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**THE EXPULSIONS FROM THE 'CONGRESS'
KINGDOM OF POLAND AND GALICIA
AS SEEN FROM PERSONAL ACCOUNTS (1914-18)**

Abstract

The article discusses the refugees' life during the Great War, focusing on the living conditions on their route to and in exile. The aim here is to grasp the experience that the refugees underwent when they were still uncertain of their future, and when they were venturing into the unknown without being aware of where their journey would take them. The source material concerns refugees who fled from the 'Congress' Kingdom of Poland and Galicia to central Russia and western part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. It involves personal documents, especially those created during this exile experience, and the accounts included in the press, notably in *Ognisko Polskie*. The evidence presented in the article shows that the exile was among the most traumatic war events. It also demonstrates that the flight and exile affected various groups in different ways. Children and elderly persons were most vulnerable and most likely to suffer damage to their health or even to lose their lives. It was particularly difficult for them to endure adverse weather conditions and malnutrition. They were also more prone to contagious diseases, especially typhus and cholera. The stay in the barracks camps established in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was another difficult experience. Especially initially the camps were not fit for housing so great a number of people of different age and gender. Finally, the analysis of personal documents shows the use of different survival strategies in the exile. The refugees showed much determination in finding employment or seeking compensation and various benefits; and there was a significant social mobilization to organize assistance to the refugees.

Key words: First World War, exile, refugees

INTRODUCTION

Polish lands were directly affected by the turmoil of the Great War. Military operations swept across the Congress Kingdom and a considerable part of Galicia. Eventually, however, Galicia remained under Austro-Hungarian rule while the lands of Congress Kingdom came

to be occupied by the Central Powers. One part of the Kingdom was formed into the Warsaw General Government to be controlled by Germany, while the other came under the control of Austria-Hungary forming the Lublin General Government.

As the front line drew closer, both Russian and Austrian authorities set out to expel the local population from the front line's adjoining territories. In addition, the Russians resorted to a scorched earth policy when they were forced out of Congress Poland by the Germans. With the approaching front and the authorities' orders that went with it, a large number of people, fearful of the uncertain future and determined to survive, decided to leave Galicia and the Vistula Land. It is estimated that about 3,6 million people left Polish lands and went into exile; several hundred thousand abandoned Galicia, mostly in 1914 and 1915.¹ More than 800,000 found refuge in the countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A significant number suffered forcible expulsion by the Russians advancing into the Empire.² Galician exiles were mostly very poor, having nothing to live on and not knowing how to seek assistance or effectively protect themselves against the actions taken by the authorities. The Jews, whom the Russians treated with particular cruelty, made up a significant part of the refugees, and so did the Ukrainians – the latter, however, are not included in this account. During the evacuation the Austro-Hungarian authorities often carried out executions of those whom they suspected of espionage. As has been indicated by historians of today and by the authors of works published in the interwar period, the Ukrainians and other members of the Orthodox Greek Catholic Church were the most frequent victims of this spy-hunting obsession.³ It is worth stressing that there were no legal procedures under which to deal with

¹ It is estimated that during the war about 10 million persons were expelled from their homes or fled to avoid the fighting. For more on the issue see: Peter Gatrell, *Refugees*, <<http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/refugees>> [Accessed: March 17, 2016].

² Andrzej Pilch, 'Emigracja z ziem zaboru austriackiego od połowy XIX w. do 1918', in *idem* (ed.), *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych* (Warszawa, 1984), 325.

³ Marcelli Handelsman (ed.), *Polska w czasie wielkiej wojny (1914–1918). Historia społeczna i ekonomiczna*, ii: *Historia społeczna* (Warszawa, 1936), 177; Jerzy Z. Pająk, *Od autonomii do niepodległości. Kształtowanie się postaw politycznych i narodowych społeczeństwa Galicji w warunkach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918* (Kielce, 2012), 86–7.

those who, while still within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, were living away from their homes. The relevant regulation was issued on 30 November 1916 but it was not until a year later that it took effect.⁴ Among those who went into exile were labourers from Congress Poland who formed a special category. It was the promise of finding attractive and decent employment that made them decide to go to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Unfortunately there was little work to be found there.

From this area of Congress Poland, of which the Central Powers were gradually seizing control, refugees travelled east or to big cities where, it was believed, they would be safer than anywhere else and where, in the words of a diarist, “people hoped to find shelter and assistance”.⁵ The number of those who found themselves in the care of Polish rescue organizations in Russia came to around 647,000, but there is no doubt that the total of all the exiles was much greater. Unevenly distributed across the Empire, they were concentrated mainly in the ‘western gubernyas’, adjacent to the frontline territories and in central Russia.⁶ Falling into a distinct category was the group of labourers who were deported deep into the Empire along with their workshops, but without their families. This group has thus far received no attention from scholars and, consequently, our knowledge of it is still very limited.

The purpose of the article is to present the refugees’ life along the ‘wandering route’ and in exile.⁷ It is based mainly on the diaries and memoirs written by Polish refugees, and especially on those created during the ‘journey’ itself or shortly afterwards. In the accounts in question, their authors usually made no references to the nationality of those about whom they wrote. For this reason this criterion

⁴ Handelsman (ed.), *Polska w czasie wielkiej wojny*, 179.

⁵ Stanisław Dzierzbicki, *Pamiętnik z lat wojny 1915–1918* (Warszawa, 1983), 21 – 1 Jan. 1915.

⁶ The largest concentrations of them existed in the gubernias of Minsk, Mohylev, Moscow, Petersburg, Yekaterinoslav. Refugee groups exceeding in number 15,000 were in the gubernias of Kiev, Kharkov, Smolensk, Saratov, Chernihov, Orlov, Poltava, Volhynia, Chersov, Vitebsk, and in the military district of Donsk. On the issue see: Mariusz Korzeniowski, Marek Mądzik, and Dariusz Tarasiuk, *Tułaczy los. Uchodźcy polscy w imperium rosyjskim w latach pierwszej wojny światowej* (Lublin, 2007), 37.

