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Woman, Mother, Polish Woman. The Evolution of Attitudes of Polish Women in Sweden 1945–1989 from the Emigrant Perspective

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Polish émigré communities that spread around the world were usually dominated by men. One exception is the Polish diaspora in Sweden, where women were in the majority between 1945 and 1989. In 1945, they made up 90% of the community. The next four emigration waves resulted in the arrival of women who tried to define their role in the new emigration environment.¹ The high percentage of women in the Polish émigré community continued, and in 1980 they made up 62% of the community. The confrontation with new economic conditions and sometimes the loss of social capital prompted a redefinition of womanhood and the reconstruction of how the role of women in the family was evaluated in the émigré community, and these were expressed in specific attitudes towards the challenges that each day brought. The aim of this article is to attempt to answer the question of how the representatives of the various Polish emigration waves in Sweden related to the qualities that Polish women in exile should exhibit and the tasks that resulted from the accepted and nurtured values in the Polish community. Furthermore, were their attitudes influenced, and to what extent, by Swedish society that was much more advanced in securing gender equality and rejecting the stereotypical

¹ Waves of emigration of Poles to Sweden include: transports of former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps from the Third Reich to Sweden in 1945, Jewish emigration after 1968, the departure of young women to Sweden to marry there in the 1970s, and post-Solidarity emigration, mostly economic, in the mid-1980s.

roles that constrain women's self-realization? To what extent did the emigration experience influence evaluations of emigrant women's attitudes and traits cultivated by Polish women who remained in their homeland? The reflections are based on journalistic material from the local Polish-language emigrant press published in Sweden, memoirs, and documentation from the archives of emigrant organizations in Sweden.²

The Polish émigré community in Sweden before and during the Second World War was small and did not exceed 2,000 people. A significant increase in the number of Polish citizens residing in the country occurred in 1945, when some 15,000 former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps were rescued during an operation organized by the Swedish Red Cross. In the following weeks, more transports arrived, and it is estimated that a total of some 21,000 people may have been rescued. Of these, about 13,000 were Polish citizens of various nationalities, with the Jewish community being the most numerous.³ As much as 90% of this population was female. The most important concern in this situation was to provide immediate medical assistance and to create convalescent facilities for the women who arrived in Sweden. Accordingly, after initial examinations, those who had been rescued were sent to hospitals, and those whose health permitted were placed in sanatoriums, boarding houses, and 70 temporary camps.

For the Polish citizens residing in Sweden, this was a crucial moment. After spending several years in Nazi concentration camps, often not yet believing that they had been rescued, the women confronted a new reality.⁴ The experiences of war were deeply embedded in their consciousness. The inhuman treatment by the Nazis had a significant impact on the psyche of the female former prisoners. In Sweden, each of them had to undergo an individual transformation. Maria Wysznačka recalls, "I still feel lost and confused in a foreign land, but I am supposedly free. I cannot yet taste this freedom: I am still a number."⁵ The disbelief

² The archival material comes from the Archives of Emigration in Stockholm, which is housed at OPON (Ośrodek Polskich Organizacji Niepodległościowych; English – Centre for Polish Independence Organisations), containing documents of Polish organisations active in Sweden. Documents from the Swedish state archive *Riksarkivet* were also used, and these were supplemented with materials from the Archives of New Files and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw.

³ Andrzej Nils Uggla, "Polacy w Szwecji w latach II wojny światowej" (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1996), 195; Arnold Kłonczyński, "Repatriacja Polaków ze Szwecji po II wojnie światowej," *Zapiski Historyczne* 68 (2003): 109–111; Danuta Basista, "Misja dyplomatyczna Folke Bernadotte w Niemczech w 1945 roku," w *Historia i Polityka. Myśl dyplomatyczna w XX wieku*, red. Patryk Tomaszewski, t. 5 (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2006), 2–36.

⁴ Victoria Van Orden Martínez, "Shaping ongoing survival in a Swedish refugee camp," *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 33, 1 (2020): 24.

⁵ Maria Wysznačka, *Bestie i ludzie (Ravensbrück–Szwecja). Wspomnienia i wrażenia* (Włocławek: Księgarnia Powszechna i Drukarnia Diecezjalna, 1947), 58.

that the period of imprisonment under occupation was over, and they were already free accompanied them during their transport from German territories to Swedish ports and slowly left them during their stays in hospitals and sanatoriums. All the rescued prisoners were treated very favourably by Swedish authorities and society. They gradually freed themselves from the trauma of war and regained their dignity.⁶ Former female prisoners referred to themselves as *Häftlinge* or numbers, as this was how they were identified by the Nazis in the concentration camps. After the war, the *Häftlinge* slowly, as Teresa Harsdorf writes, became women again.⁷

