whose personal recollections of war differ from the "collective myth" may have their own means of dealing with past. The 'Anzac' in Thomson's research developed private forms of commemoration to help him cope with the past; transforming horrific experiences into "relatively safe lists and rituals": "He chose to marry on the anniversary of his war wound, he named

---

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Mrs A (Bradford), 11 February 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 23, p2.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Mr Z (Sheffield), 5 December 1997, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 17, pp5-6.

his house after the places where his two best mates were buried, he remembered (and still recites) in exact detail the places where many of his friends were killed".<sup>193</sup>

Nevertheless, as making sense of the past has been identified as crucial to psychological stability, the existence of Polish community organisations can be recognised as contributing to the relatively good mental health of many émigrés. Life stories have emphasised the significance of the community, which has played an important role by redirecting emotions towards recreating 'Polishness' in Britain at a time when return to Poland was not possible. With so much past experience of trauma and distress, community life has undoubtedly provided many with a form of therapy.

### 5.11 Concluding comment

Recall of the past is a normal part of human mental activity; it is something that people do throughout their lives. However, in old age, reminiscence has a more developed role and perhaps more significant outcomes.<sup>194</sup> Amongst Polish émigrés, ongoing analysis of life events helps individuals, and the 'community', make sense of the past. From a mental health perspective, talking in this way provides an important safety valve. However, where this process is prevented by isolation and loss of language, it can be assumed that coming to terms with the past might be difficult and tortuous.

Much of this discussion refers to the situations of 'ordinary' ageing Poles, yet, the likelihood of psychological problems occurring amongst this group is higher than most other migrant groups and markedly higher than the indigenous British-born population. When problems occur amongst Polish émigrés, they are a combination of needing to come to terms with a traumatic past and coping with present difficulties. The war created psychological casualties, but fifty years on, problems are still evident and the past is very much a part of the present for many Poles living in Britain today.

---

<sup>193</sup> A.Thomson, "Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practices in Australia", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (London, 1998), p305.

<sup>194</sup>J.Bornat, "Oral History as a Social Movement", in R.Perks and A.Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, (London, 1998), p201.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion



Photograph: T. Smith.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p125.

Watching a performance (akademia) at the Polish Ex-Servicemen's club in Sheffield.

## 6.1 Summarising first generation narrative

The aim of this research has been to draw attention to the fact that the past histories of Polish émigrés living in Britain are exercising an adverse impact on their present lives. To achieve this objective, this study has concentrated on life history and presented the past as understood by those who participated in it, in their own words. The oral accounts collected during this study provide further perspectives on the history that compelled the resettlement of Poles away from their homeland, and offer insights into the experiences of migration, as well as broadening our understanding of related problems and issues.

The subjectivity of narratives, once maligned as incompatible with serious historical research, has emerged as a strength in this research, and in the broader study of history. The way that the past is remembered influences attitudes and shapes identities. In the mental health context, oral history aids our understanding of the present day problems of Polish émigrés, beyond those usually associated with getting older.

If the use of oral history during research with Polish émigrés has highlighted its value in illuminating historical knowledge, the method undoubtedly has additional cross-disciplinary significance. In addition to historical and sociological studies being informed by discussion of war experiences, unwilling migration, rebuilding lives in a foreign environment and ageing in a ‘second homeland’, there are implications for gerontological study and health care. Smith and Bornat suggest that a biographical approach in health care, which considers the social construction of oral history testimonies and promotes an understanding of cultural contexts and cultural difference, can be used to “avoid the fragmentation of lives into specialisms and the dislocation of people from their life stories”.<sup>1</sup>

This research has sought to understand people in the context of their life stories and interviewees have remembered the event that irrevocably altered their lives; the Second World War. The historical survey of the war years reflects the experiences of

---

<sup>1</sup>G.Smith and J.Bornat, “Oral history, biography, life history: broadening the evidence”, in *The British Journal of General Practice*, September 1999, p771.

those who were unable to influence the events in which they were caught. To cover the experiences of all those uprooted people who found themselves outside Poland's borders at the end of the war would be a mammoth undertaking. However, the testimonies presented here enable the reader to sense the anguish and turmoil through which the interviewees have lived.

Recollections of the war differ according to experience, with some interviewees having served in the military, others having been deported into slave labour, and most having undergone both. However, some themes have been raised in almost all interviews and reflect both an individual and a community understanding of their history. One such event was the Katyń massacre which took place in 1940. For the Polish émigré community, bitterness about Poland's fate in the war, and afterwards, has often focused on the slaughter of thousands of Polish officers in a forest near Smolensk; an act that came to symbolise the post-war abandonment of Poland to the Soviets.<sup>2</sup> That the Poles were not allowed to erect a memorial to the victims of Katyń until 1976, owing to the sensitivity of successive British government's regarding East-West relations, reinforced a view amongst émigrés that their contribution during the war was officially omitted from national memory. The theme of betrayal has been recurrent in many testimonies. The extent of the distress and disillusionment suffered by the Polish forces in Britain, after they learned that the legitimacy of the Soviet regime in Poland had been recognised by the allied governments, has been emphasised time and again throughout this research.

Migration for the Poles considered in this study was not a premeditated action; their dislocation from their homeland came as a terrific shock, and it was an upset that intensified the pain of recent experiences of trauma and loss. That the majority overcame the difficulties facing them as they sought homes and employment in a country where the social and cultural norms, and language, were not understood, had much to do with the formation of the Polish Resettlement Corps. Criticisms levelled at the PRC suggest that it hindered the integration of Poles into British society. However, an overriding benefit was that most Poles were able to adjust gradually to their new surroundings.

---

<sup>2</sup> Also discussed by M.Braid, "The forgotten children of Poland's past", in The Monday Review section of *The Independent*, 3 April 2000, p7.

Following the dispersal of PRC camp residents into British society, the focus of the 'community' became established around Ex-Servicemen's associations and the Polish parishes that grew up. Being part of a Polish community has been identified by many commentators as encouraging mental stability; reports of mental illness and suicide amongst Poles in the immediate post-war period suggest that these problems occurred largely amongst those who were detached from the company of compatriots.

The hostility experienced by Poles in the early years of their settlement emerged as a significant issue during the course of research. There has been a tendency for interviewees to minimise the significance of the hostility and discrimination experienced during their early days of settlement, and even to state that they understand the attitudes of the receiving society. Yet, memories of maltreatment and injustice have received a great deal of attention during interviews, suggesting that hurtful and insulting incidents are far from forgotten.

As Poles rebuilt their lives in Britain they endeavoured to integrate, whilst at the same time maintaining their Polish identity. Community life prior to 1989 was dominated by the commemoration and celebration of Polish history and culture, motivated by a desire to preserve Polish identity in the face of its suppression in communist Poland. Yet, community life was not confined to politics; it also played a supportive role by providing empathetic social situations where Polish émigrés could converse easily in the same language and, importantly, keep company with people who implicitly understood their past and present adversities.

When the long awaited and hard fought for goal of independence in Poland was achieved, the vast majority of Polish émigrés abroad did not contemplate return. They had spent over forty years in Britain, raised families and bought houses, and return would have meant rebuilding lives, again, in a country altered irrevocably by decades of communism. Additionally, as a result of post-war border changes, some pre-war home towns and villages had become part of Ukraine. Hence, many émigrés had nowhere to call 'home' in Poland to which they could return.

With the political struggle for independence over, the organisations of the Polish community focused much of their attention on charitable work for Poland. However,

the ageing Polish émigré population in Britain had problems of its own. The tendency for language skills to deteriorate in old age, coupled with growing isolation, was increasingly generating a sense that they were becoming 'foreigners' once more in the country they had adopted as their 'second homeland'.

Chapter five considered the impact of the problems that émigrés have faced during their lifetime, and concentrated particularly on the difficulties experienced by many as they grow old. In this respect, isolation and the loss of language skills emerged as the main problems facing ageing émigrés. Whilst this study has recognised that there are some issues of the past with which individuals might never come to terms, there is evidence to suggest that recollection with compatriots, who have language and experiences in common, is important in the process of ordering the past into a narrative that is reasonably comfortable to recall - with positive implications for quality of life and mental health.

Indeed, for over fifty years of settlement in Britain, the role of community has been crucial in the support of its members. Whilst the problems and issues pertinent to Polish émigrés have changed during their years of settlement, their need to speak Polish, enjoy the company of people who share their history and amongst whom they can find an empathetic ear with whom to share problems and concerns, has remained constant.

