

## "The Sense of Justice and the Need for Eugenics Require Instant and Effective Intervention": Terminating Pregnancies Resulting from Wartime Rapes in Poland in 1945

Jakub Gałęziowski 

### ABSTRACT

In the final months of the World War II and the first months after that conflict's end, millions of Red Army soldiers passed through Poland in both directions. They not only participated in military actions but also frequently committed crimes against the civilian population. The sexual violence they perpetuated affected not only local women who lived in former territories belonging to the Third Reich (so-called autochthons), but also Polish women—former forced laborers and ex-prisoners of concentration camps returning to their homes after the war and displaced women from the Kresy Wschodnie (eastern borderlands) who migrated to the western territories. These rapes led to the spread of venereal diseases and many unwanted pregnancies. As a result, from June to November 1945, an exception was introduced which made it possible to legally terminate those pregnancies which were the result of so-called war circumstances. Based on the preserved archival documents, it is impossible to estimate the number of abortions, but judging by the secret appeal of the communist authorities from October 1945, it must have been enormous: doctors were advised to exercise "considerable restraint" in directing women to treatments, given the "the demographic needs of a war-devastated country." Ultimately, therefore, the concern for demographic losses and resulting pro-natalist policies won out over the need for "eugenics" and any "sense of justice." The article discusses issues of post-war biopolitics that have not yet been explored in Polish historiography.

**KEYWORDS:** war rape, wartime sexual violence, abortion, biopolitics, Polish Red Cross, children born of war, post-war Poland

### Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

### Funding Statement

The research was supported by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Programme (MSCA-ITN Project nr 642571).

---

Dr. Jakub Gałęziowski, University of Warsaw, Faculty of Culture and Arts, j.galeziowski@uw.edu.pl,  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1595-4598>

"The Sense of Justice and the Need for Eugenics Require Instant and Effective Intervention": Terminating Pregnancies Resulting from Wartime Rapes in Poland in 1945 – ZFO / JECES 71/2022/2  
 (received 2021-02-18, accepted 2021-06-23)

DOI: 10.25627/202271211165 – eISSN 2701-0449, ISSN 0948-8294



The starting point for reflection on post-war abortions performed on Polish women raped by Soviet soldiers was research on children born of war (CBOW), in other words, on individuals of whom one parent, usually the mother, was a member of the invaded (occupied) local community, while the other parent, usually the father, numbered among the invaders or occupiers—more simply, among the enemies.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of the present study, which focuses on Poland, I have adopted a slightly broader definition of the group to include both children who were born in situations marked by war, occupation, forced labor, and captivity<sup>2</sup> to parents belonging to opposing sides as well as those pregnancies which were aborted due to their having been conceived under such circumstances. Among them, I distinguish between those individuals conceived as a result of sexual violence—which was “motivated and perpetuated by a complex mix of individual and collective, premeditated and circumstantial reasons”<sup>3</sup>—and those who were conceived as a result of sexual relationships with varying degrees of consent, bearing in mind that the reality of war and occupation render it practically impossible to define the nature of each individual relationship with any precision.<sup>4</sup> Given the shortcomings of the conceptual apparatus as applied in some existing CBOW research and the resulting terminological and linguistic limitations of the phrase “children born of war,” it should be clarified here that it is used only to refer to people who were indeed born. In addition, I employ the phrase “children conceived of war” to include the preborn<sup>5</sup> as well as the stillborn and those children who died at birth. Despite this modification of the English term, I use the CBOW acronym for the sake of convenience, like other scholars, to refer to all “children conceived of war.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This research has been conducted within the framework of my doctoral project, carried out at the University of Augsburg and at the University of Warsaw under a *co-tutelle* agreement as a part of the international research project: Children Born of War—Past, Present, and Future (CHIBOW), <https://www.chibow.org/> (2020-07-14).

<sup>2</sup> MAREN RÖGER: Besatzungskinder in Polen, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 65 (2017), 1, pp. 26–51.

<sup>3</sup> Use of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Identifying Gaps in Research to Inform More Effective Interventions. UN OCHA Research Meeting—26 June 2008. Discussion Paper 1: Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Understanding the Motivations, p. 1, [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ocha\\_svinarmedconflictmotivations\\_2009\\_0.pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ocha_svinarmedconflictmotivations_2009_0.pdf) (2020-07-14), cited by: SABINE LEE: Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century, Manchester 2017, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> LEE, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> MICHAŁ BILEWICZ, GOSIA MIKOŁAJCZAK, MARIA BABIŃSKA: Speaking about the Preborn: How Specific Terms Used in the Abortion Debate Reflect Attitudes and (De)mentalization, in: Personality and Individual Differences 111 (2017), pp. 256–262.

<sup>6</sup> It is hard to say whether this is intentional, but the fact is that preborn children are referred to as CBOW in the academic literature: LEE, p. 164; RÖGER, Besatzungskinder, p. 43.

There has to date been no comprehensive study on the topic of Polish children born of war.<sup>7</sup> The present research has thus been defined on the one hand by individuals who were willing to tell me their own stories as children born of war and on the other by hitherto little known sources. In addition to children of German soldiers (born largely as a result of consensual relationships) and children of Soviet soldiers (conceived largely as a result of rape), this study also analyzes the fate of children fathered by Germans and born to Polish women who had been forced laborers, concentration camp prisoners, and prisoners of war, and the children of Polish women who had been displaced by the war and became impregnated by Allied soldiers of various nationalities. Furthermore, it also examines the fate of the children fathered by POWs.

The analysis focusing on children fathered by Soviet soldiers highlights the vital question of abortion, which was briefly legalized in 1945 precisely in order to deal with the consequences of wartime rapes. Of key importance were the motives behind the Polish government's initial willingness to enable Polish women to terminate unwanted pregnancies, only to rescind this decision after just a few months and reimpose radical limitations on when the procedure would be allowed. While the Polish communists were indeed concerned about the consequences of rape for Polish women in late spring 1945, especially about the venereal diseases and pregnancies that resulted, by the autumn of that year, it can be claimed that they viewed the potential demographic collapse caused by wartime population losses as even more of a danger. The government's "open arms" policy<sup>8</sup> was to be pursued with regard to the preborn children of raped Polish women, as well, pushing the "sense of

---

<sup>7</sup> Apart from Maren Röger's analysis within the context of her research into intimate relationships between Polish women and German occupiers, no one thus far has addressed the topic of Polish CBOW in comprehensive manner. MAREN RÖGER: *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2015; MAREN RÖGER: *Children of German Soldiers in Poland, 1939–1945*, in: LARS WESTERLUND (ed.): *Ulkomaalasten sotilaiden lapset Suomessa 1940–1948 / Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland 1940–1948*. Vol. 2: *Saksalaisten ja neuvostosotilaiden lapset Suomessa, Norjassa, Tanskassa, Itävallassa, Puolassa ja Itä-Karjalassa / The Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Poland and Occupied Soviet Karelia*, Helsinki 2011, pp. 261–272; RÖGER, *Besatzungskinder*; MAREN RÖGER, LU SEEGERS: *Ojcowie, których zabrakło: Doświadczenia i wspomnienia polskich sierot wojennych i polsko-niemieckich "Children Born of War" [Missing Fathers: Experiences and Memories of Polish War Orphans and Polish-German "Children Born of War"]*, in: *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 6 (2016), pp. 229–250.

<sup>8</sup> JANUSZ WRÓBEL: *Na rozdrożu historii: Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949 [At the Crossroads of History: The Repatriation of Polish Citizens from the West in 1945–1949]*, Łódź 2009, p. 151.

justice and need for eugenics” that would “require instant and effective intervention”<sup>9</sup> to the background.

This particular aspect of post-war abortions—a phenomenon that was much more complex and went far beyond the legal procedure—was linked to a question formulated in my doctoral project and concerning the attitude of the Polish authorities toward CBOW after 1945. Drawing on an analysis of the collected sources, it can be maintained that the only response of Poland’s communist government to the question of children—not so much born but only just conceived of war—was to issue an ordinance aimed at simplifying and speeding up the legal decision-making process concerning pregnancies resulting from rapes by Soviet soldiers and justified by the “sense of justice and needs for eugenics” mentioned above.<sup>10</sup> Thus, post-war abortions in this specific context were an important aspect of the CBOW phenomenon in Poland. In the following, the topic of post-war abortions constitutes a separate issue and is considered independently of the CBOW.