The fact that they were in groups helped them in the process of overcoming the trauma of war. They knew each other from their time in the Nazi camps, and they had the same experiences, which helped them to believe in the good intentions of the Swedes and the help they provided. The recovery of human dignity was crucial, but this happened within individual timeframes. For many women, the moment when they were supplied with new clothes and toiletries was important. They were slowly entering the post-camp world, and the new clothes in place of their previous camp clothes were a symbol of the return to normal life.⁸ One of the women rescued from the camps, Ewa Walecka-Kozłowska, recalls, "I had my hair and all these clothes nice, my friends said, 'Ewuniu, how beautiful you look in those freedom things!' We transformed ourselves instantly into ladies."⁹ The Swedish mentors were aware of this process as evidenced by the recollection of the director of one of the temporary camps who said "one of the first things I tried to get for these women was powder and lipstick."¹⁰ He knew that by offering cosmetics, he would make it easier for women to regain their dignity. A new dress for daytime wear, not a prison uniform, and the possibility to take care of their appearance was a turning point. Former prisoners, who until then had been numbers without names, were now becoming women again in Sweden.¹¹ Unfortunately, some of the former female prisoners never overcame their war trauma and were only able to cope with the consequences of their camp experiences as inpatients in psychiatric hospitals over long periods of time.¹²

Another step to regaining human dignity and also overcoming the trauma of war experiences was to provide women in the temporary camps in Sweden with

⁶ On post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Yoram Barak, Henry Szor, "Lifelong posttraumatic stress disorder: evidence from aging Holocaust survivors," *Dialogues Clin Neurosci* 2, 1 (2000): 57–68.

⁷ Teresa Harsdorf-Bromowiczowa, *Utwory zebrane* (Nowy Sącz 2003), 35.

⁸ Harsdorf-Bromowiczowa, *Utwory zebrane*, 34.

⁹ Ewa Walecka-Kozłowska, "Fragment relacji świadka historii," *Archiwum Programu Historia Mówiona*, <https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=119125>, access: 12.07.2022.

¹⁰ Karin Juel, "Zadanie miłosierdzia," *Via Suecia* (4.09.1945): 9.

¹¹ Lena Roos, "Barmhäftiga svenskar och tacksamma flyktingar: Ett beredskapssjukhus sommaren 1945 i svensk press," *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 26, 1–2 (2008): 133–156, 138.

¹² Pia-Kristina Garde, *Świadectwo skazanych na śmierć* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2009), 79–80.

various activities. Younger women whose education had been interrupted by the war were able to return to school. Some women learned trades that allowed them to gain financial independence. This was a very serious problem, since, according to research, about 90% of the former prisoners were young women between the ages of 18 and 47.¹³ Only a small percentage of these women had professional qualifications, and the majority of them were housewives or women who had previously worked as domestic servants, nannies, or unskilled labourers. Vocational and Swedish language courses organized for former female prisoners were an opportunity to do something temporarily. Employment was not only important because these women lacked financial resources, but it was also a kind of therapy that helped them to regain mental balance. Various artistic and sporting events were also organized in the temporary camps. Music bands, dance groups, theatre groups, etc. were organized to fill the time. One former prisoner, Natalia Peucker recalls that “[...] it was very important to live today and forget the past, and there was so much going on there that you didn’t have time to think about it.”¹⁴

During the first two weeks of their stay in the temporary camps, the women were quarantined. Immediately afterwards, the former female prisoners gradually became acquainted with their surroundings and established contacts with locals. The first encounters these women had with Swedes were varied. Swedes often did not understand the behaviour of the former prisoners, who, for example, stole food because they still suffered from hunger syndrome from their time in the concentration camps. Relationships with Swedish men were also important, and the need for intimacy with another person was very strong. One of these women recalls that she appreciated the behaviour of Swedish men: “by interacting with Swedish men I learned about the soul and the mentality of the average Swede. I learned how great thoughts are born in Sweden, what Christian love is like, how widely developed the love of one’s neighbour is, based on sound principles, without hindering the development of another person’s thoughts, who strives perhaps by other ways to make humanity happy.”¹⁵

In 1945, women rescued from Nazi concentration camps initially stayed in hospitals or temporary camps, but over time they left them in an attempt to become self-sufficient. Some waited for the opportunity to quickly leave for Poland and reunite with their families. This was a very difficult decision, as news was reaching Sweden not only about the devastation from the war in Poland but also about the communist takeover. One woman recalled “[...] Then came the bouts of crying and

¹³ Sprawozdanie administracyjne Konsulatu RP w Sztokholmie za okres 1.07–31.12.1947, Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, further: AMSZ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archiv, Warsaw), z. 20, w. 15, t. 178, k. 117.

¹⁴ Garde, *Świadectwo*, 223.