⁷ See Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Śmierć, wygnanie, głód w dokumentach osobistych. Ziemi polskie w latach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918* (Warszawa, 2015).

is omitted from the analysis presented in the article. My main concern here is to grasp the experience that the refugees underwent when they were still uncertain of their future, and when they were venturing into the unknown without being aware of how long they were going to walk or where their journey would take them. I am interested in examining of their representation of this experience as it unfolded. I will also turn my attention to the bystanders.

Only rarely do I rely on the sources created after the Second World War. These sources represent the experience that had already been 'worked through' or modified by the passage of time. This is especially the case with the memoirs written after 1945. However, there are some exceptions such as the memoirs by Lidia Winniczuk of which some use could be made here. Winniczuk and her parents survived the Great War in exile. Although she was still very little, the journey she took and the house she lived in were so deeply engraved in her memory that even after a few decades she was still able to reproduce details of the experience. If she retold the story she had heard from her parents, then one may presume that the events connected with their flight became part of the family history, which testifies to the importance the family attached to them.

It needs to be mentioned here that the majority of sources on which this article is based were not written by the refugees but by those who observed their exodus – either incidentally or by members of organizations offering them assistance. Some accounts written by the escapees are to be found in the press – especially in *Ognisko Polskie* [Polish Hearth], a newspaper created specifically for Polish exiles in Russia. Reminiscences of the exile are also included in *Pamiętniki chłopów* [Peasants' Diaries],⁸ which were published in the interwar period. Given the scarcity of sources representing the experience of this social stratum, whose members made up the bulk of the refugees, these diaries must be regarded as a useful source. The writing contest for which they were created presented the peasants with their first opportunity to give an account of what they had been through during the war. Some information on the life of the refugees can also be derived from newspapers published in Lwów (L'viv), Warsaw, and Cracow, especially from *Nowiny Ilustrowane* [Illustrated News] which contains photographs from the 'wandering route'.

⁸ Ludwik Krzywicky (ed.), *Pamiętniki chłopów* (Warszawa, 1935).

THE CAUSES OF FLIGHT

What then led people to leave their homes? A couple of main reasons can be indicated. Most common were the evacuation orders issued by the authorities. Despite protests those who defied the orders were forced to flee. The other reason for leaving their homes was the fear of the approaching front line and of a real confrontation with war. Undoubtedly, people's decision to go into exile was affected by a variety of other factors, depending on the specific situation they were in. Usually, however, they found themselves coerced into leaving for the reasons to which I have referred above – both objective and subjective such as an increased fear or group pressure. In Częstochowa, for example, it was the evacuation of the Russians that made the Poles increasingly determined to flee. It was no different in Warsaw. Although some decided to abandon their homes before anything disturbing actually happened, most took the decision once the sound of fighting could no longer be ignored. Then, yielding to panic, they “grabbed all their belongings and took flight without knowing where they were heading”. A tailor from Częstochowa, in an effort to make his account more credible, wrote: “I saw a number of families walking to and fro with their bedding on their back”.⁹ This state of confusion seemed to characterize this collective flight, especially in its first stage. The waves of people walking in every direction are also mentioned in accounts by other diarists, for example, by Ludomir German with regard to L'viv or Wincenty Daniec with regard to Rzeszów and Jasło. Because of its laconic style the testimony of the tailor of Częstochowa enables the reader to empathise with the fear of those fleeing the war, and offers a vivid picture of the panic that shines through all the accounts analysed here, regardless of whether they concern the countryside or the towns. Warsaw, for example, saw people leaving in panic twice, in the autumn of 1914 and in the summer of 1915. The panic was rather subdued in 1914, involving mainly the Russian bureaucratic apparatus, but intensified in 1915, as rumours began to spread around the city that it was not going to be defended. The official guidelines to be followed by the administration in the evacuation of its representatives had the effect of making the rumours all the more credible. In a journal article an unknown author reported:

⁹ ‘Wspomnienia krawca’, *Kronika Wielkopolska*, 1 (137) (2011), 101.

A few days ago the officials' wives and their families were ordered to leave the city immediately. There ensued something of a nomadic wandering. The Warsaw–Terespol railway station, from which the trains for Moscow departed, came under a real siege. The news of the advance made by the Austro-German army in the Lublin district, and its seizing of territory in the south east, filled people in Warsaw with extreme panic. They threw themselves into packing up their movables, cleaning up their apartments and selling up everything they could not take; those who were about to leave were allowed to take things that weighed no more than 120 pounds.¹⁰

Many people planned to stay outside the city only for the duration of the fighting, in which case they usually left all their possessions behind, asking friends or janitors to look after them. “The height of the panic was over – the journalist Czesław Jankowski noted in July 1915 – but there were still many people leaving Warsaw. Temporary tenants were sought to live in the abandoned houses, even without being charged a rent, but all in vain.”¹¹ The refugees from around Warsaw who arrived in the city, and they were increasing in number, were poor or at best moderately well-off and as such did not make good customers. They usually stayed, at least initially, in the park area of Swiss Valley or were lodged in public buildings that the city authorities had selected for them. Abandoned apartments became easy targets for thieves – information about widespread looting is to be found in the daily press. *Kurier Lwowski* [Lwów Courier] reported on inhabitants who, having returned from exile in Vienna found many things missing from their apartments.¹² The refugees, fleeing from the German army, came flooding into Vilnius and Warsaw. Michał Brensztejn remarked in the summer of 1915: “Landlords and peasants from around the area are coming in with all their belongings.