Research on “children of Soviet soldiers” was started by identifying various situations in which Polish women (defined in terms of citizenship rather than of nationality) were at risk of sexual violence and being raped, and rapes may have resulted in pregnancies. This was by no means a marginal or regional problem (i.e., problem concerning only the so-called indigenous women, e.g., women from Silesia or Kashubia), as the existing literature on the subject has often suggested.<sup>11</sup> The sources, including numerous reports by

<sup>9</sup> Ordinance no. 6632/45 authorizing the Polish Red Cross (Polski Czerwony Krzyż, PCK) to terminate pregnancies resulting from wartime rapes. See Zarządzenie nr 6632/45 Ministra Sprawiedliwości Henryka Świątkowskiego do ZG PCK w Warszawie [Ordinance no. 6632/45 by Minister of Justice, Henryk Świątkowski, to the Board of the PCK in Warsaw], Warszawa, 1945-05-30, in: Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy (APB) [State Archive in Bydgoszcz], Zarząd Wojewódzki PCK w Bydgoszczy (PCK ZWB) [PCK Voivodeship Board in Bydgoszcz], sign. 991, vol. 18, copy of a copy, not pag. Neither the AZG PCK collection, nor the most of PCK ZWB fonds have page numbers. Henryk Świątkowski (1896–1970) was Minister of Justice 1945–1956.

<sup>10</sup> In Poland, like in Hungary, racial criteria were not taken into account, as it was the case in Allied-occupied Germany and Austria. ATINA GROSSMANN: *Trauma, Memory and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949*, in: RICHARD BESSEL, DIRK SCHUMANN (eds): *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, Cambridge—Washington, D.C. 2003, pp. 93–127, here p. 102; ANDREA PETŐ: *Memory and the Narrative of Rape in Budapest and Vienna in 1945*, *ibid.*, pp. 129–148, here pp. 134–135.

<sup>11</sup> The topic, if appears at all, is barely touched upon in publications devoted to the presence of Soviet troops in a region or town. It is also virtually absent from publications appearing, for example, in connection with anniversaries of the end of World War II. This state of affairs results from a complex process of tabooization. So far the matter has been dealt with in the greatest detail by: MARCIN ZAREMBA: *Wielka twroga: Polska*

the local administrative authorities from the first few months of their operation in various parts of Poland, clearly show that the problem concerned all women who found themselves along the routes used by the Soviet troops during their march to the west and then their return to their homeland, interspersed with shorter or longer stopovers (sometimes of many months) in Poland.<sup>12</sup> Initially, especially in the western territories, the power was in the hands of Soviet commanders, who were the ultimate authority to settle any dispute, and Polish officials successively and not without problems had to “retake” control from them. Red Army soldiers took over and used landed estates as well as industrial plants, and seized hospitals, thus restricting their accessibility to the local and incoming population. It can be assumed that children were conceived and born as a result of rapes in all those places. The examples presented in the article concern actions undertaken in Upper Silesia, Kashubia, and Western Pomerania, which does not mean that rape survivors came from these regions. It should be remembered that Polish women—not only from other regions of Poland, but also those who came from the former eastern borderlands and the former Third Reich (forced laborers and prisoners of concentration camps)—found a new place to live in so-called Recovered Territories. These settlements were encouraged by communist propaganda.

The topic of post-war abortions resulted from archival queries of the dispersed records of the Polish Red Cross (PCK) from the immediate post-war period. The sources I collected during my research shed completely new light on the whole campaign.

One of the branches of the State Archives in Katowice houses records (fairly complete) documenting abortions performed on raped women whose pregnancies resulted from “wartime circumstances,” (a vague phrase used to describe rapes by Soviet soldiers).<sup>13</sup> In the two surviving files, among the 98

---

1944–1947: *Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* [The Great Fear: Poland 1944–1947: A Popular Reaction to Crisis], Kraków 2012, pp. 170–184.

<sup>12</sup> Some of these reports are cited by: ZAREMBA, pp. 180–181. The reports sent by municipalities to district and regional authorities and higher up confirm the common nature of the phenomenon. At the same time, it is worth noting that while it was still the dominant theme in the summer of 1945, for example, in descriptions of the state of security in a given area, at some point (late August–early September) it disappeared almost completely, basically never to return. To what extent this pattern, found in various regions, was associated with external pressure on the part of the central government is hard to judge unequivocally at this point. In no way, however, would the problem of rapes by Soviet soldiers have completely ceased to exist at that time. Other sources, for example, those dealing with abortion, provide evidence to the contrary.

<sup>13</sup> Significantly, the perpetrators of this violence were not officially named in documents except in rape survivors’ statements cited in the protocols. The euphemistic phrase “wartime circumstances” was used, for example, in the justification of abortion consent: *Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Opieki nad Ofiarami Gwałtu przy Oddziale PCK w Katowicach* [Minutes of a Meeting of the Commission for Rape Victims at the PCK Department Katowice], Katowice, 1945-08-29, in: *Archiwum Państwowe w Katowici-*

cases recorded between 13 July and 31 August 1945, the Katowice Commission for Victims of Rape dealt with 46 cases. In addition, the collection in question contains the records of 29 women who obtained abortion consent from the district Prosecutor, 7 women referred from Opole to Katowice for the procedure, as well as 15 cases of women dealt with by the Committee for Helping Victims of Rape in Cieszyn (in one case, the examining physician sent the patient back to complete her files). The documentation of each individual case not always is complete, and cases from the various locations (Katowice, Opole, Cieszyn) vary.<sup>14</sup>

Other traces found in relation to the “abortion campaign” are much more fragmentary (e.g., in Bydgoszcz, Łódź, Opole, Poznań, and Wrocław). Taken together, however, they allow for the formulation of a hypothesis that the action was planned and organized, and that it encompassed the country’s entire territory, although its intensity varied from region to region. The whole operation from the very beginning was not fully disclosed. There are no direct references to this action in governmental documents, especially in the Ministry of Justice files, except for two mentions found in the records of the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, and Ministry of Health. The topic of legally performed post-war abortions was not reflected in the documentation produced at the time, as if it had not existed. The traces found in archives for the most part concern either isolated documents relating to particular cases of individual women or copies of a circular letter sent by the Board of the PCK to Red Cross Regions, questionnaire templates for raped women, and, finally, micro-reports from the local branches of the PCK. The examined documents appear to have been mislaid among other papers. At the same time, one of the circular letters of the Board of the PCK (cited later in the article) suggests that officials in the Ministry of Justice were aware of the scale of the performed terminations of pregnancies, which means that they must have received reports, perhaps from the prosecutor’s office.<sup>15</sup> The political dimension of this

---

cach (APK) [State Archive in Katowice], Zarząd Wojewódzki PCK w Katowicach (PCK ZWK) [PCK Voivodeship Board in Katowice], no. 512, vol. 53, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> I have found two more references in the literature to this particular collection of sources. JAROSŁAW NEJA: *Problemy z sojusznikami* [Problems with Allies], in: *Biuletyn IPN* (2005), 1–2, pp. 59–63; JANUSZ MOKROSZ: *Losy ludzkie—indywidualne i zbiorowe—górnosławskiej społeczności w świetle dziejów Chorzowa w pierwszych latach po zakończeniu II wojny światowej* [Human Stories—Individual and Collective—of the Upper Silesian Community in the Light of the History of Chorzów in the First Few Years after World War II], in: *Zeszyty Chorzowskie* 18 (2018), pp. 54–71. However, the two authors give erroneous information about the contents of both files. In fact, among the 98 cases the Katowice Commission for Victims of Rape dealt with only 46 cases (and not 102). Mokrosz treats this collection as unique to Upper Silesia, yet as my findings demonstrate, the campaign “to provide help to victims of rape” was systemic and nationwide.

<sup>15</sup> *Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do Pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolno-Śląski, poufne* [Circular letter by the Board of the PCK to its representative for the Lower

precedence requires a more detailed investigation owing to its complex and unequivocal nature as well as the number of parties involved. It would be interesting to probe the motivation guiding the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) leadership, which must have been the force that ultimately decided to intervene in the face of the information coming from the western regions about the scale of rapes of Polish women. In-depth analysis of PCK documentation could capture the decision-making process which led the minister of justice to issue the relevant ordinance. Also, examination of military sources could shed a light on the complexity of the phenomenon in question, not only because of the "wartime" nature of sexual violence and close links between Polish and Soviet troops, but also because when the abortion campaign started, the PCK was supervised by the Ministry of National Defense.