¹⁵ “Powrót do człowieczeństw,” *Via Suecia* (27.11.1945): 103.

longing for family, for siblings, for mother and father, all that. Then the anguish started, it came in Sweden, when we were already relatively well.”¹⁶

News of lost loved ones reached those rescued from the camps of Sweden, but homesickness was intense. One young Polish woman wrote that “[...] Even though it was good for me there, I could have married brilliantly, because a Swede fell very much in love with me, his parents lavished attention on me, but I wanted to marry a Pole. My friends wrote from Jönköping ‘Ewuniu, are you going back to your country? We are wondering, because there is a Soviet occupation in Poland. We don’t know what to do.’”¹⁷ The dilemma of whether to return to Poland or stay in Sweden was very difficult and influenced the attitudes of Polish women in subsequent years. Nearly all Polish Jews residing in Sweden (90%) did not want to leave for Poland.¹⁸ They received news of the deaths of their family members and the destruction of their homes. Some Polish nationals in Sweden decided to leave, despite their concerns about the political situation in Poland. The first transports to Poland were organized by representatives of the communist government in Warsaw who arrived in Sweden for this purpose in September 1945. The first transport with repatriates sailed from Malmö to Gdynia on 6 October 1945, and further transports were organized afterwards.¹⁹ By the end of 1947, 6,322 citizens or 40.8% of the number at the end of July 1945 had returned to Poland.²⁰ Those who did not go to Poland remained in Sweden or, like Polish Jews, decided to leave Sweden for Palestine or to emigrate to other western countries.

The Polish women who decided to stay in Sweden changed their lifestyles substantially. They were always involved actively in all charitable activities that could help those in need. With time, the women who did not have husbands or those whose husbands had died in the war grew closer to men in Sweden, which was why they considered staying in Sweden permanently and stated that “we want to have husbands and children.” This was not always easy, since most of these women had been brought up in the traditions of conservative Catholicism or Judaism, and Swedes were generally Lutheran. However, over time, closer acquaintances facilitated Polish-Swedish mixed marriages.²¹ Religion was not conducive to this, and some of the more traditional groups of Poles residing in Sweden had negative attitudes about mixed marriages. One Polish-language periodical, *Znak*, reported that

¹⁶ Garde, *Świadectwo*, 255.

¹⁷ Walecka-Kozłowska, “Fragment”.

¹⁸ Jerzy Sałkowski, Sprawozdanie z inspekcji Polskiej Misji Repatriacyjnej, Sztokholm, 17.10.1945, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives for Modern Records, Warsaw, further: AAN), Generalny Pełnomocnik ds. Repatriacji, further: Pełn.), sygn. 379.

¹⁹ “Relacja Gertrudy Pohl-Iwańskiej,” w Urszula Wińska, *Więzi. Losy więźniarek z Ravensbrück* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Marpress, 1992), 93.

²⁰ Sprawozdanie konsularne za okres 1.07.1946–31.12.1947, AMSZ, z. 20, t. 178, w. 15, k. 112.

²¹ “Szwed jest wysoki i postawny lecz mimo tego dostaje stopień niedostateczny,” *Via Suecia* (Oct. 1946): 249.

if there was a reason for such a union, the Church would reluctantly grant permission provided that all the children of the union were raised Catholic, even though it was believed at the time that the Church also considered non-Catholic marriages to be sacred and equal to Catholic ones. It was also reported that in mixed marriages it was difficult to achieve spiritual unity without which harmonious living was impossible. Spouses should support each other in their religious life, and the Catholic side in mixed marriages is generally disadvantaged.²² This attitude did not encourage Polish-Swedish marriages, but it had little effect on their number; in fact, the effect of these beliefs was to drive Polish women away from Catholicism.

Polish citizens who remained in Sweden found work. Since there was a law in force that made it difficult to settle in large cities because the Swedish government feared that they would become overcrowded and the population in the provinces would decrease, Polish women found work in smaller towns. While this increased feelings of loneliness,²³ it also had positive consequences, as Polish women increasingly became integrated into Swedish society with an interest in their labour rights.²⁴ This resulted in a commitment to work. Women learned about living conditions in Sweden and came to understand the aspirations of Swedes to introduce progressive solutions in many areas, including in working conditions.²⁵ However, the legal status of women living in Sweden was a concern. While those who married Swedes were granted citizenship fairly quickly, other female emigrants could only apply for citizenship after seven years of residence in Sweden and were required to supply documentation of their ability to support themselves and their families.²⁶ This meant that for several years their legal status remained temporary, which caused uncertainty about their futures. So did the jobs they held with most women were employed as manual labourers in factories and agriculture where no proficiency in Swedish was required. It was very hard work and salaries were low. One female emigrant, Dina Honigman, recalls that working in a factory “made her feel like she was enslaved [...]”²⁷

In 1947, 62.7% of Polish women were employed and in 1949, 85% of Polish women in Sweden were employed,²⁸ and these figures are possibly underestimated. Not all women were employed; some stayed at home while others worked

²² “Małżeństwa mieszane,” *Znak* (17.05.1947): 7.