¹⁰ Mieczysław Ł., *Cztery kartki wyrwane z zeszytu*, <http://www.biblioteka.warszawa1939.pl/index_a.php> [Accessed: Aug. 10, 2010], a record from Thursday, 22 July 1915.

¹¹ Czesław Jankowski, *Z dnia na dzień. Warszawa 1914–1915 Wilno* (Wilno, 1923), 57 – Wilno, 18 (31) July 1915.

¹² “Upon her return from Vienna, Mrs Emila Różycka found her three room apartment, situated at Kurkowa I.11 street, completely emptied. Terrified, she went to the owner of the house where she was informed that her things were placed in his custody. It was actually so, but not everything was preserved, many things, worth about 3,000 crowns, were missing. The same fate befell Prof. Teofil Sobiecki who also returned from his exile in Vienna. His silvers and other valuables, worth about 5,000 crowns, were stolen”, ‘Kronika’, *Kurier Lwowski*, 5 (4 Jan. 1916), 5.

The Society for Assistance to the Victims of War set up a shelter for the refugees within church walls.”¹³

Once people got over their first shock and the panic that broke out in the cities had subsided, the evacuation proceeded in an orderly fashion. Stanisław Dzierzbicki, a member of the Civic Committee, gave the following account: “The evacuation of people from Warsaw was not very smooth but it forged ahead quite steadily. Our hospitals were the first to be sent away, then officials’ wives and now, gradually or in part, some institutions such as the Courts, the Tax Chamber, the Excise Duty Department, etc. Private banks and Credit Societies were encouraged to transfer funds, but all of them refused.”¹⁴

From other diary entries it appears that some of those who were leaving the city thought they might never return, which only heightened their psychological distress. Not only were they departing from the city with which they were familiar, but they were also leaving a significant part of their possessions behind. The case of Warsaw and Vilnius clearly indicates – and so does that of Łódź – that people’s movement took place in both directions. This shows that the average individual did not have a clear idea of the existing situation and was thus likely to fail in his or her attempt to find a safe place for the duration of the fighting. It also demonstrates that Russians had no plan for the evacuation of the masses.

Włodzimierz Dzwonkowski described the sentiment that prevailed in the area of Opole Lubelskie at the beginning of the war. He stressed that the flight involved people from all social strata. Some left all their possessions behind. “For safety’s sake people were leaving wearing white head-scarfs on their chests and holding their children by hand. One of the factory officials told us later – added Dzwonkowski – that it was the children that led him to take to flight”. The shootings caused them to suffer “convulsions”.¹⁵ What is particularly remarkable in the account just given is the use of children as a guarantee of the refugees’ safety. Many set out on what was to become the longest journey they had ever taken.

¹³ Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library), sign. BN II.10610, mf. 63017, Michał Eustachy Brensztejn, *Dziennik czasów okupacji niemieckiej Wilna (1915–1917)*, i: 18 May – 31 Dec. 1915, 14 (27) Aug. 1915.

¹⁴ Dzierzbicki, *Pamiętnik z lat wojny*, 55 – 5 July 1915.

¹⁵ Włodzimierz Dzwonkowski, *W ogniu armat. Wrażenia naocznego świadka z linii bojowej w Opolszczyźnie Lubelskiej (sierpień–listopad 1914)* (Warszawa, 1914), 88.

A property owner from the Kielce region, Irena Zaborowska (née Tańska) had the opportunity to observe the exodus of the rural population in 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the war. “Streaming along the road are now civilians, not the troops. They are fleeing the Vistula area to avoid being caught in the midst of a battle – peasants, old women, children, cows, hens. Here and there a piglet can be heard oinking. It is a sad and horrible scene to behold.”¹⁶ A few days later Zaborowska saw the outbreak of panic in her own village. She perfectly recounted how it arose and how the rumours of the bestiality of the Prussian army affected the mood of the local population.

The village panicked. Sufczyce was abandoned by all except for lame Pawlak. Carts with bedding and children are rolling along wherever one looks. They are driven by women, since men have hidden in the reeds. Rumours circulated that Prussians would conscript them into the army or would chop their hands and legs off. For this reason they look as if they were already being skinned. There is so much screaming and crying around. It is all so horrible. Janowa and the miller’s wife have set about digging pits in which to put their bedding.¹⁷

In this account the panic reaction was, to some extent, justified. The rumours about conscription were not entirely made up. Historians who have covered this topic indicate that “military authorities searched for ways of removing all men of military age”.¹⁸

A similar panic caused by flying rumours was recorded by Władysław Glinka, a landlord from Susk in the Ostrołęka region. He wrote:

One evening, a man travelling from Ostrołęka shouted as he passed the servants’ quarters: “The Prussians are putting people in the city to the sword.” It did not take longer than ten minutes before labourers working in the fields were back in the courtyard with all their horses, carts and ploughs. It is impossible to describe the clamour and laments which ensued: a few women, as if in a fit of madness, rolled over the ground, letting out wild screams, others threw the clothes and bedding out of their houses and fervently wrapped them up into bundles. The oldest ones, kneeling or lying in a cross like position, wailed litanies at the top of their voices.¹⁹

¹⁶ Irena z Tańskich Zaborowska, *Pamiętnik z wojny 1914 r.* (Kielce, 2001), 30 – 17 Sept. 1914.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ Handelsman (ed.), *Polska w czasie wielkiej wojny*, 58.

¹⁹ Władysław Glinka, *Pamiętnik z Wielkiej Wojny* (Warszawa, 1927), 22 – 1914.

Glinka, as did Zaborowska, recorded an expressive reaction of women. One gets the impression that only the women succumbed to panic. This portrayal of their behaviour seems to have been the traditional way of defining femininity as expressive, emotional, timid and unstable. The panic reaction by the rural population may have been intensified by the fact that they had no previous experience to fall back on in dealing with this extreme situation.²⁰ A feeling of helplessness, coupled with fear, led them to behave in an irrational way.