However, research has also revealed that a number of Poles have been excluded from many of the benefits of community membership. Amongst this number are Polish émigrés whose personal histories are not in accord with the collective history of the majority. The case of Poles who were forcibly conscripted into the German military are one such example. It is argued that these people have been conditional members of the Polish community; they have benefited from the community in that they have remained in contact with the culture and language of their homeland, but references to their past are not generally welcomed. The world-wide unity of Poles in exile was essential to the politics of opposing the Soviet government in Poland, and any counter-narrative undermined this consensus.

Moreover, Poles who arrived in Britain in later years, after living under communism, have not always been welcomed into the community. An individual who arrived in Britain in the early 1980s, as a young man, claimed to have avoided mixing with the wartime first generation as they have viewed him as possessing communist values. With apparent sarcasm, he referred to himself as an “import”, which is a name for emigrants from Soviet Poland heard on several occasions during the course of research.<sup>3</sup> A Polish parish priest who participated in this study openly acknowledged that a situation exists whereby more recent migrants are not welcomed: “The Second World War community hasn’t adapted to that immigration yet”.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a further group, the mentally ill, have been identified by Polish health care workers as not receiving adequate support from the Polish community.

This thesis has brought to light a number of themes which call for further study. The history of Polish women was found to be significantly under-researched, and the specific experiences of women have been emphasised here. However, there is a need for a comprehensive study of Polish women’s history. Due to the importance of wartime military operations and the focus of attention on the Polish forces in Britain at the end of the war, previous research has centred on male dominated aspects of history. Yet, women were enlisted into the forces, and whilst they were not sent into combat, they were valuable in other areas of service, including the Polish airforce. The experiences of women who spent much of the war in civilian camps, and who were often engaged in vital work in them, has also been neglected.

Finally, whilst few Poles opted to return to Poland after the war, there was a sizeable minority who did. Similarly, the number of Poles who returned to Poland after it regained independence in 1989 was minimal. However, some did decide upon this course of action. The experiences of people who have returned to Poland have not been addressed during the current study, nor has work in English been uncovered regarding this subject. However, towards the end of the current research it was reported to the author that the subject of return is being addressed by Polish researchers at the Jagellonian University in Kraków, with a particular focus on

---

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, 8 April 1998. Further details withheld.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Father H (Dunstable), 4 March 1995, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 1A, p7.



returnees from Soviet deportation to Kazakhstan.<sup>5</sup> The experience of Polish émigré returners is clearly also in need of investigation.

\*

Present throughout this research has been the theme of 'difference'. During the war, Poles experienced the racial hatred of the Nazi and Soviet regimes, and in their early days of settlement in Britain, many were on the receiving end of hostile and discriminatory attitudes as they sought accommodation and employment. As Poles have grown older in their adopted homeland, indifference to their cultural difference, particularly from local authority agencies, impeded or prevented access to health and welfare services; their white European appearance obscuring ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Unpleasant experiences of British society, past and present, reinforced the need for cohesive community organisations which were, from the outset, safe havens that protected and maintained Polishness.

However, the Polishness that has been preserved in clubs and organisations nationally has been, predominantly, that of the first generation. This is understandable, given that the first generation experienced the loss of Poland to its wartime aggressors and, therefore, were driven by a political, social and psychological necessity to maintain the language and culture of their homeland.

Unfortunately, the dominance of first generation identity has been reported as having a negative effect on other groups who refer to themselves as Polish or of Polish origin. Apart from later migrants, this distance has also separated many of the first generation from their children. Whilst many of the latter have participated in Polish community events, and are familiar with its organisations, they have found little within them with which they can identify. First generation dominance of definitions of Polishness have not encouraged younger members to strengthen their links with the community. Hence, whilst many have stayed involved in community activities, this has often been due to a desire to keep in touch with their cultural heritage, or because of a sense of duty.

Therefore, it can be argued that notions of difference have continued to have a negative impact on the Polish communities well-being. As the first generation grow

---

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with M.Kmita, 21 May 2000.

older, they are looking to younger generations to take responsibility for their long-established Polish organisations; a search that is proving limited in its success.

## 6.2 The future of the Polish community

The children and grandchildren of émigrés represent the Polish community's hopes that its culture and history will continue in Britain. Keith Sword addressed this issue with 'second generation' interviewees during discussions of upbringing, identity and community in his study *Identity in Flux*,<sup>6</sup> and their opinions tended towards pessimism, as have the opinions of many interviewees during the current study. Bradford's Polish priest believes, for example, that his own community will not exist in its present form for much longer:

Future? Ha, right. It's very difficult to be honest. Ok, I'm lucky here because we got half a street belonging to the Polish community. We have got the church, parish club and Polish community centre... We spent a lot of money... church last year was repainted and double checked, and everything is ok... for many, many years this building could be alright. But, people, my community will go down definitely. I think another ten years and the first generation will go.<sup>7</sup>

An émigré interviewed by Sword was equally fatalistic about the survival of the Polish community, and also considered that the community, "will only last another generation or so".<sup>8</sup> Nor is there confidence that subsequent generations will take on the task of organising the community once the first generation has disappeared. As the priest of the previous extract explained:

Their contact [with the Polish community] is not so strong. They come to church but they don't understand. I see people, little children, or young generation, but I know they don't understand me. This is the problem. We have to work very hard to teach them the Polish language, it's not so easy. Because we are losing first generation, grandparents, there's no reason to learn. They don't see the opportunity to learn another language, that one day it help them to find a good job, they don't care about this...

<sup>6</sup> K.Sword, *Identity in Flux, The Polish Community in Britain*, (London, 1996), p231.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Father G (Bradford), 22 April 1998, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 24, p10.

<sup>8</sup> Tape B/17/JP. Cited in Sword op. cit., 1996, p231.

And for me, a priest, it's a broken heart situation because I am losing these people. Ok, they are coming for the wedding ceremony to our church, maybe they will come for christening, but I will never see them in church every Sunday... just for special occasions. They are coming when the parents dying, ask me to organise funeral, but at funerals, weddings, christenings, we have to use two languages, Polish and English. Because children and grandchildren, they do not understand what is going on, they ask me, 'Father, please could you speak in English, because otherwise it's like in Chinese'.<sup>9</sup>

Sword wrote that even traditional family activities that have swelled church attendance in the past, particularly at Christmas and Easter, are not enough to tempt people into community involvement anymore.<sup>10</sup> This situation is particularly difficult for the first generation: "Tradition is very important for us... It is very difficult and very hard to watch the children ignoring that tradition."<sup>11</sup>

During the course of research there have been occasions when children born to first generation émigrés have offered their testimony, and these have revealed different perspectives. As children, many of this group were acutely aware that their home lives were different from those of their non-Polish peers:

Communities, like the Polish, Ukrainians, probably the Italians, they built barriers around themselves, because that was their way of staying together and carrying on their culture and their way of life. So, for me, when I was little, everything was, you know, very Polish, and I found it hard to cope with the two different ways of living. I can remember being really unhappy about a lot of things because at home it was one way, you know, the people, the manners and everything, they were loud, they were very open. And in those days, not so much today, but in those days, you know, English people were very reserved, you couldn't point your finger even. You know, everything was rude if you didn't do it right. So I just found the contrast huge.<sup>12</sup>

\*

Our whole social life revolved around the Polish community... basically our friends were Polish, we went to Polish school on a Saturday morning, we'd often have Akademia, either in the afternoon or on Sunday afternoon, where we'd all go and

---

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Father G (Bradford), 22 April 1998, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 24, p10.

<sup>10</sup> Sword, op. cit., 1996, p232.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Father H (Dunstable), 4 March 1995, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 1A, p2.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mrs B (Bradford), 29 December 1999, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 47, p6.

people would make speeches - boring... Then when I was about fifteen or sixteen, I'd had enough basically and I completely went the other way. I didn't want anything to do with the Polish community... I stopped speaking Polish, I had a lot less contact with Polish people, I sort of lost it really... I really felt it was very repressive... for a long time I just didn't want to know...<sup>13</sup>

As she entered middle age, this woman felt, "Polish and proud of it", yet avoided the Polish community as she found it reactionary and felt that she had nothing in common with it.<sup>14</sup> However, others amongst the 'second generation' have enjoyed their participation in community life. Indeed, the Polish Scouting and Guide movement would not exist without the support of subsequent generations. Yet, whilst there are individuals who have communicated their sense of belonging to the Polish community, there are many who feel on the margins of community life as participation in Polish traditional gatherings requires them to conform with first generation values and modes of conduct.