The secrecy of the whole operation ultimately resulted in its failure to have a significant effect.<sup>16</sup> Yet this in no way should be considered as the basis for estimating either the number of abortions or rapes with resulting pregnancies.<sup>17</sup> Many women presumably tried to deal with the consequences of rape

---

Silesian Region, Confidential], Warszawa, 1945-10-11, in: Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr) [State Archive in Wrocław], Oddział PCK we Wrocławiu (PCK OWr) [PCK Branch in Wrocław], sign. 82, vol. 1, p. 6. The archives of Ministry of Justice were not accessible for the research query.

<sup>16</sup> There was a lack of publicly available information on the action. As the Katowice material suggests, a substantial number of the women found out about the legal possibility of terminating their pregnancies from local midwives and doctors as well as policemen to whom they had reported the crime. Apart from one item from *Dziennik Bałtycki* indicated by Magdalena Grzebałkowska and referring (although not explicitly) to "medical procedures in connection with cases of rapes of women," I have found no other traces in the daily press from that period. MAGDALENA GRZEBĄKOWSKA: 1945: *Wojna i pokój* [1945: War and Peace], Warszawa 2015, p. 222.

<sup>17</sup> The number of abortions performed in Berlin has been used by many scholars to estimate, based on extrapolation, how many of these procedures were likely performed in all of West Germany, and then the number of raped women. Attempts have also been made using the same methods to come up with an estimate of the *Russenkinder*. However, the differences between the estimates given by various scholars are considerable. For more on the topic, see MIRIAM GEBHARDT: *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, München 2015, pp. 30–31, 77; TOMASZ KRUSZEWSKI: *Gwałty na kobietach niemieckich w schyłkowym okresie II wojny światowej (październik 1944–8/9 maja 1945 roku) i w pierwszych latach po jej zakończeniu* [Rapes of German Women towards the End of World War II (October 1944–8/9 May 1945)], Wrocław 2016, pp. 36, 47–49, <https://www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/dlibra/publication/80047> (2020-07-14). With regard to figures, I agree with Andrea Pető, who shies away from quantifying sexual violence, as she sees in this practice a risk of a "numbers war" or "war of numbers" (*számháború*). ANDREA PETŐ: *Women and Victims and Perpetrators in World War II: The Case of Hungary*, in: RUTH LEISEROWITZ, MAREN RÖGER (eds): *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*,

by resorting to other measures—a village midwife (the so-called *babka*), for example—or entirely on their own, which could have tragic or even fatal consequences for their own health.<sup>18</sup> The legal option was chosen as a last resort by women who had little to lose for a variety of reasons (e.g., they realized too late that they were pregnant and were afraid to “get rid of the fetus” on their own) and by those who could not pay for an illegal, and more discrete, procedure executed at a private practice. At the same time, available documents show that abortions were carried out on a massive scale by, for example, PCK doctors, both before minister of justice issued the relevant ordinance and after it was no longer in force.<sup>19</sup>

### Rapes of Polish Women by Soviet Soldiers as a Topic that Has Been Absent from Discourse and Research

For Europeans the unprecedented sexual violence in the last stage of World War II concerned primarily German women, and to a lesser extent women in Austria, Romania, and Hungary. Its scale and brutality have been interpreted as a kind of revenge for the crimes committed by the Nazis in the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> The victims were above all enemy women. There are detailed descriptions in memoirs as well as studies—by both German and Polish scholars—of the ordeal of women living in the eastern border regions of the Third Reich, primarily East and West Prussia, Pomerania, and Upper and Lower Silesia.<sup>21</sup> One of the strongest symbols of the phenomenon is provided by the

---

Osnabrück 2012, pp. 81–93, here p. 87. The same argument can be used when it comes to estimating the number of abortions or children born as a result of rape.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the “war on village midwives,” see SYLWIA KUŻMA-MARKOWSKA: Walka z “babkami” o zdrowie kobiet: Medykalizacja przerywania ciąży w Polsce w latach pięćdziesiątych i sześćdziesiątych XX wieku [Fight with “Babkas”—over Women’s Health: The Medicalisation of Abortion in Socialist Poland (1950s and 1960s)], in: Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i Materiały 15 (2017), pp. 189–215.

<sup>19</sup> Protokół z posiedzenia w sprawie pomocy dla wracających z Niemiec [Minutes of a Meeting on Care of People Returning from Germany], Warszawa, 1945-05-30, in: Archiwum Zarządu Głównego Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Warszawie (AZG PCK) [Archive of the Main Board of the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw], sign. 4/76, not pag.

<sup>20</sup> NORMAN M. NAIMARK: The Russians in Germany: A History for the Soviet Occupation Zone 1945–1949, Cambridge, MA 1995; ANTHONY BEEVOR: Berlin: The Downfall, 1945, London 2002; CATHERINE MERRIDALE: Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945, New York 2006.

<sup>21</sup> While the vastness of the literature on the subject in Germany is not surprising, it is interesting that in the Polish historiography the question of sexual violence during World War II is discussed also primarily with regard to German women and indigenous women from the territories incorporated into Poland after the war. The authors fail to mention the fact that Soviet soldiers did not limit themselves only to women of one nationality. JOANNA HYTREK-HRYCIUK: “Rosjanie nadchodzą!” Ludność niemiecka a żoł-



events in Berlin known as the “zero hour” or “women’s hour.”<sup>22</sup> They are embodied by Anonyma, a woman who was the first to describe the events in such detail, drawing on her own experiences.<sup>23</sup>

Documents and memoirs indicate unequivocally that the experience of sexual violence was common and, in some regions, affected nearly all women—regardless of their age.<sup>24</sup> Fear of rape, rape itself, and the resulting venereal diseases were part of their daily experience, as was pregnancy in many cases. From the moment the Red Army crossed the border of the Third Reich, its soldiers raped women they encountered, including local Germans, representatives of various ethnic minorities, and Polish women, as well as forced laborers from Poland and *Ostarbeiterinnen*.<sup>25</sup> In this final stage of the war—before the enemy had been definitively conquered—at least some women from that last group may have managed to escape the fate of German women and indigenous women (whose mother tongue likely betrayed them), for, as Solzhenitsyn would have it, they were protected by “one faith.” Yet to what extent the language (“I’m not German! I’m not German! No! I’m—Polish! / I’m a Pole!”)<sup>26</sup> and appearance (“Vanka bangs with his rifle butt, / And look—it’s Dunka come to answer. / Judged by her hairdo and her shoes, / Her skirt and jumper—she’s a German / And it’s only by her snub nose / One spots a fellow-countrywoman”)<sup>27</sup> were ultimately instrumental in persuading the soldiers to refrain from raping particular women is hard to say.<sup>28</sup>

---

nierze Armii Radzieckiej (Czerwonej) na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1948 [“The Russians Are Coming!” Germans and the Soldiers of the Soviet (Red) Army in Lower Silesia 1945–1948], Wrocław 2010, pp. 81–89; KRUSZEWSKI.

<sup>22</sup> GROSSMANN, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> ANONYMA: *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

<sup>24</sup> ZAREMBA, pp. 170–184.

<sup>25</sup> The eastern regions of the Third Reich had the biggest number of forced laborers, both male and female. KRYSZYNA KERSTEN: *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej (studium historyczne)* [Repatriation of the Polish Population after World War II (Historical Study)], Wrocław 1974, p. 57; CZESŁAW ŁUCZAK: *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy podczas II wojny światowej* [Polish Forced Laborers in the Third Reich during World War II], Poznań 1974, p. 87; BEATA HALICKA: *Polski Dzik Zachód: Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe osvajanie Nadodrza 1945–1948* [The Polish Wild West: Forced Migration and Cultural Appropriation in the Polish-German Borderlands, 1945–1948], Kraków 2015, p. 80. Some of them tried to return home immediately after the front passed, but many stayed either because they had nowhere to return to or because they saw the territories abandoned by Germans as places where they could live. HALICKA, pp. 83–87.

<sup>26</sup> ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN: *Prussian Nights. A Narrative Poem*, London 1977, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> While scholars note that before entering the Third Reich the soldiers had not committed or had rarely committed sexual offences, so far they have not confirmed that the soldiers took into account the nationality of the women they encountered. ZAREMBA,

Reliable data concerning rape victims for this period is not available, especially concerning the victims' nationalities. These territories, partly abandoned by their indigenous population, had not yet been taken over by the Polish administration, representatives of which only gradually, mostly by around late spring 1945, began to record crimes committed by Red Army soldiers, including rapes of local women.