As can be inferred from the existing descriptions, the flight from the Russian army in Galicia, as in Congress Kingdom, bears the general marks of panic. Józef Białynia-Chołodocki gave the following description of the way in which people from L'viv reacted to the news that the Russians were coming: "Shouts, screeches, exhortations, crying children and rattling carts combined to heighten the horror of the situation. People took leave of their senses. A man with a child on his arms was pulling his wife along, shouting at the top of his lungs: For God's sake, run! The Muscovites are shooting. A military man threatened him with a gun and his terrified wife had to cover his mouth."²¹ After the situation on the front had changed, the Russians themselves, taking into consideration the possibility of having to withdraw, encouraged people to leave the territories seized by the army and move east. Zofia Romanowiczówna recorded in L'viv:

Three days ago we were terrified to find out that all men from 18 to 50 were ordered to leave the area likely to be abandoned by the Russians and head for the Volhynia district. One is allowed to leave at one's own expense, taking one's family and a small amount of baggage. Peasants may take their belongings, a horse and a cow. Those who will not leave voluntarily will be subjected to compulsory evacuation ... but I do not know whether they will be put on the fourth-class train carriages, on carts, or will be made to walk on foot ...²²

The experience of leaving in panic and of being caught up in the crowd left its mark upon every refugee, regardless of his or her social

²⁰ Marek T. Frankowski, *Człowiek w warunkach ekstremalnych. (Szkice z socjologii wojny i wojska)* (Warszawa, 2001), 16.

²¹ Józef Białynia-Chołodocki, *Lwów w czasie okupacji rosyjskiej (3 września 1914 – 22 czerwca 1915) z własnych przeżyć i spostrzeżeń* (Lwów, 1930), 36.

²² Zofia Romanowiczówna, *Dziennik lwowski 1842–1930*, ii: 1888–1930 (Warszawa, 2005), 258 – 18 June 1915.

background and the part of partitioned Poland he or she came from. Personal sources that contain information about the flight in question show much understanding towards those who decided to leave their homes. Their authors, whether or not they themselves were fleeing, demonstrated much empathy for the refugees. However, there are accounts that do not come into this category. A teenaged girl, Maria Balinowska, took a negative view of those who fled the city of Suwałki in the winter of 1915. "Suwałki turned tail, and what an exodus it was, a historic one! There are only the Jews, the poor, us, the Hajbows and a couple of other families left in the city."²³ Balinowska clearly accused the escapees of cowardice. No less severe in her judgment was Cecylia Mycielska. In November 1914 she wrote:

A forcible evacuation from the area devoid of fortresses is such a nice cloak for cowards ... The nobility's departure from the country is its final abdication, and there is no room for us here any longer. This land for which we have proved to have no affection must be sliding from under our feet. One more emigration driven by fear. These talks held in Vienna are the kind of deliberations typical of the Poles, [to which they already gave themselves over] as their motherland was falling apart, just another cloak.²⁴

She considered her own flight to be most ignominious. A few months later she did not change the critical view of her own decision: "I am not going to go to America or Switzerland, for to me the emigrant is the worst kind of man. If we have nowhere to go now, it is because we left our own land without being driven out of it. My guilt is worst because I did know that what I was doing was wrong."²⁵

ON THE EXILE ROUTE

Józef Ryzewski who served in the Austro-Hungarian army recorded in his diary:

²³ Wrocław, Ossolineum [hereinafter: Ossolineum], sign. Akc. 217/80, z. VIII, 'Pamiętnik Marii Balinowskiej uczennicy klasy III z lat 1907–1916', 8 Feb. 1915.

²⁴ Cracow, Archiwum Polskiej Akademii Nauk i Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności [Archive of Polish Academy of Sciences and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, hereinafter: PAN/PAU], sign. 8110, 'Korespondencja Jana Mycielskiego. Listy od Cecylii Mycielskiej z lat 1914–1915', a letter from 7 Nov. 1914.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, a card from 7 March 1915.

As we march we encounter trains carrying the refugees from Galicia. Lots of women, children and survivors from Buczacz, Podhajce and Halicz. We ask and listen expressionlessly, and the sight of all this misery makes tears flow down soldiers' faces. Men, women, and children are crowded into roofless carriages – their faces are careworn, and etched with tears and sorrow.²⁶

The account of Wanda Zakrzewska from Przemyśl can be taken as a supplement to Ryzewski's description:

The most painful picture emerged during the last days of the evacuation. There were lots of carts streaming along the streets day and night, carrying children and woman, babies on their arms. They took few things with them, bedding, dishes and some fodder for a cow chained to the cart – the only breadwinner and the only friend that these families had left. Driven on, the cows also got tired, lowing from homesickness. People were cold, drenched to the skin, and in tears, having left behind everything that they had toiled all their lives to acquire, watching it from afar burn down.²⁷

Confusion, helplessness and apathy are reflected in all of the accounts of the exodus of the rural population. Things seemed better, sometimes significantly better, for the evacuation of state officials, landlords, the intelligentsia, and the aristocracy. The accounts of their departures do not inspire one with such pity. They usually managed to move by train, although in crowd and with long stopovers. This form of travelling was certainly more comfortable than walking.

Having no knowledge of their specific destinations, the eastbound refugees initially gathered together, setting up makeshift camps. They usually stopped at the sides of the roads they had taken when they fled, or in the woods.

A bonfire will suddenly emerge from the mist, with a bunch of refugees assembled around it. There is an old man standing next to a woman clasping a child to her chest. A scrawny horse with closed eyes and drooping head has wedged his way between them. Standing close to the horse is a cow gazing bluntly at the flames, and there comes a dog, trembling with cold, huddled by the fire. It is the shared misery that has brought these

²⁶ Ossolineum, sign. Akc. 129/81, Józef Ryzewski, 'Przebieg kampanii Austro-Rosyjskiej w szczegółach dotyczący: doznań, wrażeń ... i przebytych trudów', 16 Sept. 1914.