In this situation, the pertinent issue is that of how long the Polish community can continue to be maintained in its present form. Due to advancing age, the first generation are increasingly withdrawing from official community duties, and younger replacements are few in number. The acute nature of this problem was revealed in a newsletter produced by first generation members of Sheffield's Polish Ex-Combatants Association.<sup>15</sup>



**STOWARZYSZENIE POLSKICH KOMBATANTOW**  
KO ŁO No. 439

**POLISH EX-COMBATANTS ASSOCIATION**  
SECTION No. 439

1 DOVER ROAD SHEFFIELD S11 8RH. Tel. No. (0114) 266 1238

**NEWS LETTER AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS February 2001**

**A SPECIAL APPEAL TO 'YOUNGER GENERATION MEMBERS' Re THE AGM ON  
13.05. 2001**

**ONCE AGAIN WE ARE APPEALING TO 'YOUNGER GENERATION MEMBERS' FOR CO-OPERATION IN A GRADUAL TRANSFER OF MANAGEMENT OF THE BRANCH AND CLUB AFFAIRES TO YOUNGER MEMBERS, WHO ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN THE CONTINUATION OF THE BRANCH AND CLUB SOCIAL AND CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE. PLEASE ATTEND THE AGM IN MAY**

<sup>13</sup> Interview, 6 January 2000, recorded by M. Winslow, Tape 48, pp4-10. Request for name to be withheld.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p13.

<sup>15</sup> Newsletter and Calendar of Events produced by the Polish Ex-Combatant's Association in Sheffield, February 2001.

Sword emphasised that Polishness can be found in informal links and networks that exist outside the Polish community's organisational structure, amongst groups of people who claim they are Polish but do not belong to the Polish community.<sup>16</sup> Yet, representation of this diversity is rarely reflected in community organisations. For example, a 'second generation' interviewee discussed her association with a Polish Feminist Group,<sup>17</sup> an organisation that was particularly concerned with the political situation of women in Poland during the communist era. However, this group remained separate from the mainstream 'Polish community', reinforcing feelings of detachment amongst its members.

In addition to the many 'second generation' individuals who wish to express their distinctive Polish identity in ways more suited to their life experiences and interests, there are also 'third generation' children who want to discover and explore their Polish heritage, and bring their own identity to it. Clearly, there is a necessity for further research to investigate the experiences of people who want to assert their Polish origins and uphold Polish culture in Britain, but who find it difficult to do so within the constraints of existing Polish community networks.

\* \* \*

To summarise: it has been emphasised that the character of the Polish community, built by its first generation, can be viewed as central to the maintenance of well-being amongst many of its members. However, whilst the traditional Polish environments of community organisations have proved beneficial for the first generation, subsequent British-born generations and later Polish migrants to Britain, have found it difficult to establish their own cultures within mainstream community life. Expressions of alternative forms of Polish culture have not been viewed as relevant to the cultural characteristics of 'true Polishness', which centres on 'God, Honour and Fatherland'.<sup>18</sup> A consequence of this situation is that first generation community leaders are finding it immensely difficult to transfer the management of Polish organisations to younger generations.

---

<sup>16</sup> Sword op cit., 1996, p232.

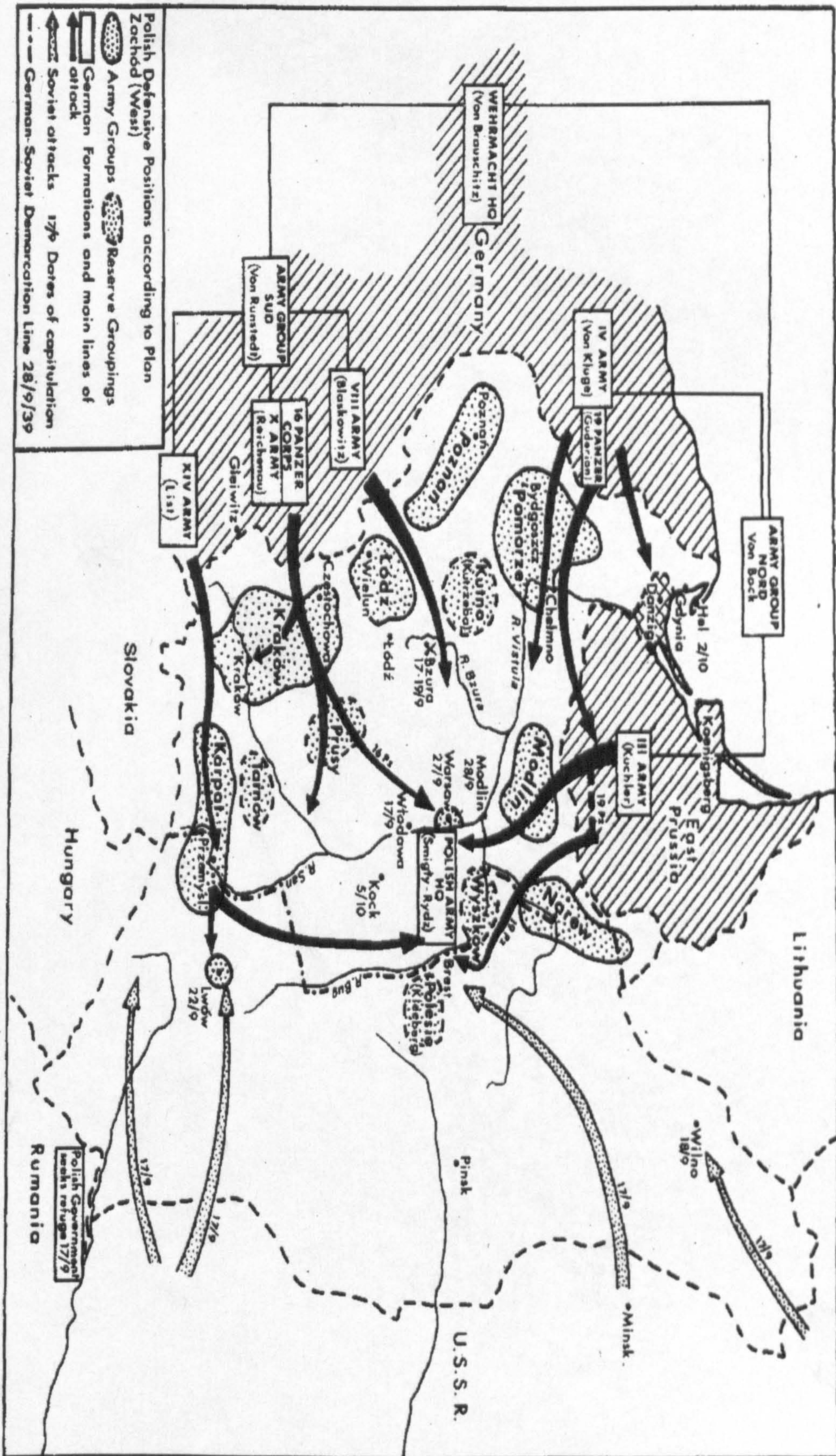
<sup>17</sup> Interview, 6 January 2000, recorded by M.Winslow, Tape 48, p13. Request for name to be withheld. The Polish Women's Forum produced *Forum Polek: A women's anthology in Polish and English*, London, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> M.Rayska stated that God, Honour and Fatherland (Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna) are part of being a 'true Pole' in her review of "Keeping the Faith", *Gazeta Niedzielną*, 28 January 2001, p3.

It has also been emphasised that a lack of awareness of difference, from both British society and within Polish community organisations, has proved damaging for the Polish population in Britain. In post-war Britain the Polish émigrés have suffered hostility and discrimination from within British society, experiences which are still keenly remembered. Moreover, the tendency for Poles to be considered 'like the English' by local authorities, because they are white Europeans, ignores cultural diversity and has been detrimental to their health and welfare.

During the later years of their post-war settlement, in the midst of these problems, an acknowledged deterioration of the Polish community has been evident, with a declining population and a less vibrant community life. This background has undoubtedly motivated the participation of many interviewees in this research. As the traditional forum for remembrance and expression of identity disappears, there is a growing need to place traumatic memories on record. Indeed, the need to bear witness was cited by many people as prompting their involvement in this study. As a consequence, these important testimonies have contributed to our increased understanding of historical and sociological issues surrounding the settlement of Poles in Britain.