The intensity of rapes increased toward the end of the offensive against Berlin, especially after the final victory over Germany, when millions of soldiers began returning home. This is an aspect of wartime rapes which escapes scholars' attention—the moment marking the true beginning of the tragedy for Polish women, both those who (when returning to their homeland) encountered Soviet soldiers heading back eastwards, especially during the so-called “wild repatriation,”<sup>29</sup> and those women who lived during this time in areas incorporated into Poland or had come to these areas from other regions of the country, above all from the territories beyond the river Bug.<sup>30</sup> The first group included mostly former concentration camp prisoners and forced laborers, while the second was comprised primarily of Polish women from central Poland and from the pre-war eastern borderlands of Poland. Numerous contemporary reports by the newly established or just emerging local authorities detail how Soviet troops passing through various towns and villages or stationed there for extended periods were characterized by a far greater lack of discipline than when they had marched toward Berlin. This was largely associated with an uninhibitedness that spread among soldiers at the time.<sup>31</sup> Sources, much more readily available for this period of time, clearly show that Red Army soldiers more frequently raped Polish women, not Germans.<sup>32</sup>

---

p. 170; HALICKA, p. 111; KRUSZEWSKI, p. 27. Yet there must have been some who did not join in the collective fury. HALICKA, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> WRÓBEL, p. 443.

<sup>30</sup> The scholarly literature rarely features this topic, and when it does information about the rape of Polish women is usually limited to a statement of fact. HALICKA, pp. 114, 193. As I have already mentioned, Zaremba devotes some more attention to the topic, referring to Polish women living in the “liberated” areas as well as to former forced laborers and prisoners. ZAREMBA, pp. 170–184. However, I have found no references to women displaced from other regions of Poland (primarily from the east) who shared the fate of their compatriots.

<sup>31</sup> NAIMARK, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> Soviet soldiers fairly quickly established contacts with local Germans and favored them over incoming Poles. Such information can be found in field reports sent by the local authorities and local humanitarian workers. JERZY KOCHANOWSKI: *Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's Former Eastern Territories*, in: PHILIPP THER, ANA SILJAK (eds.): *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, Lanham 2001. pp. 135–154, here pp. 146–149; HYTREK-HRYCIUK, pp. 148–181; HALICKA, pp. 308–310. *Ibid.*, pp. 310–318, Halicka tackles the topic of intimate relationships (not based on violence) between German women and Red Army soldiers. Analogous situations were also to be observed in Germany and Austria, in zones occupied by the Soviet troops: BARBARA STELZL-MARX: *Freier und*

During this period, these actions were no longer seen as taking revenge on the enemy but rather as “compensation” for the hardships of battle to which the victors felt simply entitled.<sup>33</sup> Although scholars have attempted to appraise the rapists’ motivations, these are difficult to measure.<sup>34</sup> The most convincing theory for explaining Soviet rapes, however, is the bio-social theory outlined by Jonathan Gottschall, who distances himself from explanations of sexual violence based solely on socio-cultural aspects or references to biology. He believes that the phenomenon cannot be fully understood unless we take into account both these factors. In his opinion, they can be applied to all periods, cultures, and types of conflict.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the shared experience of Polish women in 1945, especially those women who found themselves at the time in the territories incorporated into Poland in the west and north, was sexual violence or the constant threat of sexual abuse from Soviet soldiers. These were the regions with the highest concentration of Soviet troops and the weakest state authorities and social structures. Therefore, it was not the fact that the regions had previously belonged to the Third Reich or that some people from the local population had remained on their farms, but rather the number of soldiers in these regions, that was the main reason behind such a high number of acts of violence against the local Polish population or Polish women from the east or west (or just passing through these regions).

The following examples of two different situations illustrate the circumstances in which Polish women found themselves in 1945 in regions described as, depending on the context, “Recovered Territories” or the Polish

---

Befreier: Zum Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen sowjetischen Besatzungssoldaten und österreichischen Frauen, in: STEFAN KARNER, BARBARA STELZL-MARX (eds.): *Die Rote Armee in Österreich: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955. Beiträge*, Graz et al. 2005, pp. 421–448. Until recently the German public similarly objected to such situations being openly discussed, as is evidenced by the reception of Anonyma’s memories. LEE, pp. 51–52. However, opposite views have been expressed by children born in such circumstances. WINFRIED BEHLAU (ed.): *Distelblüten: Russenkinder in Deutschland*, Ganderkesee 2015.

<sup>33</sup> ZAREMBA, pp. 172–173. This aspect is also noted by Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, who attributes it, however, to the “first wave of rapes,” explaining that nationality did not matter to Soviet soldiers, consumed as they were by a desire for revenge or by sexual desire, with sexual abstinence, considerable stress, and alcohol undoubtedly fueling such behavior. WENDY JO GERTJEANSSEN: *Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front during World War II*, PhD Diss., University of Minnesota, 2004, p. 359, <http://www.victimsheroessurvivors.info/VictimsHeroesSurvivors.pdf> (2020-07-14).

<sup>34</sup> The multifaceted nature of the causes of sexual violence in wartime and post conflict situations, as well as the inadequacy of applying individual theories have been pointed out by various scholars. LEE, p. 30; ANDREA PETŐ: *Przemilczane gwałty [Unspoken Rapes]*, in: *Biuletyn IPN Pamięć.pl* (2014), 11, pp. 33–38.

<sup>35</sup> JONATHAN A. GOTTSCHALL: *Explaining Wartime Rape*, in: *The Journal of Sex Research* 41 (2004), pp. 129–136.

“Wild West.”<sup>36</sup> The author of the first two accounts is Wanda Póltawska, a former Ravensbrück prisoner, who published her memoirs for the first time in 1962 and described her journey back to Poland with several fellow prisoners in detail:

“Hands ... men’s hands, reaching out for me ... lustful glances ... oily smiles ...

There were so many variations on the theme, so many seemingly innocent approaches to defenceless women.

We had very quickly learned to distinguish between men who were harmless and those who represented a threat. We could tell from their faces, their gestures.” [...]

“I looked at my group of weary, exhausted girls and saw terror in their eyes. Where were we going to sleep? By this time we were frightened of all men, no matter who they were [...] Not one of those fellows who were looking us over right now, seeing us as just another group of eighteen- to twenty-year-old girls, could have any idea what we had been through. There was nowhere to go, no barrack huts, nothing but open fields. And those camp-fires, those tents, those eager groping hands.”<sup>37</sup>

The next two fragments come from a report by a certain Dr. Bartoszewski, the Polish Red Cross’s sanitary head for Lower Silesia, who in August 1945 visited a temporary “camp” for displaced persons from eastern regions of Poland located by the railway track in Brockau near Wrocław (today the district of Brochów in the southeastern part of the city). As Bartoszewski stressed, his remarks were “sketchy and casual” and were a “weak echo of the tragic cry of the ‘Valley of Tears’ called Brockau.”

“We need to add that what proves to be a great disaster among women in particular are venereal diseases; the women, often raped and without moral, physical, and medical support, are seriously ill. [...] Support in the form of the delivery of medications can prevent the spread of the diseases, while proper and strong protection of transports and camps of our DPs will protect our women against brutal rapes.”<sup>38</sup>

As already stated, in the summer of 1945 the topic of rapes of Polish women appeared in nearly all reports by administrative officials of various levels and departments as well as doctors—among others in Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Olsztyn, Opole, Poznań, Słupsk, Szczecin, and Wrocław—only to disappear almost completely by the early autumn. One common conclusion emerges from the reports: local authorities were completely helpless when it came to crimes committed by Soviet soldiers and their consequences. The only thing they could do was to wait for action to be taken at the

<sup>36</sup> HALICKA.

<sup>37</sup> WANDA PÓLTAWSKA: *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, New York 2013, pp. 174–175 (Polish version Warszawa 1962).