²⁷ Wanda Zakrzewska, *Oblężenie Przemyśla. Rok 1914–1915. Z przeżytych dni* (Lwów, 1916), 70.

people together. I can see lots of bonfires like this on the river Bug, near Leplewka [Lepleuka].²⁸

During his stay in the Karczew area, a short distance from Warsaw, on the right bank of the Vistula, Stefan Jankowski noted that “neighbouring villages are swarming with refugees from Powiśle, not only from our side of the bank of the river”. He went on to say that women and children made up the majority of the refugees. Unlike those heading for the east, these groups were not particularly numerous, usually consisting of several dozen people. As can be inferred from the account included in Jankowski’s diary, the refugees were usually poor and ill-prepared for the flight they had taken. The difficult situation of the locals did not make it easier for them to obtain the means necessary to live, especially food.²⁹

Many of those who were leaving their homes, including especially the peasants who had been forcibly expelled from the front adjacent territories, tried to hide somewhere near and to wait for the fighting to end. In order to prevent the refugees from holing up near the front line, the Russian troops were ordered to escort them along the way, which, as recounted by eyewitnesses, only added to the stress the suffering and made the oppressive actions taken by the authorities even harder to bear, especially as the soldiers were very firm in executing their order. However, the civilians, clearly in defiance of the measures taken by the military authorities, did everything in their power to avoid being led too far away from their homes.

Refugee settlements are mentioned by Kossakowski: “If we drove through the forest today we would see some characteristic pictures. A deep ravine came to be inhabited by a number of refugee families. One can see caves carved out in the walls of the ravine and some human figures bustling about small bonfires laid under pots of food. There are some cows tied to pegs, children sitting and dogs lying on the ground”.³⁰ The photographs of makeshift habitations, made from big barrels or of shanties created from a variety of available things, that were occupied by the refugees, can be found in the newspapers

²⁸ Michał S. Kossakowski, *Diariusz*, i, Part 1: 21 maja – 31 sierpnia 1915, ed. by Marek Mądzik (Lublin, 2010).

²⁹ Ossolineum, sign. 12011/III, mf. 2194, ‘Pamiętniki Stefana Jankowskiego z lat 1914–1936’, 24 Nov. 1914; it refers to the events of October 1914, fol. 152–3.

³⁰ Kossakowski, *Diariusz*, i, 1, 127 – Zażółkiew, 11 July 1915, Sunday.

from the period. The 'official' refugee campsites were not, one might add, much different from the ones described above.

The refugees would set up camp in the grounds of land owners. One of them, despite the sympathy he tried to show towards his countrymen suffering the hardships of war, was not pleased by their visit. He wrote: "The refugees find it hard to get by. All I want is for them to stop breaking the trees. In the evening the garden was stripped bare. Soldiers and refugees from the camp steal everything they can".³¹ He was terrified by the devastation of his estate and by the number of the people present. Groups of refugees were referred to as a "huge wave" or a "huge refugee flood". These phrases point both to the number of refugees and to the strength they represented – a fact of which they were usually unaware. In such circumstances, theft was not uncommon. Members of organizations offering assistance to the victims of war were even afraid that it might become ingrained. Therefore, special agents were sent to the points where more numerous groups of refugees camped and where the refugees were served with hot tea and food. Ryszard Wójtowicz, a Central Civic Committee (CKO) refugee assistant, while not trying to trivialize the misfortune the refugees suffered, discerned the characteristics of the peasant population. What he saw led him to comment on the Polish peasant's egoism which "the hardships of war only deepened".³² Similar observations were made by Władysław Glinka.

In his work on crowd psychology, published at the end of the nineteenth century, Gustav Le Bon, in attempting to explain the proliferation of such attitudes, wrote that "by the mere fact that he forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings".³³ The psychologists of today stress that under the conditions of anonymity and deindividuation

³¹ 'Kiedy Mars w wielkiej wojnie szedł przez Nowoszyce. Wspomnienia spisane w 1915 roku we dworze w Nowoszytach', [1933], 5 – 4 Sept. 1915.

³² Ryszard M. Wójtowicz, *Spoleczna praca ludowa w czasie wojny. Pamiętnik instruktora opieki nad wygnańcami Centralnego Komitetu Obywatelskiego pisany na turalce w Rosji w latach 1915, 1916, 1917 i 1918* (Warszawa, 1936), 36 – Bobrujsk, 14–22 Oct. 1915.

³³ Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* (London, 1897²), 55.

which a crowd provides – a fact of which Le Bon had already taken notice – one becomes increasingly confident of being able to avoid punishment for acting in defiance of the law.

The forcible expulsion, the fatigue caused by a long journey, and the lack of specific destination affected the emotional state of the refugees. Diaries from the period recount many conversations held with refugees. A great number of such accounts are to be found in the diary by Michał Kossakowski. He noted that the refugees were terrified, and tried to understand why they had had to leave their homes. He also remarked that “it is difficult to get things straight with them. They are travelling, still suffering from the blow they have just received”. Kossakowski’s exchange with the refugees clearly points to the psychological strain they were under. They would repeat the same brief sentences a couple of times, and failed to make eye contact with the persons to whom they were talking or, as diarists put it, had “unseeing eyesight”. Another trait through which they distinguished themselves was sadness, sometimes referred to as depression.

CHILDREN IN EXILE

It is not difficult to guess that diarists were especially moved by the sight of wandering children. Their accounts indicate how difficult it was for the parents, especially for mothers, to control their children.