²³ Erik Hedfeldt, P.m. angående decentralisering av arbetstillståndsgivningen för utlänningar, Stockholm, 19.03.1946, Riksarkivet (the Swedish National Archive in Stockholm), file: SE/RA/420275.12/F1, Statens Arbetsmarknadskommissions arkiv 1940–1947, vol. 5.

²⁴ “Kobiety nie dajcie się wyprowadzić w pole!,” *Via Suecia* (26.02.1946): 85.

²⁵ “Pokazy mód i muzyka czynią ludzi z mechanicznych robotów,” *Via Suecia* (26.03.1946): 22.

²⁶ Problemy legalizacji w Szwecji, Biuletyn Nr 4, Warszawa 1967, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa (the Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw), AIPN, sygn. 01334, MSW II, Biuro “C,” k. 30.

²⁷ Garde, “Świadectwo,” 253.

²⁸ Sprawozdanie konsularne Konsulatu RP w Sztokholmie za 1.07.1946–31.12.1947, AMSZ, z. 20, w. 15, t. 178, k. 117.

in unreported employment.²⁹ Nonetheless, Polish women entering the Swedish labour market became more readily integrated by improving their skills in Swedish and their acquisition of knowledge about Swedish traditions and culture and how Swedish society functioned. These were not highly paid jobs, and Polish women often felt exploited in the workplace. One Polish woman wrote to a Polish newspaper published in Stockholm regarding her job as a domestic help, in which she worked overtime and earned very little money. However, this work provided the possibility of surviving, which was very important for many people. She points out that “Swedish women I know say that a maid is only supposed to work eight hours a day and have every other Sunday off [...]”³⁰ This indicates that they gradually came to recognize their value as workers and would try to fight for their rights to be respected.

Material conditions in the first years of emigration were difficult for Polish emigrants. Women who married Swedes were in better situations, but it is estimated that this was only about 40% of Polish female immigrants.³¹ Women who did not marry or who married Poles or other immigrants were in a more difficult situation. Polish immigrants with higher educations were often forced to take lower-paid manual jobs, which, in many cases, reduced their professional status. After the war, the Swedish Women’s Association was established, as was the Polish-Swedish Women’s Association (Polish – *Polsko-Szwedzkie Stowarzyszenie Kobiet*) to support each other.³² Providing mutual support to improve their own situations was the obvious reason these organizations were created, but they also provided a social forum.

The impossibility of returning to the homeland, nostalgia for relatives who lived in Poland or who were scattered around the world, and difficult material conditions fostered other attitudes among Polish emigrants. Strong national bonds formed among Polish women who remained in exile, as was manifested in active organizational activities that brought together former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. There were many such organisations in exile, the most important of which was the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners (Polish – *Związek Byłych Więźniów Politycznych*), which included female members who hoped that together they would be able to obtain compensation for the suffering they had endured

²⁹ Sprawozdanie administracyjne Konsulatu RP w Sztokholmie za styczeń–marzec 1949, AMSZ, z. 20, w. 15, t. 178.

³⁰ “Listy do Redakcji,” *Wiadomości Polskie* (1947): 7, 10.

³¹ Arnold Klónczyński, *Stosunki polsko-szwedzkie w latach 1945–1956* (Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2007), 110.

³² Polish women had already made efforts to support themselves in this regard during the war, when *Stowarzyszenie Kobiet z Wyższym Wykształceniem* (English – Association of Women with Higher Education) was founded in 1943 and *Związek Kobiet Polskich Pracujących Zawodowo* (English – Association of Polish Working Women) in 1944; Protokół z poszerzonego zebrania Prezydium RUP z dnia 15.12.1979, Polish Emigration Archive, Stockholm: AEP(S).

at the hands of the Nazis. Other organisations, such as the Association of Polish Combatants (Polish – *Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*), united Poles in exile who did not accept the communist government in Poland and believed that the only legal government was the Polish government-in-exile in London. Members of these organizations stressed that prolonged exile could result in assimilation into Swedish society, which could sever ties with Polish culture. Refugees, as they referred to themselves, should be bound by the unequivocal credo “I am Polish.” This brought with it certain obligations in the family, personal, and social lives of the Polish diaspora, because, as the Polish press reports, the second generation has no martyrdom capital behind it, “hiding from the cradle in isolation, often without a Polish school, in mixed marriages, often to the sound of a foreign language.”³³ These responsibilities included preserving Polish culture and language and protecting Polish traditions. Polish émigrés took on these tasks and became involved in organizing Polish language instruction and celebrations and observances of Catholic and national holidays.