<sup>38</sup> The report suggests that after being unloaded from railway wagons, 8,000 Poles spent several weeks outdoors, waiting for decisions concerning their fate. Raport Szefa Sanitarnego PCK na Okręg Dolno-Śląski [Report by the PCK Sanitary Head for the Lower Silesian Region], 1945-08-29, in: AZG PCK, sign. 4/76, not pag.

central level. Attempts to put pressure on the commanders of the Red Army fronts by appointing government representatives proved futile. Nor did a letter sent by Polish communists to Stalin himself, a letter in which they complained about the behavior of Red Army troops, receive a reply.<sup>39</sup>

### Intervention of the Polish State Concerning the Temporary Liberalization of Post-War Abortions

The position of Poland's communist authorities in the post-war geopolitical landscape—even if they supported the instruction coming from Moscow—was not easy. From this perspective, the Polish Interim Government's decision—more specifically that of the minister of justice—to help Polish women<sup>40</sup> terminate pregnancies resulting from wartime rapes can be seen to a certain extent as courageous. On the basis of the sources examined, it is impossible to ascertain whether and to what extent the Polish government was inspired by similar actions taken in this respect in Berlin, Vienna, or Budapest; the circumstances were certainly much more complicated. Poland's situation was completely different from that of Allied-occupied Germany or Austria or Hungary, where enemy women were raped.<sup>41</sup> There were two major difficulties: on the one hand Polish authorities had to take a stance on the rapes of Polish women—who were first of all victims of the Nazis, however—and, on the other, they did not want to fall into disfavor with an ally on whom they were completely dependent. We may ask whether the silence surrounding the abortion campaign is evidence that the government was afraid to publicize the matter among the Allies. In the end, Poland turned out to be the only country among the victors of World War II in which action was taken to respond to rapes committed not by enemy soldiers but by an ally. The need to weigh a likely hostile reaction on the part of the Soviet Union (but perhaps also other allies) while responding to a pressing social matter could have unexpected consequences.

The question of rapes of women was raised on 18 May 1945 during a meeting of representatives of various government ministries and nongovernmental organizations devoted to Polish men and women returning from the

---

<sup>39</sup> WRÓBEL, pp. 400–402.

<sup>40</sup> Although documents from the Ministry of Justice do not even mention the question of the nationality of women “taken care of” by the PCK, annotations in documents issued locally suggest that it did matter. For example, referrals to Opole featured a formula saying that the victim was a Polish woman. On the other hand, officials did not know how to treat German women reporting to them with the same problem. Raport tygodniowy Oddziału Opieki Społecznej w Opolu [Weekly Report by the Welfare Service in Opole], Opole, from 1945-05-27 to 1945-06-02, in: Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu (APO) [State Archive in Opole], Zarząd Miejski w Opolu (ZMO) [Municipal Board in Opole], sign. 185, vol. 214, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> GROSSMANN, pp. 100–110; PETŐ, Memory, pp. 134–137.

west, a meeting that took place at the Ministry of Labor and Welfare. The issues discussed included—in addition to the epidemic of venereal diseases, which was hard to contain—pregnancies resulting from rapes. The Ministry of Health proposed that a “central point” be set up for referrals for all returning women “in need of medical help,” that is women suffering from venereal diseases and pregnant women. This mission was entrusted to the Polish Red Cross.<sup>42</sup> At the next meeting, held on 28 May, those present heard a report by the ministry’s special envoys sent to investigate the situation in western border regions. The most pressing matters emerging from the inspection included “mass rapes of women in western regions,” an issue requiring “instant and effective intervention.”<sup>43</sup> In this context a proposal was formulated again for the PCK to deal with the matter. A representative of the PCK who was present at the meeting and served as a Ministry of National Defense delegate to the PCK’s Board, Major Tadeusz Karnibad, put forward a motion for an ordinance to be issued “allowing termination of pregnancies in the case of officially confirmed rapes.” Presumably, this was the meeting during which details of measures to help rape survivors were discussed.<sup>44</sup>

Two days later, on 30 May 1945, the proposal was put into practice. Under Ordinance no. 6632/45 the then minister of justice, Henryk Świątkowski, authorized the PCK to “carry out terminations of pregnancies.” Given the significance of the document, I quote it in its entirety:<sup>45</sup>

“War and the resulting decline of moral standards, repatriations of people of various nationalities passing through Poland, and widespread drunkenness have led to an increase in the number of rapes of women. They often result in pregnancies and venereal diseases. The Polish Red Cross has undertaken to provide treatment of venereal diseases free of charge and terminate pregnancies free of charge under Article 233 of the Criminal Code. In line with the existing legal regulations, such cases require a doctor’s certificate and consent of the district prosecutor. As rape victims often report too late for all formalities to be completed, a sense of justice and a need for eugenics require urgent intervention, but on the other hand malfeasance cannot be ruled out. Taking all the above circumstances into account, I hereby order the following:

<sup>42</sup> Protokół z posiedzenia w sprawie opieki nad powracającymi z Niemiec [Minutes of a Meeting on Care of People Returning from Germany], Warszawa, 1945-05-18, in: AZG PCK, sign. 4/76, not pag.

<sup>43</sup> Protokół z międzyministerialnej konferencji w sprawie pomocy dla wracających z Niemiec [Report of an Interdepartmental Conference on Care of People Returning from Germany], Warszawa, 1945-05-28, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> The document was located in a collection which had not been studied before my archival query. The files included in it various documents haphazardly put together: loose printed material and manuscripts, which probably have not attracted anyone’s attention since the collection was taken over by the State Archives in Bydgoszcz. The material contains the only document I know of with the full text of Ordinance no. 6632/45. See Zarządzenie nr 6632/45 (as in footnote 9).

- 1) Only the Polish Red Cross is authorized to terminate pregnancies in such cases.
- 2) A Polish Red Cross doctor diagnoses a pregnancy, issues a medical certificate confirming the pregnancy and its stage, submitting the relevant documentation to the Polish Red Cross Commission for Rape Victims.
- 3) The Polish Red Cross Commission's decision provides the basis for carrying out the procedure.
- 4) Files or their copies certified by the commission should be immediately sent to the relevant district prosecutor.

The above ordinance remains valid until 31 August 1945."

In this form the document reached at least some of the PCK regional representatives, probably directly from the Ministry of Justice, bypassing the Polish Red Cross's Board, the members of which did not discuss the matter until the 12 June 1945 meeting of the PCK Presidium, the first meeting of the organization's leadership in nearly a month.<sup>46</sup> On 25 June, the organization's representative for the Pomeranian region sent a circular letter with a copy of Ordinance no. 6632/45 to the branches of the PCK he supervised, attaching "commission decision templates and victims' statement templates."<sup>47</sup> In Silesia, on 5 July 1945, the relevant units received not the copy of the ordinance in question, but a copy of instructions issued by the PCK Board on 14 June which had been prepared by two of its members, the Countess Maria Tarnowska and Ludwik Christians, instructions that were an "adaptation" of minister Świątkowski's ordinance.<sup>48</sup>

Documents from just those two regions are enough to claim that the PCK responsibilities were interpreted differently in different places. However, it is hard to guess today what ultimately determined the choice of particular solutions adopted in a given region. This was manifested in different guidelines

---

<sup>46</sup> It is hard to say for sure what caused the long delay; we can only guess that it was associated with a reorganization of the PCK structure, the objective of which was to make the organization subordinate to the new communist authorities. As a result of this process, some members of the PCK Board were replaced. The new board met on 16 May and then not until 22 June. In between there were three meetings of the presidium (12, 15 and 19 June).

<sup>47</sup> Pismo okólne nr 28 do pełnomocników ZG PCK Okręgu Pomorskiego wraz z załącznikami [Circular Letter No. 28 to Representatives of the PCK Board for the Pomeranian Region with Attachments], Bydgoszcz, 1945-06-25, in: PCK ZWB, sign. 991, vol. 18, not pag.

<sup>48</sup> These instructions are extant in two versions, in the form of a copy of the original document kept in the records of the PCK Wrocław branch, and a part of another document issued by the acting representative for Silesia, General Sulima, and addressed to the PCK branches in Silesia. That second letter is dated 1945-07-05. All quotations come from the Wrocław version of the document. Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolno-Sląski: Zarządzenie MS w sprawie opieki nad ofiarami gwałtu [Circular Letter by the PCK Board in Warsaw to the PCK Representative for the Lower Silesian Region: Ministry of Justice's Ordinance on the Care of Rape Victims], Wrocław, 1945-06-14, in: PCK OWr, sign. 82, vol. 1, pp 14–15.

concerning the procedure itself, which in effect led to the Polish Red Cross's assuming varying degrees of responsibility for the decision to terminate a pregnancy. While the minister's ordinance gave the full responsibility to the organization, the PCK Board was reluctant to accept such a task and instead saw the PCK as a body formulating opinions rather than making decisions, shifting the ultimate responsibility to the prosecutor's office—i.e., in fact in accordance with the pre-war criminal law, which was still binding at the time.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the differences were not only considerable, but also significant. In addition to a reversal of the order of actions of the various bodies and change of the decision maker, there was also a reference to the voluntary nature of the PCK participation in the procedure. The phrase that the PCK “has undertaken to provide treatment” was replaced with a statement that the help to victims of war, which could include raped women, was inscribed in the statute of the PCK. Other arguments for the campaign were given as well; instead of the “sense of justice and need for eugenics,” factors like the mother's mental state, venereal disease, and its impact on the health of the newborn and of the mother, as well as marriage status were indicated.