I see a woman moving ahead with an unsteady gait. Hunched, her face beaded with sweat, she is rushing her three year old boy who has just raised his shirt as if it were restraining his movements. The boy keeps on running, trying to move his legs as fast as he can, but they get entangled and he falls. The mother, unaware of the fall, drags him along the ground so the kid straightens up again and hurries up with his last ounce of strength. I ride up to her on horseback, intending to reproach her, but I find myself restrained by the sight of her martyr like face and her look hazy with despair. So I address her hesitatingly in a quiet voice:

“Mother! You are going to kill the kid!”

She stops and whispers in despair:

“There is my third boy ahead. He will perish without me. I must catch up with him.”

We put her on our cart, but even after riding a dozen versts she did not find her boy.³⁴

³⁴ Kossakowski, *Diariusz*, i, 48 – Plusy, 16 June 1915.

A family head's helplessness and desperation is reflected in a horrifying account included in the diary by Władysław Glinka. Given what we know from other testimonies, Glinka's account, although it is second-hand, may point to an event that actually took place, however difficult it may be to imagine. For this reason I have decided to quote it here. "An orderly from the Red Cross told me that he had seen a peasant-exile digging up a pit to bury the corpse of his wife and his still alive baby". As the orderly revolted against such a conduct, the peasant said: "What am I supposed to do. I have no breasts to feed the baby."³⁵

The war took a great death toll on children. During her flight Zofia Nowosielska laid to rest two of her younger siblings. Although her diary was written many years after the war, it is worth quoting an excerpt from it. "Three year old Stacha dies on the way. We bury her in the Ukrainian graveyard. I do not cry because I know I must not. Mother's despair is horrible" – she writes.³⁶ It is worth adding that the girl was at that time fourteen years old and the worst was still ahead of her. During their exodus her mother gave birth to a dead baby – a son. "I took this tiny brother of mine, for whom it sufficed to take just one breath to become poisoned by the fume of poverty, deep into the woods, and wrapped him up in my Cracow apron. Then I dug up a pit, plucked lots of leaves and covered it with them. I did it all like an automaton and on the following day I could not find the grave."³⁷ We can only guess at the impact this experience would have had on Zofia's psyche. Coupled with her patriotic upbringing, it may have led her to choosing a military career later on in her life.

Memoirs also address some other aspect of the parents' care of their children. A labourer, Czesław Bağorski, recorded:

I could see a boy, about twelve years of age, appear before my eyes. Sad but courageous, he rejoiced at being spoken to in Polish. When I asked him what he was doing there he replied that it was his parents' farm, that his father had been conscripted and had gone to war while his mother, along with his younger siblings, escaped from the bullets. "I stayed [he said] between these cottages. For a couple of days there was no one else around

³⁵ Glinka, *Pamiętnik*, 18 – 30 Sept. 1915.

³⁶ Zofia Nowosielska, *W huraganie wojny. Pamiętnik kobiety-żołnierza* [Warszawa, 1929], 23.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 24.

here, just the bullets from the Russians on one side and from the Germans on the other. Fortunately, our house has survived.”³⁸

Both Nowosielska’s case and the behaviour of the boy keeping watch over his farm show that war in some way ‘stole’ the childhood. It forced children to assume responsibility not only for themselves but also for their siblings and sometimes even for their parents.

Sources contain stories about children who became separated from their parents during the flight. A father told his little children, a boy and girl, to keep an eye on their cows. The animals were requisitioned and the father was gone for the rest of the day. Scared and disoriented, the children cried. The author only wrote that “he feels helpless”. *Kurier Płocki* [Płock Daily] reported: “A handful of small refugees from the river Bzura walk and cry aloud. – Why are you crying? – Our dad got lost behind the river Vistula and now our mother is gone too! There were many heart-breaking scenes like this”.³⁹ It is worth stressing that unlike adults, whose sorrow manifests itself in apathy or nervousness, children cry. It seems to be of secondary importance here whether the episode presented above actually happened. What matters is the belief, held by the person recounting it, that children suffering misfortune are represented as crying.

LIFE IN EXILE

In time, the refugees were dispersed around different districts of the empires. In Roslavl, for example, “they could be seen flocking around the railway station”. They erected temporary shelters using carts, a huge number of which, over six thousand, they had at their disposal. The carts are what is left of their farms, all they have left”.⁴⁰ The observer’s attention was drawn primarily to how numerous the refugees were and how great a poverty they suffered. It was reported: “the Minsk region is full to bursting. The Navahrudak and Pinsk districts, along with their surroundings, are replete with crowds of newcomers from the Suwałki region, from the Kaunas region and from Congress Kingdom. The villages around Mohyliv, whose every

³⁸ Ossolineum, sign. 14466/II, BN, mf. 64645, Czesław Bągorski, ‘Mój dzienniczek z wojny światowej 1914–1918’, 61–2 – 8 May 1915.

³⁹ ‘Z pamiętnika i wrażeń przeżytych. Uchodźcy’, *Kurier Płocki*, 97 (1915), 3.