The commitment to teaching Polish to the children of emigrants was evident as soon as they arrived in Sweden. The first schools, as mentioned above, were established in the temporary refugee camps in 1945. After these camps closed in November 1946, the primary, middle, and secondary school classes were moved to Vikingshill near Stockholm, and then, the following year, to the town of Gustavsberg in the suburbs of Stockholm. About 80 children attended the school.³⁴ The teachers were mainly Polish women who had worked in schools in Poland before the war, most of whom were well-educated, experienced teachers, and some, like Wanda Madler, had served as headmistresses before the war. This school closed in 1949, but secondary school classes were established in another school and up to 100 students attended it. However, this school kept changing locations for financial reasons and operated in Stockholm until 1954, when it finally closed.³⁵

In subsequent decades, Polish émigré journalism emphasized that a particularly important task of the émigrés, and of women in particular, was to prevent the denationalization of Polish youth. Émigrés congregated around churches, community meeting centres, libraries, and refugee organizations, which were “the strongest bastions of Polishness.”³⁶ This resulted in attempts to set up small Saturday and Sunday schools scattered throughout southern and central Sweden and attempts to revive religious life. The schools were small, with a few children each, and were mainly active in the 1950s and 1960s. Only a few survived in later periods. This was because of the Swedish integration model for foreigners, which

³³ “Depozyt polskości,” *Wiadomości Polskie* (1946): 4, 42.

³⁴ Elżbieta Later-Chodyłowa, “Uwagi na temat polonii szwedzkiej,” *Komunikaty Instytutu Bałtyckiego* 36/37 (1984/1985): 120.

³⁵ Arnold Kłonczyński, *My w Szwecji nie porastamy mchem... Emigranci z Polski w Szwecji w latach 1945–1980* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2012), 350.

³⁶ “Żywa polskość,” *Wiadomości Polskie* (1947): 9, 11.

made it compulsory for all municipalities in the country to establish national language classes for expatriates. Children attended these classes at schools located in their places of residence and did not want to participate in additional classes held on weekends.

From the beginning, the patriotic upbringing of young Poles was important. In the first post-war years, emigrants who chose not to return to communist Poland took it upon themselves to preserve Polish culture. The strong influence of the Romantic period can be seen here, when emigrants assumed the duty to ensure cultural continuity after the failure of the November Uprising in 1831 and the January Uprising in 1864. This can be seen in émigré journalism after the Second World War. For example, the most important Polish newspaper in Sweden, *Wiadomości Polskie*, published the following in 1947: "The aim of emigration is to maintain the independent Polish spirit, the aim of the country is to keep the national substance as uncontaminated as possible. [...] The spirit of civil rights, civic duty, and responsibility should find expression in all areas of our life [...]."³⁷ This attitude required concrete actions, which included the Polish schools described above but also other undertakings organized by the Polish émigré community, above all by Polish women. Great importance was attached to the celebration of national holidays, in particular the holiday celebrated on 3 May that commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of 1791, a holiday that was forbidden in communist Poland. The speeches and papers given emphasized that the Constitution was adopted in an atmosphere of opposition to Russian interference in Polish affairs, so the analogy with the communists backed by Soviet Russia ruling Poland was obvious. This is why these celebrations were used as an opportunity to invite Swedish guests, including politicians and journalists, to publicize that Poland had lost her sovereignty.³⁸ Concerts and artistic performances accompanied official festivities and were intended to make the celebrations more attractive to encourage emigrants to take part in them. For example, a pre-war star of the Warsaw operetta, the Swede Elna Gisted-Kiltynowicz, often sang. After the concert, banquets were organized, parties were held with tables laid with traditional Polish dishes, or, more modestly, with coffee and cakes prepared by Polish women.³⁹ These events were also an opportunity for emigrants to socialize and keep in touch.

Another important holiday was Independence Day celebrated on 11 November, which was also forbidden in communist Poland, with assemblies, conferences, and concerts organized in commemoration of it. Polish women organized performances in which children acted out the roles of historical figures, recited patriotic poems, and so on. The role of these holidays diminished in the 1970s, when successive generations of Polish emigrants were more and more integrated

³⁷ M.S., "Cele i środki," *Wiadomości Polskie* (1947): 1, 7.

³⁸ Przyjaźń polsko-szwedzka, May 1954, Riksarkivet, file SE/RA, Wiesław Pateks arkiv, vol. 30.

³⁹ "Kronika Skandynawska," *Wiadomości Polskie* (May 1980): 43.

into Swedish society, and small numbers of people participated in the celebration of these holidays. As the process of integration and assimilation into Swedish society progressed, the children of emigrants increasingly felt Swedish upon entering adulthood. Emigration also changed.