Appendix 1

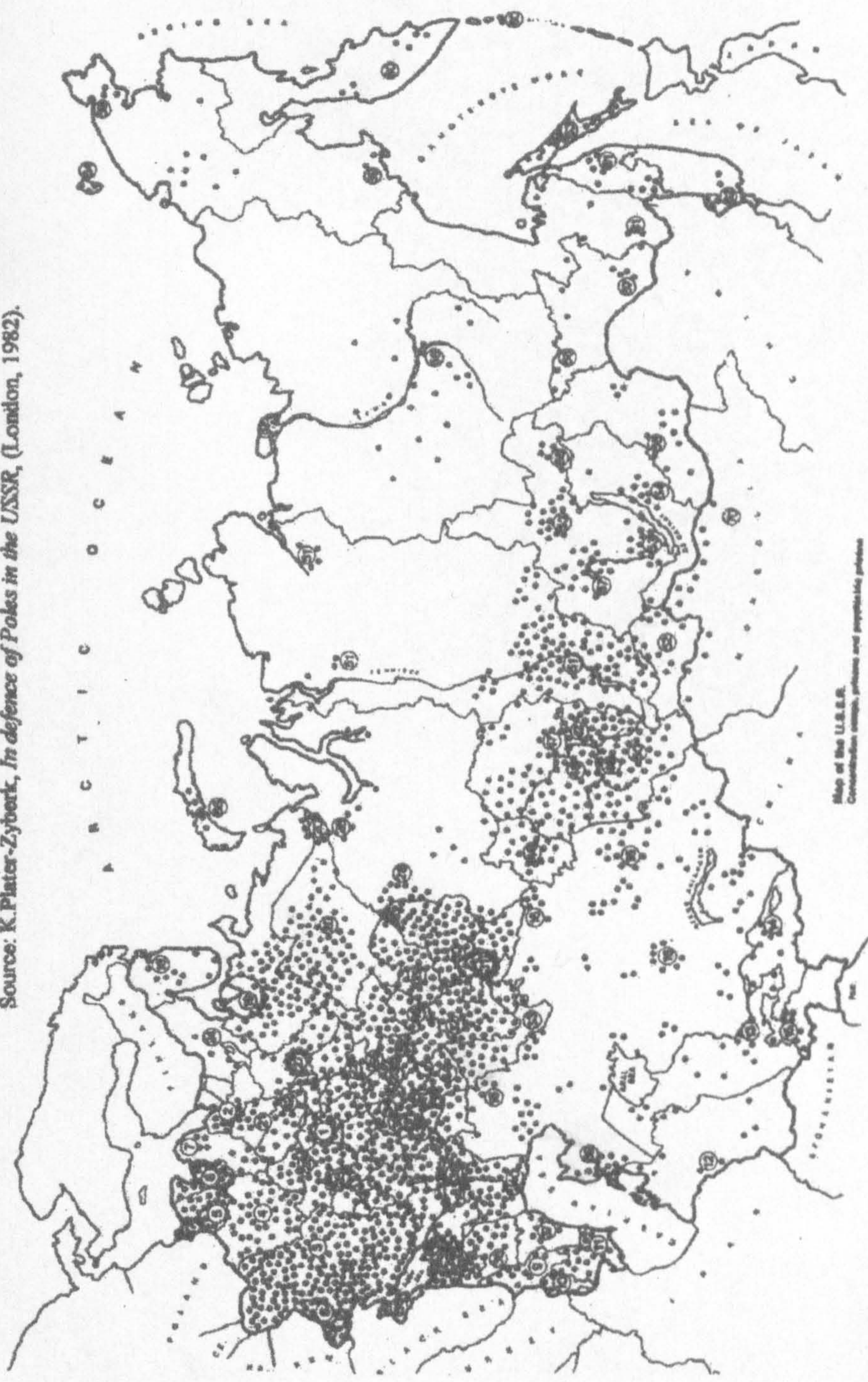


The September Campaign, 1939. Source: N. Davies, God's Playground: A History of Poland, Vol II. (Oxford, 1981), p436.

Appendix 2

Concentration camps, prisons and psychiatric prisons in the USSR

Source: K. Plater-Zyberk, *In defence of Poles in the USSR*, (London, 1982).



- |                             |   |   |   |                           |                             |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Moscow region (RSFSR)    | 21. Novgorod Region (RSFSR)                                     | 31. Chelyabinsk Region (RSFSR)            | 41. Ul'yanovsk Region (RSFSR)             | 51. Krasnoyarsk Territory | 61. Khabarovsk Territory    |
| 2. Leningrad region (RSFSR) | 22. Gor'ki Region (RSFSR)                                       | 32. Bashkir A.S.S.R.                      | 42. Yaroslavl' Region (RSFSR)             | 52. Tuva A.S.S.R.         | 62. Primorsk Territory      |
| 3. Ukrainian S.S.R.         | 23. Tatar A.S.S.R.  | 33. Orenburg Region (RSFSR)               | 43. Saratov Region (RSFSR)                | 53. Irkutsk Region        | 63. Sakhalin Region (RSFSR) |
| 4. Belorussian S.S.R.       | 24. Petrozavodsk Region   | 34. Mordovian A.S.S.R.                    | 44. Kuibyshev Region (RSFSR)              | 54. Buryat A.S.S.R.       | 64. Wrangel Island          |
| 5. Lithuanian S.S.R.        | 25. Orel, Kursk, Tula, Kaluga, Lipetsk Region (RSFSR)           | 35. Volgograd Region (RSFSR)              | 45. Udmurt A.S.S.R.                       | 55. Chuvasha A.S.S.R.     | 65. Novaya Zemlya Island    |
| 6. Latvian S.S.R.           | 26. Pskov, Vladimir, Bryansk, Kalinin, Smolensk Regions (RSFSR) | 36. Penza Region (RSFSR)                  | 46. Omsk Region (RSFSR)                   | 56. Chita Region          | 66. Crimean Region          |
| 7. Estonian S.S.R.          | 27. Vologda, Kostroma, Kirov, Izhevsk Region (RSFSR)            | 37. Kalmyk and Dagestan A.S.S.R.          | 47. Tomsk Region (RSFSR)                  | 57. Amur Region           | 67. Taishet "Ozerlag"       |
| 8. Moldavian S.S.R.         | 28. Tyumen' Region (RSFSR)                                      | 38. Stavropol Territory                   | 48. Novosibirsk Region (RSFSR)            | 58. Yakutsk A.S.S.R.      | 68. BAM                     |
| 9. Georgian S.S.R.          | 29. Perm' Region (RSFSR)  | 39. Krasnodar Territory and Rostov Region | 49. Altai Territory                       | 59. Magadan Region        | 69. Mangyshlak Peninsula    |
| 10. Armenian S.S.R.         | 30. Sverdlovsk Region (RSFSR)                                   | 40. Astrakhan Region (RSFSR)              | 50. Gorno-altai Autonomous Region (RSFSR) | 60. Kamshatka Region      | 70. Mongolia                |



## Appendix 3

Correspondence from Harold MacMillan (Secretary of State for Air, 1945) to General Anders (Commander of Second Polish Corps), regarding the impending absence of Polish Airforce representatives from the Victory Parade of 8 June, 1946.

Source: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum.

Copyright reference: KGA 60

POLISH INSTITUTE AND SIKORSKI MUSEUM  
Archives Ref. No. KGA 60  
Copyright: Polish Institute and  
Sikorski Museum

KGA/6a

22

7th June, 1946.

My Dear General,

Tomorrow we are to celebrate our victory. With my colleagues in Mr. Churchill's Government, I shall be at the saluting stand to watch the parade.

I tell you this frankly; that with all the legitimate joy and pride in every British heart will be mingled much sorrow and even shame. My thoughts will be with you and your troops. I felt I must send you this message, more especially because I have had a recent opportunity of seeing the wonderful fortitude of your troops and the high leadership which you have given them.

I trust that if there is anything which I can ever do to assist, you will not hesitate to let me know.

Yours very sincerely,

*Harold Macmillan*

Harold Macmillan.

General Anders,  
Commanding 2nd Polish Corps.

## Appendix 3 (cont)

Reply from General Anders in response to correspondence from Harold MacMillan.  
 Source: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum.  
 Copyright reference: KGA 60

POLISH INSTITUTE AND SIKORSKI MUSEUM  
 Archives Ref. No. KGA 60  
 Copyright: Polish Institute and  
 Sikorski Museum

K.G.A/6a

28

15 June 1946

Thank you very much indeed for your extremely nice letter and for all the kind remembrances and sentiments you expressed.

I and all your friends in 2 Polish Corps very much appreciate your friendship and sincere thoughts.

To us the present situation is one of great sorrow, as we feel that it will have serious effects on the fate of our beloved country. On the other hand I realize the difficulties facing the British Government.

I am indeed grateful for your kind offers of help should the need arise. If this should occur I will most certainly avail myself of your preferred assistance.