⁴⁰ ‘Z tułaczki’, *Ognisko Polskie*, 1 (1916), 4.

house, including those on the outskirts, is already filled to capacity, serve as home to a number of evacuated government institutions.”⁴¹ *Ognisko Polskie*, a newspaper for Polish refugees published in Moscow in the years 1916–18, provided the following information: “Numerous groups of refugees arrived in Smolensk at the beginning of the autumn. They are in need of everything, including especially built apartments to be lodged in.” A journalist from Orel near Moscow, to which more than 3,000 thousand refugees had travelled with others reported “to be still coming in”, also pointed to their misery. “They are suffering, he wrote, a great hardship.”⁴²

In exile, the problem of lost and orphaned children reappeared. Rescue organizations operating in the East were especially concerned by this aspect of the refugee question. Particularly, as it was reported, “many children perished during this harsh journey last year. In panic and confusion parents just lost their children. On my way I met a great number of such orphans at different military stations”.⁴³

Ognisko Polskie kept reminding its readers of the need to set up orphanages for children who were left unattended. Władysław Glinka visited one of such shelters set up in Russia for refugee orphans. He wrote: “Yesterday we went to this orphan asylum. We found Duchess Mirska wearing a white apron and cooking a soup and Mrs Kozakowska changing a baby. Of 30 children 8 died, but there are new ones coming in every day. They are so miserable sight to behold. Emaciated and pale, almost all of them are suffering from dysentery”.⁴⁴

The fact that women who looked after the children came from privileged classes seems to point to the importance attached to this child-care activity. This brief quotation also indicates that people actively engaged in running these aid organizations came from different social backgrounds. All sorts of institutions offering aid to children are often mentioned in *Ognisko Polskie*. According to the findings of the authors of a work on the refugees to Russia, organizations offering assistance to war victims ran 2,084 different educational institutions which were attended by 116,545 children and teenagers.⁴⁵ This care

⁴¹ Jankowski, *Z dnia na dzień*, 86.

⁴² ‘Z tułaczki’, *Ognisko Polskie*, 1 (1916), 6.

⁴³ Franciszek Szew., ‘List z Borysowa’ (section ‘Z tułaczki’), *Ognisko Polskie*, 15 (1916), 6.

⁴⁴ Glinka, *Pamiętnik*, 29 – 20 Oct. 1915.

⁴⁵ Korzeniowski, Mądziak, and Tarasiuk, *Tułaczy los*, 176.

and educational activity pursued by Polish rescue organizations in Russia is also stressed by the authors of the work *Polska w czasie wielkiej wojny*. This activity was focused primarily on supplying the refugees with life's necessities, including everything from food and clothes to apartments and employment agencies. Orphan asylums and schools, both elementary and secondary, were founded. At the end of 1917 the Polish Collegium, forming something of a Polish university, came into being in Kiev.⁴⁶

Most of the refugees in the Russian Empire were not sufficiently well-off to maintain a decent standard of living, especially over a longer period. After reaching their destination, they received some financial support from aid institutions, both Polish and Russian. However, as their exile continued it became crucial for them to find some employment. As in the occupied territories, from which they had fled or from which they had been forcibly evacuated, in Russia, too, work was not easy to find. In *Ognisko Polskie* one could read:

The issue of work is one which we consider most important. Of great concern both to us and to the local population, it has received a lot of attention from various social associations and Russian agencies and has been widely covered by the press, and there seems to be no ending to these deliberations. However, we should say to ourselves that it is primarily our business and it is up to us to come up with a clear idea [of dealing with it]. The guiding thought to which every Pole in exile is going to agree is this: He who is capable of working and is about to be given the opportunity to earn money should go to work.⁴⁷

However, not everyone was willing to find employment, as is attested to by some of the accounts to be found in the press. *Ognisko Polskie* got word about Poles who did not want to work, thus laying themselves open to criticism both from Russians and from their working countrymen. "There is only one thing I feel sad about – wrote a reader from Saratov. – Some people, especially the young ones, have grown lazy here in Saratov. They do not want to work – either they are underpaid or tired or it is too hot for them. I am myself familiar with some artisans. I have attempted to procure for them a job in good workshops. But they say the job is too hard and they are not

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 173–4.

⁴⁷ W. Bzowski, 'O pracy wygnańców', *Ognisko Polskie*, 3 (1916), 4.

going to be paid properly”. However, to be fair, he added: “But one needs to admit that such are few, most crave for work.”⁴⁸ Viewed as deserving to be excused from work were those whose strength had sapped during the journey and the parents who had laid their children to rest. Their trauma, it was believed, may have deprived them of their motivation to carry on with their lives.

Work was easiest to find in the cities that had well-functioning industrial plants. Labourers were also needed in agriculture. However, the Russians, as one of the readers wrote, “exploit the refugees a little”.⁴⁹ This opinion finds confirmation in letters by Anna Glücksberg, a Warsaw inhabitant, who, while in exile, worked as a secretary at one of the Moscow offices, complaining about a low wage and the separation from her relatives.⁵⁰

In an effort to make the lives of Polish refugees in Russia easier, aid organizations sought to organize some workshops for them. Most popular among these were sewing plants, offering employment to women, who made up the majority of refugees. Workshops were also established for the manufacture of baskets or lace, which in addition to employing women also employed children. One often finds information about carpenters’ or shoemakers’ workshops being set up.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire the refugees received permission from the authorities to settle in specific places. There was a significant group of Poles in Brno, Prague and Graz. As in Russia, refugees tried to organize their lives, either on their own or with help from different organizations. Lidia Winniczuk, whose father acting in the capacity of a post office clerk, was evacuated with his family to Brno, recalled years later that they shared two rooms with one other family and that it was a tight squeeze. “We found there some beds or sofas, hooks on which we hung our clothes served as our wardrobe and some ordinary containers that we obtained in a shop were a substitute for the cupboard. To these containers our father affixed shelves. Importantly, there were also some chairs and a table.”⁵¹ Among those

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Jan Sokół z Mazowiecka, ‘Z miasta Tomska na Syberii’, *Ognisko Polskie*, 48 (1916), 6.

⁵⁰ Warsaw, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka (University Library, BUW), Glücksbergs correspondence, Ms. 1417, akc. 710, Moscow, 1/14 Feb. 1915, A letter from Anna.

⁵¹ Lidia Winniczuk, *Nad Zbruczem, Stryjem i Wisłą. Wspomnienia 1905–1927* (Kraków, 1988), 64.

in Vienna exile were Władysław Orkan, the Mycielski family from Wiśniowa and Ludomir German, who had been evacuated from L'viv. Unfortunately nothing is known about the conditions in which they lived. One may presume they were not bad, but certainly humbler than before the war.