In 1968, another wave began, which would become known as the post-March emigration. Polish Jews and their families were forced to emigrate following the anti-Semitic political campaign led by the Polish communist authorities. According to estimates, about 3,000 Poles chose Sweden as a place of temporary or permanent settlement.⁴⁰ It should be emphasized, however, that a significant proportion of them considered themselves Poles.⁴¹ According to a survey conducted a few years later in Sweden, about 30% of the post-March emigrants considered themselves Polish and only 21% declared Judaism as their religion.⁴² Years later, most of these émigrés claimed that they were forced to leave against their will, and some still believe so today. This coercion aroused a negative attitude towards Poland and also towards Poles in many of the emigrants.⁴³ Cruel treatment at the hands of the authorities and the confiscation of personal property at their departure deepened this resentment.⁴⁴ Since this group included many people who had had political careers in communist Poland, the representatives of this emigration wave were treated as collaborators by the Poles living in Sweden.⁴⁵ Although there were a few exceptions, contacts between the two groups of emigrants were limited and not conducive to cooperation. Polish Jews who emigrated to Sweden did not participate in the life of the Polish diaspora there. This was also not conducive to maintaining links with Polish culture; however, these attitudes varied among individuals, and some members of this emigration wave continued to take an interest in Polish affairs and were to return to Poland years later.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Michał Rudawski reports the number of 3,000 Polish Jews who emigrated to Sweden, see: Michał Rudawski, *Mój obcy kraj* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Tu, 1996), 271; Julian Ilicki estimates this population at 2,500, see: Julian Ilicki, *Den föränderliga identiteten: om identitetsförändringar hos den yngre generationen polska judar som invandrade till Sverige under åren 1968–1972* (Uppsala: Sällskapet för Judaistisk Forskning, 1988) 57, 253.

⁴¹ Many examples are shown in interviews with emigrants conducted by journalist Krystyna Naszkowska, for example: Krystyna Naszkowska, *Ani tu ani tam. Marzec'68 – powroty* (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2018), 260; *eadem*, *Wygłani do raju. Szwedzki azyl* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2017), 266.

⁴² Ilicki, "Den föränderliga," 211.

⁴³ Anne Grinzweig Jacobsson, *Ucieczka na Marstrand*, transl. Mariusz Kalinowski (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, 2022), 144.

⁴⁴ The situation of Sabina Baral cited by: Maciej Zaremba-Bielawski, *Dom z dwiema wieżami* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karakter, 2018), 288.

⁴⁵ Magdalena Grochowska, *Jerzy Giedroyc. Do Polski ze snu* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 369.

⁴⁶ Adam Ringer, *Na podwójnym espresso. Życie w trzech aktach* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2000), 76.

The 1970s was also a period when a significant number of young women from Poland left for Sweden to marry Swedes to enhance their material situations.⁴⁷ This group is referred to as the matrimonial emigration. At the time, Polish women were scattered all over Sweden and formed Polish-Swedish families. At the beginning of the 1970s, Polish women made up about 30% of the Polish-Swedish community, by 1975 this figure had risen to 57%, and by 1980 it was as high as 62%, a level that was stable until the mid-1980s.⁴⁸ The increase in the number of Polish women living in Sweden, however, did not foster improved participation of women in Polish emigrant life. According to a study conducted by sociologists, 39% of Polish women were not interested in either the daily life of the emigrant community or the situation in Poland. They concentrated on professional matters and family life and maintained contact with their families in Poland, and 21% of respondents were not interested in Swedish politics.⁴⁹ The research also indicated that the majority of women were interested in issues concerning their new homeland, but they were less interested in matters concerning Poland.

By the late 1970s, women had become interested in what was happening in Poland as it was the time of strikes and the birth of the Solidarity movement, which gave hope for an improved economic situation. Polish women in Sweden observed the situation in their homeland, but did not become actively involved in political affairs. This changed in the early 1980s.⁵⁰ Then another wave of emigrants from Poland arrived, and the activity of Polish female emigrants who had been living in Sweden for decades increased. The Polish-Swedish Women's Association (Polish – *Polsko-Szwedzkie Stowarzyszenie Kobiet*), known at the time as the Polish Women's Association (Polish – *Stowarzyszenie Polek w Szwecji* in Sweden), became very active.⁵¹ Together with other associations, they organized fund-raising events and clothing and food drives and sent the proceeds and goods collected to the needy in Poland. They organized cultural events that were also opportunities for fund raising. The momentum of these events was even greater after the imposition of martial law in Poland on 13 December 1981, as this event led to increased interest in the Swedish media in what was happening in Poland. Assemblies and concerts concluded with raffles or fund-raisers, the proceeds of which went to help Polish children and the families of internees.

⁴⁷ Tadeusz Nowakowski, "Polki w Szwecji – historia tysiąca lat," *Nowa Gazeta Polska* (2000): 11.

⁴⁸ Jan Gruszczyński, "Proces adaptacji Polaków w Szwecji," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 3 (1973): 188; Elżbieta Michalik, "Aktywność kobiet w środowiskach polonijnych w Szwecji w XX wieku," w *Kobiety i młodzież w migracjach*, red. Jan E. Zamojski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2005), 244.

⁴⁹ C. Larsson, *Invandrarkvinnor. Kvinns situation i några invandrar och minoritetsgrupper*, SIV Raport, vol. 22 (Norrköping: Statens Invandrarverket, 1982), 75.