W. ANDERS  
 Lt-Gen.

Harold Macmillan Esq. M.C., M.P.  
 The House of Commons  
 or c/o HUGHES & Co. Ltd.  
 St. Martin's Street  
 LONDON, W.C.2

Appendix 4

20.6.1945

Camp Office of Dachau      Date .....

C e r t i f i c a t e

Sikorski

It is hereby certified that Mr. ....  
 .... Ryszard ....., born ..1.1.1927.....  
 in ..Warszawa....., was detained in Dachau  
 Concentration Camp from ..27.4.1945..... to the day  
 of deliverance by the United States Army and was  
 registered in the Camp Books under the number ..  
 .... He came from ..KL.Flossenburg.....

.....

.....

*Robert E. Deal*

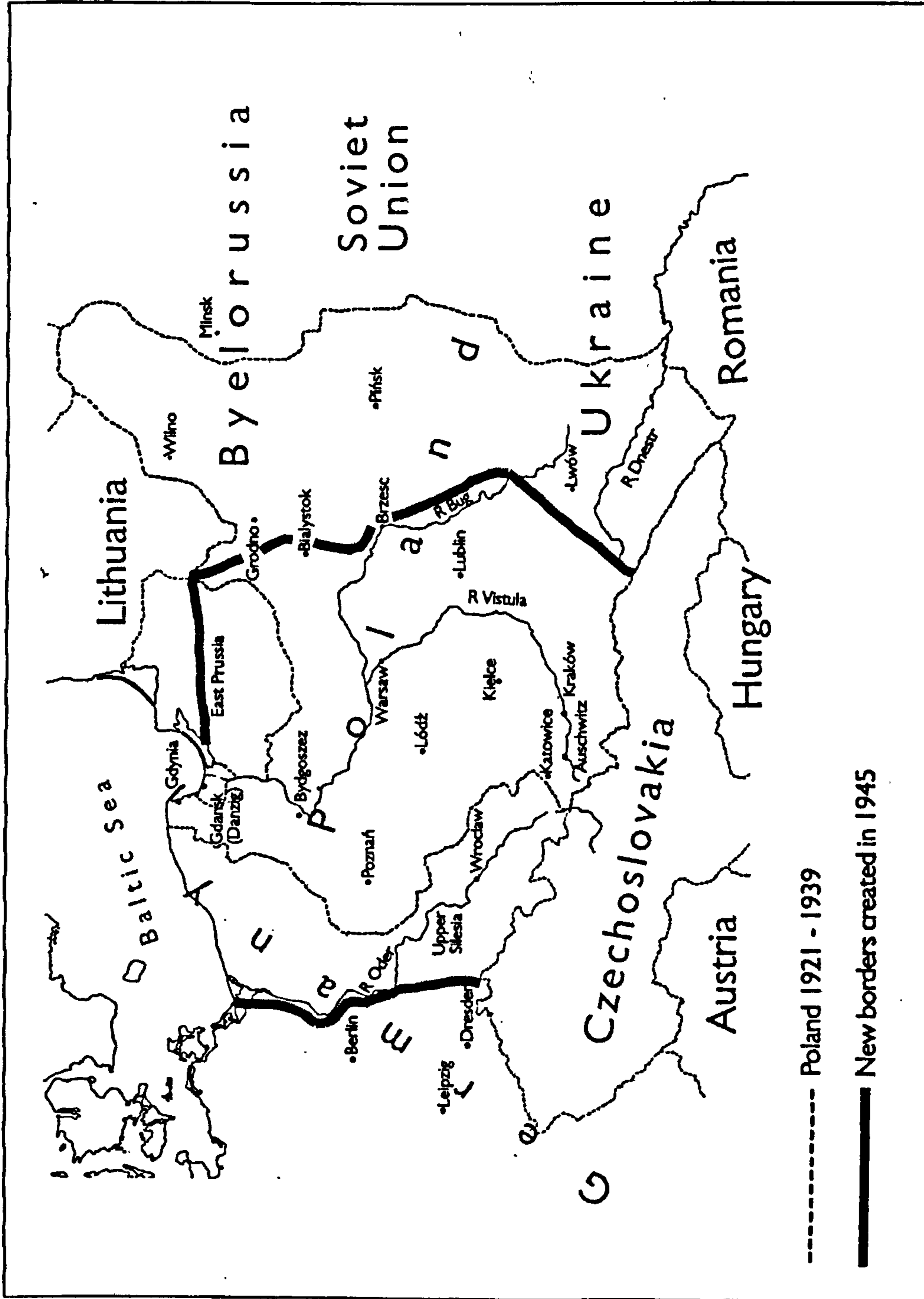
C a m p   O f f i c e

**ROBERT E. DEAL**  
 Captain, F. A.  
 C. C., B. P. Team 101

*Jan Domagala*

/ Domagala Jan /  
**Camp Secretary**  
 Camp Secretary of Dachau

This certificate was issued following the liberation of Dachau by military forces from the United States.



Map of Poland showing borders before and after the Second World War.

Source: T. Smith and M. Winslow, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, (Bradford, 2000), p6.

## Appendix 6

**Conditions of Service in the Polish Resettlement Corps:** Reproduced from, J.Zubrzycki, *Soldiers and Peasants: The Sociology of Polish Migration*, (London:1988), pp147-150.

Extracts from a War Office document circulated to Polish troops in August 1946 explaining the aims and organisation of the Resettlement Corps.

**The War Office.  
August, 1946.**

**Brochure  
Polish Resettlement Corps  
(Officers)**

1. The Polish Resettlement Corps is part of the British Army. It is being formed to help the officers and men of the Polish Forces to settle down in Civil life. The British Army is very anxious to do all they can to help their Polish comrades who have served in the same cause in the war.  
If you do not join the Resettlement Corps the British Army will not be able to help you. For your own good you are strongly advised to join and you will find that the British Army will welcome you and help you in every way they can to settle in civilian life in the United Kingdom or abroad.  
If at any time during your service in the Resettlement Corps, you wish it return to Poland, you will be quite free to do so and your journey will be arranged for you free of charge.
2. To join the Polish Resettlement Corps, you will be required to sign an Application form for appointment to an Emergency Commission in the regular British Army. It is printed in Polish, and you will be given a copy of it together with notes, also printed in Polish, so you will know exactly what you have to do. You will have to answer some questions about yourself and family and then sign the Form.
3. You will be asked to serve for two years. This does not mean that you will have to spend the whole two years in a military camp, because, if a job can be found for you in Civil life earlier, or you can find it yourself, you may be relegated to unemployment, as is explained later in this pamphlet. But you are asked to sign on for two years to give plenty of opportunity to find a job for you.
6. The period of employment with the British Forces will count from the date of your appointment to an Emergency Commission in the British Army.
7. You will on appointment to a British Commission be subject to military law under the Army Act and will be required to conform to the King's Regulations for the Army and to such other rules and regulations as are applicable to your position as an officer of the British Army.
9. Provisions will be made for the wives and families of married men when the wives and families are in the United Kingdom: Housing and food may be provided or an allowancy in money may be given. Details will be published as soon as possible.
10. While actually serving in the Resettlement Corps you will be in a hutted camp or in barracks, just like the British Officers.

13. The British Army will do all they can to look after the welfare of their Polish comrades as they do for Officers of the British Army.
14. You will want to learn English. The British Army will teach you and will also teach you about English money and about English ways in general, and will do their best to see that you are fitted to take your place in Civil life here and abroad.
15. The main object of the Polish Resettlement Corps will be to place you in permanent civil work. Until such time as a job is found for you, you may, however, be employed as an officer in charge of Polish soldiers of the Polish Resettlement Corps who are doing any kind of useful work.

This work may be on normal; military tasks such as are carried out by British soldiers in and around barracks and stores, probably in conjunction with British soldiers at various centres; or it may be assisting civilian agriculture and industry in the same way as British soldiers are lent when it becomes necessary.

There is a great deal of work to be done in England, especially in reconstruction and while you are waiting for some permanent job to be found for you, you will be expected to assist in this or some similar way. While you are employed on work of this kind as an officer, you will get your Army pay but no other pay from any civil employer.
16. For permanent settlement the following will be open to you.
  - a) Return to Poland.
  - b) Enlistment as a soldier into the British Regular Army.
  - c) Emigration to some other country.
  - d) Civilian work here in England. If you leave your civil employment you will be liable to be recalled to the active list for duty with the Resettlement Corps.
17. Everything possible will be done to try to place you where you want to go, and to help towards this you will be asked to complete a long paper, giving full and complete information about your education and former work.
18. The British Army will do all they can to look after your families. When they arrive in England, they will have to live in camps at first. England is very short of houses, and it is not possible to find houses at once for your families. But they will be made as comfortable as possible.