The situation of those who stayed in the so-called 'barracks' refugee camps was most difficult. The barracks often were not fit for housing the evacuees. Women had to share them with men, and there were only some makeshift screens separating the genders. The camps lacked some basic facilities such as toilets, bathrooms etc., and the refugees did not get enough food. As a result, many of them died and many fell victim to contagious diseases. With time, camp conditions improved following efforts undertaken by members of aid organizations who intervened with the authorities on behalf of the refugees.⁵²

Among the refugees there were also entrepreneurial individuals who strove not only to avoid becoming impoverished by the war but also tried to profit from it. In December 1915 Władysław Glinka wrote about people who travelled all around the Empire trying to obtain compensation for property they had lost during the war. It is hard to say whether they were desperate or accustomed to protecting their own interests. Glinka characterized them in the following way: "Exhausted, burning with fever and with glazed eyes staring vacantly, they make a pitiful sight. Every few weeks when this mass psychosis seems to be dying down, word spreads that someone has received hundred thousand roubles, a full reimbursement for their furniture, tools and the sowing. These rumours send everyone back into a state of frenzy and the orgy of efforts and travel resumes."⁵³ Because many refugees had lost everything they owned, their desire to regain at least part of what they had, even if as indemnification, seems to some extent understandable. The more so as the organizations offering assistance to the refugees informed them of the possibility of seeking compensation from the Russian authorities, thus encouraging them to try to obtain it.

Following the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, the situation of all the Poles staying there, including the refugees, was becoming

⁵² For more on the camps see Sierakowska, *Śmierć, wygnanie, głód*.

⁵³ Glinka, *Pamiętnik*, 44–5 – 25 Dec. 1915.

increasingly difficult. However, this is no place to discuss it now. Suffice it to say that at that time people began to return home. In the spring of 1918, Stefan Jankowski wrote in his diary about his relatives' return from Russia.⁵⁴ He stated that their life in Russia had not been that bad, for they had managed to get well-paid jobs there. However, it should be kept in mind that they belonged to the privileged classes.

RETURNS

The Galician exiles who stayed within the countries of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were the first to be given a chance to return from exile. It was as early as 1915 that they began to apply for permission to go back home. The assistance organizations drew up their registers and contacted the authorities on their behalf.⁵⁵ Upon returning, the refugees often found their houses looted or damaged, sometimes lying in ruin. A peasant and author of a diary gave an account of his return from exile that lasted only a few weeks: "the house to which we returned was half damaged by grenades. All the household appliances were dragged around everywhere and there was little grain left in the barn. Thank heavens some of it was still there."⁵⁶ In Cracow and L'viv committees were established with a view to assisting those who were returning. It was not only people of limited means that found themselves in a difficult situation. Cecylia Mycielska gave her brother the following description of what she found upon her return to Wiśniowa in the spring of 1915: "I came back without any difficulty. I stay near Pelagia's place, in our servants' house because the manor was completely looted and left empty. Its windows were smashed and the door was removed (hidden in the garner, but there is a lot missing). There are 14 cows, 8 colts, 3 pigs and 2 poor calves left in the household."⁵⁷ Other sources, for example peasants' diaries,

⁵⁴ Ossolineum, sign. 12011/III, mf. 2194, 'Pamiętniki Stefana Jankowskiego', April 1918, fol. 1275.

⁵⁵ Cracow, Archiwum Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences), sign. 4223, 'Fragment korespondencji i akt komitetu ratunkowego dla Internowanych Polaków z Królestwa Polskiego w Wiedniu z lat 1915–1917'.

⁵⁶ Krzywicki (ed.), *Pamiętniki chłopów*, 335.

⁵⁷ PAN/PAU, sign. 8110, 'Korespondencja Jana Mycielskiego', 2 June 1915, Wiśniowa.

indicate that regardless of when one was returning, one faced the task of rebuilding one's house, of regaining one's possessions and actually of building one's life from scratch.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience that involved leaving one's home, taking a long and tiresome journey into the unknown, staying in exile and getting back from it had an impact both on individuals and on their communities. The source material analysed above shows, I believe, that the exile in question was among the most traumatic events during the war. In some parts of eastern Poland the memory of these events is still alive. The evidence also demonstrates that the flight and exile affected various groups in different ways. The flight into exile was easier for people of independent means. They could afford to travel by train, to stay overnight in a hotel and a private apartment, or to secure for themselves better living conditions in a new place. People with money had a good chance that their life in exile would be safer than that of a great mass of poor exiles for whom the banishment in question became a real Golgotha that often proved too difficult for them to survive. Children and elderly persons were most vulnerable. It was particularly difficult for them to bear adverse weather conditions and malnutrition. They also most often fell victim to contagious diseases, especially typhus and cholera. Death took the greatest toll on these two groups. The stay in the barrack camps in Austria-Hungary was a particularly difficult experience. Especially initially the camps were ill-suited for the admission of so large a group of people of different age and gender. Except for difficulties in supplying people with food, a great number of refugees suffering from all sorts of diseases and a large mortality rate, the refugees also faced problems connected with the necessity of using unscreened washing areas and of having to share the same living space, undivided into separate sections for male and female refugees etc.

The analysis of personal documents shows different survival strategies used by the refugees. They displayed much determination in looking for employment or seeking compensations and various benefits. The evidence also demonstrates significant social mobilization to organize assistance for the refugees. Although the direction in which they fled and the assistance they received have already been

covered by scholars, the way they reacted to, and were affected by the exile remains unexamined. The article presented here is just the first step in exploring the subject. It also shows how many issues connected with it awaits to be examined.

trans. Artur MękarSKI

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