⁵⁰ Paweł Jaworski, "Through the Iron Curtain. The 1974 Polish-Swedish Treaty covering travel without visas and its consequences, Peoples and Borders: Seventy Years of Migration in Europe, from Europe, to Europe (1945–2015)," *Journal of European Integration History* (2017): 187.

⁵¹ Protokół z poszerzonego zebrania Prezydium RUP z dnia 15.12.1979, AEP.

The 1980s saw an influx of new emigrants, both economic and political, including former internees and their families. This resulted in the activation of the émigré community and of the Polish Women's Association in particular. The members of this organization continued to send shipments to Poland and conducted food and clothing drives and charity events, the proceeds of which were used to purchase food and medicines and to pay the costs of shipping them to Poland. The association also promoted greater cooperation between the divided émigré community,⁵² and catered to the needs of emigrants, especially single mothers who needed assistance. The activists were already well established materially and professionally and they had their own families, so they could devote themselves to social work taking inspiration from Swedish women activists. A new form of activism was the *Polen Gala*, which were concerts organized in large concert halls and theatres to celebrate Polish national holidays. The aim of these galas was to present Polish national culture to Polish and Swedish audiences. The proceeds were used to support Polish culture. Swedish artists often provided support, and representatives of the Swedish immigration authorities were also invited.⁵³

In addition to charitable, educational, and self-help activities, Polish women in Sweden also joined in political support of the Solidarity Trade Union (Polish – NSZZ *Solidarność*) and other opposition circles in the country. An Information Office of the Solidarity Trade Union was established in Stockholm. Among those who were active in or supported the office were Maria Borowska, Anna Bogucka, Katarzyna Hanuszkiewicz, Katarzyna Sławska, Elżbieta Święcicka, and Irena Lundberg. They also contributed to Polish magazines published in Sweden, e.g., Zofia Pogonowska and Małgorzata Fiszer wrote in the “*Sztokholmskie Słowo*,” in the *Wiadomości Polskie*, Aneta Markowska and Maria Kossakowska in *Biuletyn Informacyjny NSZZ Solidarność*, Sławska in the monthly magazine *Sprzeciw*, Maria Barycz (pseudonym), Agata Krakowska, and Hanna Gunnard. These magazines were a place to formulate assessments of the current situation in Poland, but also to present views on the role of Polish women in exile. One of the activists, Zofia Pogonowska, emphasized “we, the people living in the free world, are not threatened by anything [...]. It is our duty to help them [Poles in Poland], it is our duty to shout so that this shout is heard in Warsaw, so that it does not let the Kremlin leaders sleep.”⁵⁴ This is how a significant segment of the Polish female émigré community was mobilized to support the anti-communist movement in Poland by joining charity drives and demonstrations organized in Sweden. Polish women were astute observers of Swedish political life and in these publications frequently and openly voiced their criticism of Swedish policy concerning events in Poland that they deemed to be lacking in involvement.⁵⁵

⁵² “Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów,” *Wiadomości Polskie* 3 (1985): 7.

⁵³ “11 Listopada,” *Wiadomości Polskie* 11 (1983): 45.

⁵⁴ Zofia Pogonowska, “Walka o Polskę,” *Sztokholmskie Słowo* 1 (1983): 19.

⁵⁵ Hanna Gunnar, “Pokoju Nagroda Nobla’ 82,” *Sprzeciw* 1 (1983): 24.

In 1980, there were more than 25,000 Polish citizens living in Sweden, and by 1989 there were more than 36,000.⁵⁶ However, only about 200–300 people were involved in supporting the opposition in Poland who were engaged in any way with the expatriate community. Polish women who established Polish-Swedish families had, for the most part, already distanced themselves from Polish problems. Slawska bitterly commented on this fact, writing years later that “we have a number of emigration organizations that, although rich in ambition, are poor in members. Most prefer to keep to the sidelines and not join in anywhere.”⁵⁷ Polish women focused on raising their children in constant contact with other Polish families. Immigrant parents busied themselves in the difficult initial period with acquiring material resources in their new country to provide their children with a sense of security, so in the 1980s scout organizations began to appear as a way to maintain contact with Polish peers. The Swedish-Polish community did not form closed Polish neighbourhoods and did not have Polish schools, so it was decided that scouting could be an interesting educational environment for young Poles. A few new troops were formed, one for boys called *Kaszuby* and for girls called *Tatry*; these, however, operated only locally.