If you go back to Poland or go to some other country away from England, your family will be sent too, free of charge. They may not be able to go in the same ship, but if they cannot, they will be sent to join you as soon as possible. If you go to civilian work here in England you will be able to have your family with you as soon as you can find a home for them. Once you are earning wages in civil life here, you will of course be expected to maintain your family out of your wages just as your British comrades do.

## Bibliography

### *Primary sources*

#### **Oral testimony**

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Mrs Sk, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 1, Penrhos.  | 14 February 1995  |
| Father H, Polish priest. Tape 1A/2, Dunstable.   | 4 March 1995      |
| Mr T, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 3, Sheffield.  | 7 March 1995      |
| Mr B, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape A1, Sheffield.   | 14 March 1995     |
| Mr Si, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 4, Sheffield.   | 16 August 1996    |
| Mr Ra, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 5, Croydon.   | 14 June 1997      |
| Mr Sl, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 6, Sheffield.   | 27 June 1997      |
| Mr P, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 7, Sheffield.  | 27 June 1997      |
| Mr Z, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 9, Sheffield.  | 15 September 1997 |
| Mr Mj, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 8, Sheffield.   | 25 September 1997 |
| Mr Sz , Polish émigré 1940s, and Mrs Sz, Polish émigré and voluntary worker. Tape 10, Sheffield. | 1 October 1997    |
| Tape 11. Details withheld for confidentiality.   | 2 October 1997    |
| Mrs D, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 12, Chislehurst.  | 29 October 1997   |
| Mrs N, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 13, Chislehurst.  | 29 October 1997   |
| Dr L, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 14, Chislehurst.   | 29 October 1997   |
| Mrs C, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 15, Chislehurst.  | 29 October 1997   |
| Mr Ra, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 16, Croydon.  | 30 October 1997   |
| Mr Sz, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 27, Sheffield.  | 7 November 1997   |
| Mr Z, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 17, Sheffield.   | 5 December 1997   |
| Mr St, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 20, Bradford.   | 21 January 1998   |
| Tape 19. Details withheld for confidentiality.   | 29 January 1998   |
| Mr RR, Polish émigré, and Mrs RR, British wife. Tape 18, Chesterfield.                           | 31 January 1998   |

Mrs Szy, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 21, Bradford.	4 February 1998
Mrs W, Polish émigré 1950s. Tape 22, Bradford.	4 February 1998
Mrs A, Polish Outreach Worker and émigré, 1980s. Tape 23, Bradford.	11 February 1998
Father G, Polish Priest. Tape 24, Bradford.	22 April 1998
Mr RR, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 25, Chesterfield.	9 May 1998
Tape 26. Details withheld for confidentiality.	14 May 1998
Mrs F, 'second generation' language teacher, and Mrs Gr, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 28, Sheffield. Recorded by Mrs F.	October 1997 Exact date not known.
Mr Z, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 29, Sheffield.	8 June 1998
Mr P, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 30, Sheffield.	22 June 1998
Mr Gr, 'second generation' social club manager. Tape 31, Sheffield.	6 August 1998
Tape 32. Details withheld for confidentiality.	6 September 1998
Mrs Ma, Polish émigré 1940s, and Mr Ma, 'second generation' son. Tape 33, Fenton, Lincs.	6 September 1998
Girl Guides, 'third generation'. Tape 34, Fenton, Lincs.	6 September 1998
Tape 35. Details withheld for confidentiality.	6 September 1998
Mr K, Polish émigré 1940s and Polish Scout leader. Tape 36, Fenton, Lincs.	6 September 1998
Mr R, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 37, Fenton, Lincs.	6 September 1998
Dr L, Polish émigré 1940s, Tape 38, Chislehurst.	26 September 1998
Dr L, Polish émigré 1940s, Tape 39, Chislehurst.	31 October 1998
Mr So and Mrs So, Polish émigrés 1940s. Tape 40, Sheffield.	6 February 1999
Mr Wa, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 41, Aberdeen.	19 February 1999
Mr A, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 42, Aberdeen.	19 February 1999
Mr W, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 43, Aberdeen.	20 February 1999



Mrs IN, Polish psychiatric social worker. Tape 44, Brixton.	13 March 1999
Mr SP, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 45, Sheffield.	3 June 1999
Tape 46. Residential home manager and Polish émigré, 1980s. Name withheld for confidentiality.	4 December 1999
Mrs D, 'second generation' social worker. Tape 47, Bradford.	29 December 1999
Tape 48. Details withheld for confidentiality.	6 January 2000
Mr Zs, Polish émigré 1940s, and Mrs Zs, his British wife. Tape 49, Reading.	8 January 2000
Mr Ni, Polish émigré 1940s. Tape 50. Sheffield.	7 July 2000

Tapes, transcripts and notes of interviews are in the possession of Michelle Winslow, University of Sheffield.

### Unpublished theses

- Coutouvidis, J "The formation of the Polish government-in-exile and its relations with Great Britain, 1939-1941", Ph.D., University of Keele, 1975.
- Hitch, P "Immigration and illness in a northern city: An investigation into the relationship between ethnic group membership, area of residence, residential mobility, social class and hospitalisation for diagnosed mental disorder", PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 1975.
- Sword, K "Ethnic identity and association among Polish émigrés in a British town", D.Phil., University of Sussex, 1983.
- Zebrowska, A "Integration or assimilation?: A study of second generation Poles in England", PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, December 1986.
- Kucewicz, A "The immigrant experience: The reception of Polish refugees and their adaptation to life in Sheffield post-1945", BA dissertation, Department of Historical and Critical Studies, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988.
- Krawczyk, B "Polska Szkola - An ethnographic study of a Polish Saturday School", M.Ed., University of Stirling, 1988.
- Demunck, M.F "The unwilling odyssey and exile of Jozef S., a Polish citizen, 1939-1989", M.Phil., Bradford, 1990.

- Kernberg, T "The Polish community in Scotland", PhD thesis, Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, University of Glasgow, October 1990.
- Lodge, D "European Volunteer Workers in Bradford since the Second World War", MPhil., University of Sheffield, November 1991.
- Gula, J "The Roman Catholic Church in the history of the Polish exiled community in Britain (1939-1950)", Ph.D., School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1992.
- Hanson, J "Sympathy, antipathy, hostility: British attitudes to non-repatriable Poles and Ukrainians after the Second World War and to the Hungarian refugees of 1956", PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, June 1995.
- Winslow, M "'Scarred for life': The effect of war trauma upon an ageing Polish population", Department of Historical and Critical Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, 1995.

### **Unpublished articles and comments**

- Bram, G "Mabledon Park Hospital Annual Report 1951-1952".
- Bram, G "Memo: Re Mabledon Hospital", 13 June 1978.
- Niczyperowicz, J "The Polish community in Leeds: A social perspective", March 1987.
- Szablewski, W "Polish political refugees in Sheffield 1945-86", 1993.
- Kondracki, T "The Polish Ex-Combatants Association (SPK) 1946-1994", 1994.
- Kicman, A "Informative lecture about Poles in Great Britain, for Community Psychiatric Nurses", January 1995.
- Kelsey, F "Historical perspective" paper presented at "Thalidomide: Potential benefits and risk, Open Public Scientific Workshop", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rockville, 9 September, 1997.  
<http://www.fda.gov/oashi/patrep/nih99.html#kelsey>
- Szablewski, W "A short history of the Polish Ex-Combatant's Association 439th Branch, Sheffield," October 1997.
- Sceglova, T "The development of oral history in Altai", research paper given at the European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam, 5-7 March 1998.
- Smith, G "Oral history and the historian: In praise of hindsight and selective memories", newsletter for students and staff of Open University course DA301, No.1, 1998.

- Smith, G and Smith, T "Representing narratives of an imagined land in words and pictures", research paper given at the conference of the Oral History Society, May 1999.
- Kmita, M "Good practices for mental health for Eastern European women in the UK". Date unknown.