“Extreme caution” was also advised owing to the delicate nature of abortion in moral terms and its incomppliance with the doctrine of the Catholic Church.<sup>50</sup> The question of the Catholic Church's attitude to post-war abortions requires a separate analysis given the vast and multifaceted nature of the problem. Suffice it is to write at this point that throughout the period in which the ordinance was in force there was virtually no mention of it by the Catholic hierarchy in Poland. The problem appeared for the first time only in the Polish episcopate's pastoral letter of 4 October 1945, but there was no explicit reference to the Ordinance no. 6632/45.<sup>51</sup> Reactions of ordinary priests, on the other hand, were much more varied.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly these directives and recommendations were adhered to with a large degree of regional variation. The information about the setting up of the “commission for making decisions concerning raped women” in Chojnice

<sup>49</sup> In the spring of 1945, legal abortion was possible only under article 233 of the pre-war Criminal Code, which was still in force at the time. Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 11 lipca 1932 r. Kodeks karny [Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 1932-07-11, Criminal Code], in: Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (1932), 60, no. 571, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19320600571> (2022-06-06).

<sup>50</sup> Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do Pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolnośląski (as in footnote 48).

<sup>51</sup> JAN ŻARYN (ed.): Komunikaty Konferencji Episkopatu Polski 1945–2000 [Reports of the Polish Episcopal Conference 1945–2000], Poznań 2006, p. 49.

<sup>52</sup> JAN ZIEJA: Życie Ewangelii: Spisane przez Jacka Moskwę [Living the Gospel: Edited by Jacek Moskwa], Paryż 1993, pp. 177–178; MACIEJ SIEMBIEDA: Krew i żółć [Blood and Bile], in: MACIEJ SIEMBIEDA: Podwieczorek oprawców, Warszawa 2003, pp. 83–90, here p. 87.



(Pomerania region) comes from a report by the local PCK representative of 19 June 1945;<sup>53</sup> in the next report (26 June), she concluded that “the question absorbing the leadership the most this week is the campaign to help women who were victims of rape.”<sup>54</sup> I believe that this makes it possible to formulate a hypothesis that in addition to a prosaic reason—action was taken on the basis of the guidelines that reached the regions and branches first—the practice was dictated by local circumstances and the sensitivity of specific individuals involved. Faced with mass-scale rapes, they took action as required at a given moment, instead of thinking about possible inspections. In this context, we should not be surprised by information provided by one of the ministerial inspectors at a meeting at the Ministry of Labor and Welfare on 30 May 1945 that, “when it comes to the sick women in Katowice, the Polish Red Cross began to act without waiting for the prosecutor’s authorization.”<sup>55</sup> Under the existing legal regulations, the PCK had thus acted illegally, but most likely no one ever faced criminal charges for this. In addition, although formally the Katowice Commission for Victims of Rape did not begin its work until 13 July, terminations had been performed for at least several (if not more) weeks before that, without the official permission of the PCK central authorities (or at least without their official position on the matter). The campaign was carried out spontaneously and without being included in any reports. That is why, apart from this single reference, there are no traces of it.

In the end, with some exception, action was taken in accordance with the intention of the authors of the instructions, according to whom the ministry’s ordinance was only an authorization, but it was not mandatory to “follow it to the letter.” Consequently, measures taken were multifaceted or no measures were taken at all. For example, it is hard to estimate unequivocally what was meant by the following handwritten note dated 4 September 1945 on the margins of the Wrocław copy of the circular issued by the Board of the PCK: “In the Lower Silesian Region, no terminations of pregnancies were performed as specified in the letter.”<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere the same hand added that certificates issued by the prosecutor’s office were not used and the number of “miscarriages” was very low.<sup>57</sup> So how was the problem of pregnancies resulting

---

<sup>53</sup> Sprawozdanie z działalności Oddziału PCK w Chojnicach [Report from the PCK Branch in Chojnice], Chojnice, 1945-06-19, in: PCK ZWB, sign. 991, vol. 206, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup> Sprawozdanie z działalności Oddziału PCK w Chojnicach za okres 1945-06-19 – 1945-06-26 [Report from the PCK Branch in Chojnice from 1945-06-19 to 1945-06-26], no date, *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Protokół z posiedzenia w sprawie pomocy dla wracających z Niemiec [Minutes of a Meeting on Care of People Returning from Germany], Warszawa, 1945-05-30, in: AZG PCK, sign. 4/76, not pag.

<sup>56</sup> Pismo ogólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolnośląski (as in footnote 48).

<sup>57</sup> Pismo ogólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolnośląski, poufne (as in footnote 15).

from rapes dealt with in the region? There is evidence that the number of pregnancies was significant, for attempts were made in Wrocław over the course of several months to set up a special hospital for raped women, both those with venereal diseases and those who were pregnant.<sup>58</sup>

It is not clear how many PCK commissions were ultimately established as part of the campaign to provide “care for the victims of rape.” Documents of the PCK Board suggest that instructions were sent to all 14 regions, which may indicate that at least one commission was active in each region. The representative for Silesia recommended that no fewer than 13 commissions be convened in his region, overseeing the work of 26 branches operating there at the time. In total there were 288 branches across Poland in 1945.<sup>59</sup> The commissions’ composition was not regulated by the Ministry of Justice, but it was mentioned by the Board of the PCK, which formulated specific guidelines: members of the commissions should include, in addition to doctors and lawyers, women who were mothers, and all members were to be people of “high moral and social qualifications.”<sup>60</sup>

In the end, different approaches were followed in different regions. For example, the local Committee for Helping Victims of Rape in Cieszyn included the director of a secondary school, a lecturer from the State Agricultural College there, and the wife of the director of the other secondary school in the city, while in Pomerania the commission members were all male and all lawyers and doctors.<sup>61</sup>

The number of commissions set up in the various regions undoubtedly varied; there were more commissions in northern and western Poland and fewer in central Poland.<sup>62</sup> The available sources also show that while some commissions had their hands full from the very beginning—for example, in

<sup>58</sup> Sprawozdanie Szefa Sanitarnego ZG PCK za kwiecień–czerwiec 1945 [Report of the Sanitary Head of the PCK Board for April–June 1945], no date, in: AZG PCK, sign. 1/202, not pag. In the end, information about the founding of the hospital appeared only in a report from November 1945. Sprawozdanie z działalności Wydziału Lecznictwa ZG PCK za okres 1945-11-7–1945-11-13 [Activity Report of the Medical Department of the PCK Board from 1945-11-7 to 1945-11-13], *ibid.* For more on rapes in Wrocław, see KRUSZEWSKI, pp. 43–45, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Sprawozdanie za 1945 [Report from 1945], no date, in: Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (AAN) [Central Archives of Modern Records], Polski Czerwony Krzyż: Zarząd Główny w Warszawie (PCK ZGW) [Main Board of the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw], sign. 284, vol. 12, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolnośląski (as in footnote 48).

<sup>61</sup> Pismo okólne nr 28 do pełnomocników ZG PCK Okręgu Pomorskiego wraz z załącznikami (as in footnote 47).

<sup>62</sup> There was certainly such a commission in Łódź for instance. Sprawozdanie ZG PCK dla MPiOŚ za wrzesień 1945 [Report by the PCK Board for the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare], no date, in: AAN, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (MPiOŚ) [Ministry of Labor and Welfare], sign. 402, vol. 300, p. 1.

Chojnice, others took time to become established. In Inowrocław, for example, no victim reported a rape to the local commission until the end of July 1945.<sup>63</sup> The period of operation of these commissions is also not known, for they were created at different times and there is no clear information about when exactly they ceased to work. The Katowice commission had its first meeting on 13 July and the last minutes from its meetings are dated 31 August 1945. Did it cease to operate after that date? After all, the problem of pregnancies resulting from rapes did not disappear overnight, and a letter dated 8 September extended the PCK mandate to carry out abortions to 30 November 1945.<sup>64</sup> What is also surprising is the lack of any information about the commissions' further activities and the noticeable absence of documentation. This prompts a question whether one can link this to the possible reticence of the administrative authorities to bring up the topic of rapes by Soviet soldiers in their reports as outlined above.