The Polish emigrant community integrated with Swedish society quite quickly. The very scarce archival documentation available and a few memoirs from this period indicate that Polish women living in exile in Sweden continued their education and quickly found work; thus they did not create closed communities. Even women who arrived in 1945 from Nazi concentration camps and who decided to live in Sweden forever had to deal quickly with the trauma of war. They got married, started families, and participated to a lesser extent in the national life of the Polish diaspora. Women who were the wives of émigré activists or who were strongly connected with the Polish government in exile undertook various initiatives to preserve Polish culture by establishing schools for children, organizing celebrations of various holidays, and so on. Each representative of the successive emigration waves acted in a similar way. However, subsequent emigration waves were significantly different in certain respects. The women who emigrated from Poland to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s were better educated and had professions that allowed them to start working quickly. Not speaking Swedish was an obstacle that was quickly overcome. Often the need to build a material existence in the new country was more important than participation in the life of the Polish community, which was not attractive to them because the organization of national holidays was archaic and reminiscent of official celebrations in communist Poland.⁵⁸ Family links were

⁵⁶ Arnold Kłoczynski, “Inicjatywy solidarnościowe podejmowane przez Polaków w Szwecji w latach 1980–1989,” w *Za naszą i Waszą Solidarność. Inicjatywy solidarnościowe z udziałem Polonii podejmowane na Świecie (1980–1989)*, t. 2, red. Patryk Pleskot (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018), 495.

⁵⁷ Katarzyna Skrzyńska, “Polubmy się nawzajem! (czyli) polskie piekło,” *Refleks* 1 (1997): 4.

⁵⁸ Magdalena Wnuk, *Kierunek Zachód, przystanek emigracja* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2019), 399.

most important because they strengthened all members of the family during the difficult period of acclimatizing to the new environment.⁵⁹ Sociological studies have shown that only 8% of children spoke only Polish on a daily basis.⁶⁰ These were probably immigrants living in the area until relatively recently. Education allowed children and young people, and also their parents, to relatively quickly acquire the ability to speak Swedish. This meant that attempts to preserve Polish identity were only successful in the first years. Few Polish women became involved in the crises in Poland through organizing charitable assistance when strikes were declared in Poland. Polish women in exile were strongly influenced by Swedish society, and, if possible, they pursued professional careers⁶¹ and were often more self-sufficient than women living in Poland.

Arnold Kłonczyński

Woman, Mother, Polish Woman. The Evolution of Attitudes of Polish Women in Sweden 1945–1989 from the Emigrant Perspective

Summary

Polish emigrant communities scattered around the world have been usually dominated by men. The Polish diaspora in Sweden was exceptional, for in the years 1945–1989 the majority was made up of women. In 1945, they constituted 90% of the community. The next four waves of emigration resulted in an influx of women who tried to define their role in a new reality of emigration. The high number of women in the Polish immigrant community continued and in 1980 they constituted 62% of this community. The clash with new economic conditions, sometimes social declassing, resulted in the redefinition of female-ness, a reconstruction of the way of evaluating one's role in the family and the émigré community, expressed in specific attitudes towards the challenges that each day brought. The aim of the article is to attempt to answer the question as to how the representatives of the various Polish waves of emigration to Sweden related to the characteristics that were supposed to be exhibited by Polish women in emigration and the tasks that resulted from the values adopted and cultivated. Drawing on an analysis of memoirs, journalistic materials published in the émigré Polish press in Sweden, and archival documents, I note that Polish women living in exile in Sweden continued their education and quickly took up work, thanks to which they did not create closed environments. Even the women who came from concentration camps in 1945 and decided to live permanently in Sweden, had to cope quickly with war trauma. They got married, started families and, to a lesser

⁵⁹ Jacek Kubitsky, *Psychologia migracji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Dyfin, 2012), 28.

⁶⁰ Halina Vigerson, "Vilka egenskaper karakteriserar den polska minoriteten i Sverige? Kon-skenser för bildningsversamhet," w *Vuxenutbildning i utveckling. Problem – trender: rapport från symposiet "Sociopedagogiska aspekter på den Sverige – polska minoritetens bildningsbehov,"* red. W.J. Wojtowicz (Linköping: Universitetet i Linköping, 1984) 48.

⁶¹ Jolanta Szutkiewicz, *Ludzie o złotym sercu* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2016), 101.

extent, participated in the national life of the Polish diaspora. Those women who were wives of émigré activists or were strongly connected with the Polish government-in-exile undertook various actions related to preserving Polish culture, established schools for children, organized celebrations of various holidays, etc. Each representative of successive waves of emigration acted in a similar way. Often the need to build a material existence in a new country was more important than participation in the life of the Polish community, which in any case was not attractive to them. Family ties were most important, because they strengthened all family members during the difficult period of acclimatization in the new environment. They were involved in crisis situations, for example, by organizing charity aid in periods when strikes broke out in Poland. Polish women in exile were strongly influenced by their Swedish environment and, if possible, took up professional careers. They were often more independent than women living in Poland. Polish women in exile in Sweden represented very different values. This was due to the reasons for emigration and the period in which they left for Sweden and started a new life there, but they often tried to cultivate patriotic values, which involved raising children in an atmosphere of Polish culture and tradition, and, through charity events, helping those who stayed in Poland and needed aid.