### ***Published Secondary sources***

#### **Books**

- Allen, A *New Minorities, Old Conflicts: Asian and West Indian Migrants in Britain*, New York, 1971.
- Anderson, B *Imagined Communities*, London, 1991.
- Ascherson, N *The Struggles for Poland*, London, 1987.
- Baker, R (ed.) *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, British Refugee Council/ European Consultation of Refugees and Exiles, London, 1982.
- Bhabha, H *The Relocation of Culture*, London, 1994.
- Bornat, J (ed.) *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, evaluations, achievements*, Buckingham, 1994.
- Bowling, B *Elderly People from Ethnic Minorities: A report on four projects*, Age Concern and Institute of Gerontology, Kings College, London, 1995.
- British Medical Association *Multicultural Health Care: Current practice and future policy in medical education*, London, 1995.
- Buijs, G (ed.) *Migrant Women: Crossing boundaries and changing identities*, Oxford, 1993.
- Carswell, A *For Your Freedom and Ours: Poland, Scotland and the Second World War*, Edinburgh, 1993.
- Ciechanowski, J.M *Warsaw Rising of 1944*, Cambridge, 1975.
- Czaykowski, B and Sulik, B *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961.
- Davies, N *God's Playground: A history of Poland Vol. II*, Oxford, 1981.
- Davies, N *Europe: A history*, London, 1997.

- Dudnik, S and Milarski, F.M *10-Lecie SPK Sheffield, Ex-Serviceman's Association (Sheffield), 1964.*
- East, R *Revolutions in Eastern Europe , London, 1992.*
- Ethnic Communities Oral History Project *Passport to Exile: The Polish way to London, London, 1988.*
- Filipow, K and Wawer, Z *Passerby, Tell Poland: Narvik. Tobruk. Monte Cassino. Falaise, Warsaw, 1991.*
- Grinberg, L and Grinberg, R *Psychoanalytical Perspectives on Migration and Exile, Yale University, 1989.*
- Gula, J *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain, London, 1993.*
- Hochhuth, R *Soldiers, translation by Robert David MacDonald, London, 2000.*
- Holmes, C *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British society 1871-1971, London, 1994.*
- Holmes, C *A Tolerant Country?: Immigrants and minorities in Britain, London, 1991.*
- Hope, M *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of post-war settlement in Great Britain, London, 1998.*
- Kawecka, K *Journey Without a Ticket: To England through Siberia, Nottingham, 1994.*
- Kyriacou, S and the Polish Reminiscence Group *Travelling Light: Poles on foreign soil, London, 1989.*
- Lawrence, J and Mace, J *Remembering in Groups: Ideas from reminiscence and literacy work, Essex, 1992.*
- Leitgeber, W *It Speaks For Itself: What British war leaders said about the Polish armed forces 1939-1946 - selections from communiqués, speeches, messages and press reports, Public Relations Division, Polish Armed Forces, 1946.*
- Littlewood, R and Lipsedge, M *Aliens and Alienists: Ethnic minorities and psychiatry, London, 1997.*
- Lotnik, W and Preece, J *Nine Lives: Ethnic conflict in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, London, 1999.*

- Lummis, T *Listening to History: Authenticity of oral evidence*, London, 1987.
- Maxwell, E *Silence or Speaking Out*, The Parkes Lecture 1990, Southampton, 1990.
- McCarthy, M *Elders in Exile*, Northern Refugee Centre, 1995.
- Modelski, T *The Polish Contribution to the Ultimate Allied Victory*, Worthing, 1988.
- Norman, A *Triple Jeopardy: Growing old in a second homeland*, London, 1985.
- Olsson, L *On the Threshold of the People's Home of Sweden: A labor perspective of Baltic refugees and relieved Polish concentration camp prisoners in Sweden at the end of World War II*, New York, 1997.
- Patterson, S *Immigrants in Industry*, Oxford, 1968.
- Patterson, S *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain 1960-1967*, Oxford, 1969.
- Paul, K *Whitewashing Britain: Race and citizenship in the Post-war era*, New York, 1997.
- Plater-Zyberk, K *In Defence of Poles in the USSR*, London, 1982.
- Polish Cultural Foundation *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and documents*, London, 1965.
- Polish Ex-Combatants Association *The Poles in Great Britain 1971*, London, 1971.
- Polish Government in Exile *Memorandum on the fate of Poles in the Soviet Union*, London, 1989.
- Polish Women's Forum *Forum Polek: A women's anthology in Polish and English*, London, 1988.
- Rack, P *Race, Culture and Mental Disorder*, London, 1993.
- Radzinski, E *Stalin*, Moscow, 1996.
- Samuel, R and Thompson, P (eds.) *The Myths We Live By*, London, 1990.
- Sikorski, R *The Polish House: An intimate history of Poland*, London, 1997.

- Smith, B *Poland: A study in treachery*, Worthing, 1984.
- Smith, T and Winslow, M *Keeping the Faith: The Polish community in Britain*, Bradford, 2000.
- Solomos, J *Race and Racism in Britain*, London, 1993.
- Suchcitz, A *Poland's Contribution to the Allied Victory in the Second World War*, The Polish Ex-Combatants Association in Great Britain, 1995.
- Sudoplatov, P *The Memories of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet spymaster*, London, 1994.
- Sword, K *Identity in Flux: The Polish community in Britain*, London, 1996.
- Sword, K, Davies, N and Ciechanowski, J *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950*, London, 1989.
- Szablewski, W and Winslow, M *Polish Community Cultural Awareness: Information and learning pack*, Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, January 2000.
- Tomaszewski, W *In the Dark Days of 1941: Fifty years of the Polish School of Medicine 1941-1991*, Edinburgh, 1992.
- Tonkin, E *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history*, Cambridge, 1995.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum *Oral History Interview Guidelines*, Washington, 1998.
- Ward, A *Copyright Ethics and Oral History*, Essex, 1995.
- Wood, T and Jankowski, S *Karski: How one man tried to stop the Holocaust*, New York, 1994.
- Zamoyski, A *The Forgotten Few: The Polish Air Force in the Second World War*, London, 1995.
- Zubrzycki, J *Polish Immigrants in Britain: A study of adjustment*, The Hague, 1956.
- Zubrzycki, J *Soldiers and Peasants: The sociology of Polish migration*, London, 1988.

### Chapters in books

- Anderson, K and Jack, D.C "Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses", in R Perks and A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Bertaux, D "From the life-history approach to the transformation of sociological practice", in D.Bertaux (ed.), *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, London, 1981.
- Bornat, B "Oral history as a social movement", in R.Perks and A.Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Bornat, J "Recording oral history", in M.Drake and R.Finnegan (eds.), *Sources and Methods: A Handbook*, Cambridge, 1994.
- Bram, G "Breakdown in elderly Polish refugees", in Baker (ed.), *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, British Refugee Council/ European Consultation of Refugees and Exiles, London, 1982.
- Duffin, P "Turning talking into writing", in J.Bornat (ed.), *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, Evaluations, Achievements*, Buckingham, 1994.
- Evans, M "Rehabilitating the traumatised war veteran: The case of French conscripts from the Algerian war, 1954-1962", in M.Evans and K.Lunn (eds.), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford, 1997.
- Green, A "The exhibition that speaks for itself", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Grele, R.J "Movement without aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history", in R Perks and A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Hitch, P "The mental health of refugees: A review of research", in Baker (ed.), *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, British Refugee Council/ European Consultation of Refugees and Exiles, London, 1982.
- Jagucki, W "The Polish experience: 40 years on", in R.Baker (ed.) *The Psychosocial Problems of Refugees*, London, 1983.
- Kendall, R.E "The nature of psychiatric disorders", in Heller, Reynolds, Gomm, Muston, Pattison (eds.), *Mental Health Matters: A Reader*, London, 1996.
- Kikumura, A "Family life histories: A collaborative venture", in R Perks and A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.

- Kmita, M "The effect of the Second World War on the mental health of the Polish immigrants in Britain" in B. Holyst (ed.), *Mental Changes*, Polish Psychological Society, Warsaw, 1989.
- Krzyzanowska, I "A brief account of Polish Ex-Combatants Branch No.440 in Huddersfield 1948-1998", in *SPK 1948-1998: Kola Nr.440 Huddersfield*, Polish Ex-Combatant's Association (Huddersfield), 1998.
- Kurcz, Z and Podkanski, W "Emigracja z Polski po 1980 roku", in *Nowa emigracja I wyjazdy zawodowe za granice*, Wroclaw, 1991.
- Levin, M "In the past", in Acton Society Trust, *What Welcome? Reception and Resettlement of Refugees in Britain*, London, 1982.
- Mills, M "Using the narrative in dementia care", in J.Bornat (ed.) *Biographical Interviews: The link between research and practice*, London, 1999.
- Passerini, L "Work ideology and consensus under Italian fascism", in R Perks and A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Patterson, S "Polish London", in R.Glass et al (eds.), *London: Aspects of change*, London, 1964.
- Patterson, S "Immigrants and minority groups in British society", in S.Abbott (ed.), *The Prevention of Racial Discrimination in Britain*, Oxford, 1971.
- Patterson, S "The Poles: An exile community in Britain", in J.Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977.
- Popular Memory Group "Popular memory: Theory, politics, method", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.) *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Portelli, A "What makes oral history different", in *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Prazmowska, A.J "Polish refugees as military potential: Policy objectives of the Polish government in exile" in A.Bramwell (ed.) *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, Oxford, 1988.
- Schrager, S "What is social in oral history?", in R.Perks and A.Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.