Yet according to a letter of 24 August 1946, some commissions continued their work, despite the fact that the ministry's ordinance was no longer in force, because after 30 November "there was no further extension given the stabilization of the internal relations and almost complete disappearance of such rapes."<sup>65</sup> Minister Świątkowski warned in the letter: "Thus the PCK commissions are no longer authorized to issue opinions on pregnancy termination, and the PCK doctors have no right to perform the procedure on the basis of such opinions." The practical consequences of this intervention remain unknown. Starting on 1 December 1945, abortion could be authorized only by the relevant prosecutor under Article 233 of the Criminal Code. This turn of events may be viewed as unusual, all the more so given that the Ministry of Justice recorded an increase in the number of terminations in autumn 1945. At a time when the numbers should have gone down, at least theoretically, they continued to rise. Perhaps these figures generated a wave of suspicion and outrage in some circles that women were using the legal possibility offered to them to terminate unwanted pregnancies that stemmed from other circumstances.<sup>66</sup> The increase in the number of terminations carried out by

---

<sup>63</sup> Sprawozdanie z działalności Oddziału PCK w Inowrocławiu według wytycznych zebrania Pełnomocników w Bydgoszczy [Report of the PCK Branch in Inowrocław According to Guidelines from a Meeting of Representatives in Bydgoszcz], 1945-07-10, in: PCK ZWB, sign. 991, vol. 150, not pag.

<sup>64</sup> Information about the existence of such a letter appeared in a circular signed by Marian Piesiewicz on behalf of the director of the PCK. Pismo okólne do wszystkich okręgów, kopia, Warszawa, 1945-09-11, in: AZG PCK, sign. 2/23, not pag.

<sup>65</sup> Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do Pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Pomorski w sprawie przerywania ciąży [Circular Letter by the Board of the PCK to Its Representative for the Pomeranian Region on Termination of Pregnancy], Warszawa, 1946-09-04, in: PCK ZWB, sign. 991, vol. 27, not pag. It features a copy of the Ministry of Justice's ordinance sent to the PCK Board on 1946-08-24.

<sup>66</sup> This was by no means groundless, as the subject of pregnancy termination was raised at the time by the Polish Episcopate, ŻARYN, p. 49. Soon a discussion ensued among

doctors associated with the Polish Red Cross—as a confidential circular of 11 October 1945 unequivocally points out—must have been considerable, for the then deputy director of the PCK, Marian Piesiewicz, appealed on behalf of the organization's board to all regional representatives to “call on doctors working at our institutions and recommend that they be as cautious as possible when issuing certificates confirming indications for termination of pregnancy.”<sup>67</sup> Probably following the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Justice, which received the statistical data, Piesiewicz wrote that the increase in the number of “miscarriages” hampered a “positive solution of the population problem in our war-ravaged country.” Thus, the formal expiry of Ordinance no. 6632/45 a few weeks later was more of a question of wishful thinking than a reflection of reality.

### Conclusions—Between Eugenics and Demographic Necessity

The inspection of borderland areas carried out in spring 1945 by envoys of the Ministry of Labor and Welfare must have been a shocking experience for them. The ensuing discussion, however, suggests that it was not the criminal nature of sexual violence but its consequences—which could be severe for the state—that motivated the authorities to intervene, which did not occur in a geopolitical vacuum. Poland's geographical location was a key factor in these developments, as millions of Red Army soldiers passed back and forth through its territory in the course of the war and its aftermath, but the country's unique political position among the victors of World War II was also important, a position associated with its entry into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. At the same time, Polish society came out of the war having been particularly sorely tried by the invaders and occupiers, and having suffered some of the highest population losses in Europe. Facing a real threat of a demographic collapse resulting from the war, the Polish state needed every citizen and could not afford any decline. Decisions concerning the launch of the abortion campaign among Polish women who were victims of rape and attempts to restrict and then ban such terminations of pregnancy must therefore be interpreted in the context of all these factors, experiences, and tensions.

There is no doubt that the post-war rapes and abortions affected a huge number of women. At least some of these women had presumably had earlier experiences of sexual violence at the hands of the German occupiers or had been forced to terminate their pregnancies. Examples from Poland and be-

---

doctors about possible abuses committed by women wanting to get rid of unwanted pregnancies. The debate, particularly lively in Upper Silesia, was recorded by *Śląska Gazeta Lekarska*, e.g., in issues 9–10 and 11 of 1946. The subject also appeared in several other professional periodicals, both regional and national.

<sup>67</sup> Pismo okólne ZG PCK w Warszawie do pełnomocnika ZG PCK na Okręg Dolno-Śląski, poufne (as in footnote 15).

yond show that the most common response to pregnancies resulting from rapes by Red Army soldiers was abortion.<sup>68</sup> On the basis of the analyzed sources, it can be concluded that significantly fewer Polish women took advantage of the legal possibility created by the Ministry of Justice between June and November 1945 to have legal abortions than the government has expected. (It is, however, difficult to know whether in practice this window of opportunity was limited only to a few weeks in the summer.) Many more women took matters into their own hands and got rid of their pregnancies on their own. It may be suspected that the gray area of abortion in Poland was much bigger than in other countries. The number of residents in those homes operating for mothers and children after the war suggests that few women decided to give birth to unwanted children.<sup>69</sup> In addition, it is hard to estimate how many children were abandoned after birth or what the scale of infanticide was. Likewise, it is difficult to ascertain how many illegitimate children were born into families and raised by them.<sup>70</sup> All this can be a basis for a hypothesis that immediately after the war abortion among Polish women reached unprecedented levels.

Women's wartime experiences of sexuality and motherhood, consensual and coerced extramarital contacts, sexual violence, abortion, births, and aban-

---

<sup>68</sup> For post-war Germany, see GROSSMANN, pp. 102, 109. Such a situation could also be found in Hungary. PETŐ, *Memory*, p. 134, and the review of Pető's study by AGATHA SCHWARTZ, in: *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 12 (2019), pp. 343–346, here p. 344. Similar tendencies were observed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. TODD A. SALZMAN: *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia*, in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998), 2, pp. 348–378, here pp. 361–364; JOANA DANIEL-WRABETZ: *Children Born of War Rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, in: R. CHARLI CARPENTER (ed.): *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*, Bloomfield 2007, pp. 21–38, here p. 24; LEE, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> JAKUB GAŁĘZIOWSKI: *Dom Matki i Dziecka w Słupsku w świetle badań Polskiego Instytutu Służby Społecznej: Próba zachowania anonimowości i podmiotowości kobiet i dzieci w powojennym chaosie* [The Mother and Child Home in Słupsk in the Light of Research Carried out by the Polish Institute of Social Service: An Attempt to Preserve the Anonymity and Subjectivity of Women and Children in the Post-war Chaos], in: *Przegląd Historyczny* 109 (2018), 4, pp. 793–821. JAKUB GAŁĘZIOWSKI: *Single Mothers and Their Babies in Poland in 1945–1949: The Social Care System vs. Female Freedom and Subjectivity*, in: JERZY KOCHANOWSKI, CLAUDIA KRAFT (eds.): *Rooms for Manoeuvre: Another Look at Negotiating Processes in the Socialist Bloc*, Vienna 2021, pp. 191–211.

<sup>70</sup> In the Opole district alone (excluding the city of Opole) I have counted 132 such cases from the years 1945–1947. Pismo z Referatu Opieki Społecznej Starostwa Powiatowego w Opolu do wszystkich Zarządów Gmin w sprawie sporządzenia wykazu "matek z dziećmi po żołnierzach radzieckich" [Letter from the Social Welfare Department, County Office in Opole, to All Municipalities on the Preparation of a List of "Mothers with Children Fathered by Soviet Soldiers"], Opole, 1947-03-13, in: APO, Starostwo Powiatowe w Opolu (SPO) [County Office in Opole], sign. 178, vol. 634, p. 1.

donments of children could not have failed to influence their post-war life. These experiences contributed to profound changes in Polish society, not only in terms of awareness of moral issues, but also sexuality and reproduction. Getting to know the long-term effects of these experiences as well as their impacts on the families of the women, their later relationships, partners, and children, as well as society at large requires in-depth studies. For the moment we can only speculate to what extent the scale of abortions changed Polish women's attitudes on such matters and paved the way for the eventual legalization of abortion in 1956 as well as the nearly universal acceptance of this change despite the contrary position of the Catholic Church. How do the war-time and post-war experiences of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers (and the taboo surrounding them) still influence Polish men and women today? What is certain is that the analyzed experiences have not become part of the shared memory of Polish men and women for various reasons, nor have they appeared in the master narrative and public discourse about World War II and its consequences. Future research should strive to rectify this shortcoming by further examining how the experiences during occupation prepared the ground for later social changes.