- Siemaszko, Z.S "The mass deportations of the Polish population to the USSR, 1940-1941", in K.Sword (ed.), *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41*, London, 1991.
- Thomson, A "Anzac memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia", in R Perks and A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998.
- Woods, T "Mending the skin of memory", in *Rethinking History*, Vol.2, No.3, Autumn, 1998.

### Published articles

- Adamson, J "Carers and dementia among African/Caribbean and South Asian Families", in *Generations Review*, Vol.9, No.3, September 1999, pp12-14.
- Bloxham, P "The city Poles who came to stay", in *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*, 7 November, 1966, p8.
- Bornat, J "The communities of community publishing" in *Oral History*, Vol. 20. No 2. 1992, pp23-31.
- Braid, M "The forgotten children of Poland's past", in The Monday Review section, *The Independent*, 3 April 2000, p7.
- Brosnan, J "Home is where the heart is", in *The Big Issue*, no. 193, 19-25 January, 1998, pp14-16.
- Bülbring, M "Post-War refugees in Great Britain", in *Population Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1954-55, Part Two, Nov. 1954, pp99-112.
- Christianson, S "Emotional stress and eyewitness memory: A critical review", in *Psychological Bulletin*, 1992, Vol.112, No.2, pp284-309.
- Cybulska, E "Poles - Unsuitable for psychotherapy?", letter in *Psychiatric Bulletin*, October, 1993, p629.
- Davies, N "UK act excludes Katyn's killers" (letter), in *The Times*, April 29, 2000: <http://www.times-archive.co.uk>
- Day, A "Listening galleries: Putting oral history on display", in *Oral History*, Vol.27, No.1, Spring 1999, pp91-96.
- Hankinson, R "Here to aid us, but they feel unwanted", in *The Star*, Tuesday 2 March, 1948, p2.
- Hitch, P and Rack, P "Mental illness among Polish and Russian refugees in Bradford", in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 137, 1980, pp206-211.

- Hunt, N and Robbins, I "Telling stories of the war: Ageing veterans coping with their memories through narrative", in *Oral History*, Autumn 1998, Vol. 26, No 2, pp57-64.
- Lanca, M  
Alksnis, C, Roese, N  
and Gardner, R "Effects of language choice on acculturation: A study of Portuguese immigrants in a multicultural setting", in *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol.13, No.3, September, 1994, pp315-330.
- London, M "Mental illness among immigrant minorities in the United Kingdom", in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, 1986, pp265-273.
- Makarczyk, W "Identity and cooperation: A case of emigrants", in *The Polish Sociological Bulletin*, No.2, 1976, pp31-41.
- Malkin, C "Escape from Stalin's nightmare to make a new home in Leek", in *Post and Times*, 23 August, 1995, p16.
- Miles, R  
and Kay, D "The TUC, foreign labour and the Labour government 1945-1951," in *Immigrants and Minorities*, March 1990, Vol.19, No. 1, pp85-108.
- Mokrzycki, J "Can a Jew get justice in the country of Auschwitz?", in *Dziennik Polski*, January 11, 1999, p4.
- Mokrzycki, J "Protest Zjednoczenia Polskiego", in *Dzennik Polski*, 28 June 2000, p3.
- Nocon, A "A reluctant welcome: Poles in Britain in the 1940s", in *Oral History*, Vol.1, No.24, Spring 1996, pp79-87.
- Patterson, S "The Polish exile community in Britain", in *The Polish Review*, Vol.VI, No.3, 1961, pp69-97.
- Perks, R "'A feeling of not belonging': Interviewing European immigrants in Bradford", in *Oral History Journal*, Vol.12, No.2, Autumn 1984, pp64-67.
- Rayska Maria "Keeping the faith", in *Gazeta Niedzielna*, 28 February 2001, p3.
- Rickard, W "Oral history - 'More dangerous than therapy'? : Interviewees' reflections on recording traumatic or taboo issues", in *Oral History*, Vol.26, No.2, Autumn 1998, pp34-48.
- Sabbadini, A "Psychotherapy with victims of torture: From wounded victims to scarred survivors", in *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 12, 4, 1996, pp513-521.

- Scott, J "Poles apart but a part of Britain", in *Yorkshire Post*, Wednesday 5 November 1997, p8.
- Skultans, V "Remembering time and place: A case study in Latvian narrative", in *Oral History*, Spring 1998, Vol.26, No.1, pp55-63.
- Siomkajlo, A 'Liberalisation of critical discourse (Communiqué concerning 'Polish London)' in K.Kmjawska-Courtney and R.M Machnikowski (eds.) *Liberalism Yesterday and Today*, Institute of International Studies, University of Lodz, 1998, pp177-184.
- Smith, C "Death of man in Nazi probe" in, *The Star*, Friday 31 May, 1996, p2.
- Smith, G and Bornat, J "Oral History, biography, life history: Broadening the evidence", in *The British Journal of General Practice*, September 1999, pp770-771.
- Smith, G and Jackson, P "Narrating the nation: The 'imagined community' of Ukrainians in Bradford", in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25, 3, 1999, pp367-387.
- Stacey, M "The myth of community studies", *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 20, 1969, pp134-147.
- Stachura, P "The emergence of the Polish community in early postwar Scotland", in *Slavonica*, 1997-98, 4/2, pp27-40.
- Sword, K "'Their prospects will not be bright': British responses to the problem of the Polish 'recalcitrants' 1946-49", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, 1986, pp367-390.
- Temple, B "Telling tales: Accounts and selves in the journeys of British Poles", in *Oral History*, Vol.23, No.2, Autumn 1995, pp60-64.
- Vass, J "One man's odyssey" in *Sheffield Telegraph*, Friday 7 November, 1997, p12.
- Walesa, L "You carried the banner of freedom with pride", in *Polish Affairs*, No. 127 (Final), 1991, p22.
- Ward, S "Dad, why do people say these bad things about you?", in *The Independent Magazine*, 1 July 1995, pp23-27.
- Warnes, T "A decade of gerontology's development in Britain", in *Contemporary Gerontology*, 5, 4, 1999, pp120-125.
- Whittell, G "Katyn killings poison Putin's Polish mission", in *The Times*, 22 April, 2000: <http://www.times-archive.co.uk>

- Winslow, M "Polish migration to Britain: War, exile and mental health", in *Oral History*, Vol.27, No.1, Spring 1999, pp57-64.
- Zabeski, Z "From Sheffield - With love", in *Sheffield Spectator*, May 1982, pp20-21.

### Unattributed articles

- "London Poles and the Moscow trial", in *The Times*, Saturday 3 June, 1945, p3.
- "Moscow Trial concluded: Varying sentences of captivity", in *The Times*, Friday 22 June, 1945, p3.
- "Declaration of loyalty to Mr. Raczkiewicz", in *The Times*, Monday 2 July, 1945, p3.
- "Britain 'unfriendly'", in *The Times*, Thursday 6 June, 1946, p3.
- 'Commentary' in *The Star*, Saturday 19 April, 1947, p2.
- "Poles help to fill city's labour gaps", in *The Star*, Wednesday 14 May, 1947, p8.
- "Foreign workers 'tabooed' by city foundrymen", *The Star*, Tuesday 20 May, 1947, p8.
- "Sheffield's Polish community" in, *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*, 16 July, 1975, p8.
- "Summer flood which endangers 'Polish spring'" in *Medical Aid for Poland Fund*, Summer 1997, Review No 12, pp1-2.
- "Mixed feelings", in *Gazeta*, October-December 1997, No. 11, p2.
- "Courageous member of the wartime Polish underground who gave the Allies an early first-hand account of the Holocaust - and was ignored", obituary for Jan Karski in *The Times*, July 17, 2000: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk>

### Census reports

*Census 1961 England and Wales: Birthplace and Nationality. Education. Socio-economic group. Usual residence.* HMSO, London, 1964.

*Census 1961 Scotland: Birthplace and Nationality*, Vol.5, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1966.

*Census 1971: Great Britain: Country of Birth Tables*, HMSO, London, 1974.

*Census 1981: Country of Birth. Great Britain*, HMSO, London, 1983.

*1991 Census: Ethnic Group and Country of Birth. Great Britain. Vol.1*, HMSO, London, 1993.