## Bibliography

### Archival Sources

Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie:

Polski Czerwony Krzyż. Zarząd Główny w Warszawie (AAN, PCK ZGW), sign. 284.  
Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (AAN, MPiOS), sign. 402.

Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy:

Zarząd Wojewódzki PCK w Bydgoszczy (APB, PCK ZWB), sign. 991.

Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach:

Zarząd Wojewódzki PCK w Katowicach (APK, PCK ZWK), no. 512.

Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu:

Starostwo Powiatowe w Opolu (APO, SPO), sign. 178.

Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu:

Zarząd Miejski w Opolu (APO, ZMO), sign. 185.

Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu:

Oddział PCK we Wrocławiu (APWr, PCK OWr), sign. 82.

Archiwum Zarządu Głównego Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Warszawie (AZG PCK):  
sign. 1/202, 2/23, 4/76.

### Printed Sources

Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 11 lipca 1932 r. Kodeks karny, in: *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej* (1932), 60, no. 571, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19320600571.pdf> (2022-06-06).

Use of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Identifying Gaps in Research to Inform More Effective Interventions. UN OCHA Research Meeting—26 June 2008. Discussion Paper 1: Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Understanding the Motivations, [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ocha\\_svinarmedconflictmotivations\\_2009\\_0.pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ocha_svinarmedconflictmotivations_2009_0.pdf) (2020-07-14).

### Literature

ANONYMA: *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

BEEVOR, ANTHONY: *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945*, London 2002.

BEHLAU, WINFRIED (ed.): *Distelblüten: Russenkinder in Deutschland, Ganderkesee 2015*.

BESSEL, RICHARD—SCHUMANN, DIRK (eds): *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, Cambridge—Washington, D.C 2003.

BILEWICZ, MICHAŁ—MIKOŁAJCZAK, GOSIA—BABIŃSKA, MARIA: Speaking about the Pre-born: How Specific Terms Used in the Abortion Debate Reflect Attitudes and (De-)mentalization, in: *Personality and Individual Differences* 111 (2017), pp. 256–262.

CARPENTER, R. CHARLI: *Forgetting Children Born of War: Setting the Human Rights Agenda in Bosnia and beyond*, New York, 2010.

DANIEL-WRABETZ, JOANA: Children Born of War Rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in: R. CHARLI CARPENTER (ed.): *Born of War:*

- Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones, Bloomfield 2007, pp. 21–38.
- GAŁĘZIOWSKI, JAKUB: Dom Matki i Dziecka w Słupsku w świetle badań Polskiego Instytutu Służby Społecznej: Próba zachowania anonimowości i podmiotowości kobiet i dzieci w powojennym chaosie, in: *Przegląd Historyczny* 109 (2018), 4, pp. 793–821.
- GAŁĘZIOWSKI, JAKUB: Single Mothers and Their Babies in Poland in 1945–1949: The Social Care System vs. Female Freedom and Subjectivity, in: JERZY KOCHANOWSKI, CLAUDIA KRAFT (eds.): *Rooms for Manoeuvre: Another Look at Negotiating Processes in the Socialist Bloc*, Vienna 2021, pp. 191–211.
- GEHARDT, MIRIAM: *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, München 2015.
- GERTJEJANSSEN, WENDY JO: *Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front during World War II*, PhD Diss., University of Minnesota, 2004, <http://www.victimsheroessurvivors.info/VictimsHeroesSurvivors.pdf> (2020-07-14).
- GOTTSCHALL, JONATHAN A.: Explaining Wartime Rape, in: *The Journal of Sex Research* 41 (2004), pp. 129–136.
- GROSSMANN, ATINA: Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949, in: BESSEL/SCHUMANN, pp. 93–127.
- GRZEBĄŁKOWSKA, MAGDALENA: *1945: Wojna i pokój*, Warszawa 2015.
- HALICKA, BEATA: *Polski Dzik Zachód: Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe osvajanie Nadodrza 1945–1948*, Kraków 2015.
- HYTREK-HRYCIUK, JOANNA: “Rosjanie nadchodzą!” Ludność niemiecka a żołnierze Armii Radzieckiej (Czerwonej) na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1948, Wrocław 2010.
- KERSTEN, KRYSZYNA: Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej (studium historyczne), Wrocław 1974.
- KOCHANOWSKI, JERZY: Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland’s Former Eastern Territories, in: PHILIPP THER, ANA SILJAK (eds.): *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, Lanham 2001, pp. 135–154.
- KRUSZEWSKI, TOMASZ: Gwałty na kobietach niemieckich w schyłkowym okresie II wojny światowej (październik 1944–8/9 maja 1945 roku) i w pierwszych latach po jej zakończeniu, Wrocław 2016, <https://www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/dlibra/publication/80047> (2020-07-14).
- KUŻMA-MARKOWSKA, SYLWIA: Walka z “babkami” o zdrowie kobiet: Medykalizacja przerywania ciąży w Polsce w latach pięćdziesiątych i sześćdziesiątych XX wieku, in: *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i Materiały* 15 (2017), pp. 189–215.
- LEE, SABINE: *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century*, Manchester 2017.
- LUCZAK, CZESŁAW: *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy podczas II wojny światowej*, Poznań 1974.
- MERRIDALE, CATHERINE: *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945*, New York 2006.
- MOKROSZ, JANUSZ: Losy ludzkie—indywidualne i zbiorowe—górnos Śląskiej społeczności w świetle dziejów Chorzowa w pierwszych latach po zakończeniu II wojny światowej, in: *Zeszyty Chorzowskie* 18 (2018), pp. 54–71.
- NAIMARK, NORMAN M.: *The Russians in Germany: A History for the Soviet Occupation Zone 1945–1949*, Cambridge, MA 1995.
- NEJA, JAROSŁAW: Problemy z sojusznikami, in: *Biuletyn IPN* (2005), 1–2, pp. 59–63.
- PETŐ, ANDREA: Memory and the Narrative of Rape in Budapest and Vienna in 1945, in: BESSEL/SCHUMANN, pp. 129–148.
- PETŐ, ANDREA: Women and Victims and Perpetrators in World War II: The Case of Hungary, in: RUTH LEISEROWITZ, MAREN RÖGER (eds.): *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and Its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, Osnabrück 2012, pp. 81–93.
- PETŐ, ANDREA: Przemilczane gwałty, in: *Biuletyn IPN Pamięć.pl* (2014), 11, pp. 33–38.



- PÓŁTAWSKA, WANDA: *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, New York 2013.
- RÖGER, MAREN: *Children of German Soldiers in Poland, 1939–1945*, in: LARS WESTERLUND (ed.): *Ulkomaalaisten sotilaiden lapset Suomessa 1940–1948 / Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland 1940–1948. Vol. 2: Saksalaisten ja neuvostosotilaiden lapset Suomessa, Norjassa, Tanskassa, Itävallassa, Puolassa ja Itä-Karjalassa / The Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Poland and Occupied Soviet Karelia*, Helsinki 2011.
- RÖGER, MAREN: *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2015.
- RÖGER, MAREN: *Besatzungskinder in Polen*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 65 (2017), 1, pp. 26–51.
- RÖGER, MAREN—SEEGERS, LU: *Ojcowie, których zabrakło: Doświadczenia i wspomnienia polskich sierot wojennych i polsko-niemieckich “Children Born of War”*, in: *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 6 (2016), pp. 229–250.
- SALZMAN, TODD A.: *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia*, in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998), 2, pp. 348–378.
- SCHWARTZ, AGATHA: [book review], in: *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 12 (2019), pp. 343–346.
- SIEMBIEDA, MACIEJ: *Krew i żółć*, in: MACIEJ SIEMBIEDA: *Podwieczorek oprawców*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 83–90.
- SOLŻENICYN, ALEKSANDER: *Prussian Nights. A Narrative Poem*, London 1977.
- STELZL-MARX, BARBARA: *Freier und Befreier: Zum Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen sowjetischen Besatzungssoldaten und österreichischen Frauen*, in: STEFAN KARNER, BARBARA STELZL-MARX (eds): *Die Rote Armee in Österreich: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955. Beiträge*, Graz et al. 2005, pp. 421–448.
- WRÓBEL, JANUSZ: *Na rozdrożu historii: Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949*, Łódź 2009.
- ZIEJA, JAN: *Życie Ewangelią: Spisane przez Jacka Moskwę*, Paryż 1993.
- ZAREMBA, MARCIN: *Wielka trwoga: Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, Kraków 2012.

