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Exploring Everyday Lived Experiences of Polish Deportees in Kazakhstan in 1940 and Policy of Soviet Authorities

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Abstract: *The paper examines the Soviet deportation of Polish citizens in 1940 from eastern Poland to the northern regions of the Kazakh SSR, their everyday lived experiences, hardship and deprivation in exile and policy of Soviet authorities towards the deported Polish population. The study draws upon relevant literature and archival data pertaining to the Soviet ethnic deportations and removal of Polish citizens in 1940. To respond to the research questions, the study employs a variety of research methods such as a critical analysis of historical data and archival documents. The concepts of ethnicization and racialization theoretically and conceptually guide the study and allow for understanding ethnic dimensions of the Soviet deportations in the 1930s-1940s. The results of the study show that deportation and punishment of ethnic Poles by the Soviet regime were shaped by historical animosity and hatred of Poland and the Polish nation deeply rooted in Russian history. In this regard, the study has established continuity between anti-Polish sentiment of tsarist Russia and anti-Polonism of the Soviet state. The peculiarity of the Soviet animosity towards Poland and the Poles was that the regime targeted the whole nation and all categories of Poles. The paramount goal of the Soviet regime was to erase and exterminate Poles as a distinct ethnic group through physical elimination and terror. Besides, extermination of Poles was carried out by the Soviet regime through erasing Polishness, ethnic and cultural identities of Poles and subjecting them to cultural assimilation and Russification. For that reason, the Soviet regime deliberately and systematically dismantled, fractured and marginalized ethnic Poles, reducing them to a small vulnerable minority. An analysis of archival data and documents has shown that deported Poles and their families in the regions of Kazakhstan were deliberately exposed to hardship, privation and destitution, being deprived of access to welfare and social protection by Soviet authorities. Moreover, the study has revealed that anti-Polish sentiment and prejudices permeated all segments of Soviet society, both Soviet authorities and ordinary people systematically exploited the vulnerability and helplessness of the deported Polish population.*

Keywords: Poles, Deportation, Soviet regime, Kazakhstan, lived experiences, ethnicization, racialization

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Introduction

The current study is the continuation of our previous research paper on the deportation of the Poles by the Soviet regime that was published in “*Historia i Świat*” in 1924.¹ The current study explores everyday lived experiences, hardship, deprivation, collective trauma and suffering of Polish deportees in northern regions of the Kazakh SSR in 1940 and how the regional, district and local Soviet and communist party bodies, officials and functionaries addressed the issues related to welfare, accommodation, housing, employment, healthcare and education of deported Poles, as well as shortcomings and pitfalls in managing these matters. The focus of the study is on those Polish citizens who were deported to Kazakhstan in 1940 after the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland in the autumn of 1939. The study specifically focuses on the lived experiences of deported Poles in 1940 to the northern regions of the Kazakh SSR such as North Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, Kustanai, Aktobe, Semipalatinsk and Akmola. The study employs the methods of historical data and document analysis. We have collected historical data pertaining to our research from the archives and collections of documents. The importance and relevance of our study are linked to the declassification of archival data and documents pertaining to the Soviet deportations during the 1930s-1940s, specifically related to an ethnic dimension of uprooting and punishing diverse ethnic groups within and beyond the Soviet empire. Shedding light on the lived experiences, collective suffering and trauma of Polish deportees in the regions of Kazakhstan at the beginning of the 1940s based on archival and historical documents demonstrates the relevance of the topic.

There were two waves of the Polish deportees at the second half of the 1930s and the start of the 1940s to Kazakhstan and other parts of the USSR carried out by the Soviet authorities. The Soviet government and its corresponding bodies such as the NKVD violently uprooted Soviet citizens of Polish background in 1936 residing in western regions of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. In the first wave, Soviet citizens of Polish origin along with ethnic Germans were designated as untrustworthy and disloyal to the Soviet regime on the basis of their ethnicity, distinct ethnic identity and the proximity of these areas to Poland. On that ground, the Soviet government came to the conclusion that the purported disloyal and treacherous Poles and Germans ought to be removed from western frontier areas of the Soviet empire and forcibly relocated to inner areas of the country. The second wave of deportation of ethnic Poles occurred in the aftermaths of the German-Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the subsequent destruction of the Polish state.

¹ Zhumatay *et al.*, 2024.

The second wave stood apart from the first wave in terms of citizenship of deportees. After annexation of eastern areas of the Polish state in September 1939, the Soviet authorities immediately extended the Soviet draconian and punitive laws to the occupied territories subjecting their inhabitants, namely citizens of fallen Poland, to harsh and cruel treatment and to ultimate removal of thousands of Polish citizens to Kazakhstan and other parts of the Soviet Union. The Poles who were removed to the Kazakh SSR were given a disgraceful and at the same time sardonic legal status “special settlers” (*spetspereselentsy*) by their tormentor, the Soviet regime.² A legal status “settler” that was assigned to the Poles, was in fact a colonial concept. It can be argued that deported Poles were eventually supposed to become part of the Soviet/Russian settler colonial project in the long run. Despite being brought to the Kazakh steppe against their will, deported Poles were expected to integrate themselves into a Russian-dominated milieu and thereby contributing to Russian settler colonialism. That was why they were labeled “special settlers”. In this regard, Snyder stresses that either “they [Polish deportees] would integrate with Soviet society, or they would die”.³ A prominent Russian scholar Zemskov argues that one of the underlying rationales for forced removals of non-Russian ethnicities, including the Poles, was that Stalin and his inner circle increasingly focused on cultural and ethnic homogenization of the country through Russification of non-Russians. The Soviet political establishment was convinced that violent removal of non-Russians from their historic homeland to remote unknown areas would facilitate their Russification.⁴

Fragmented, weakened, minoritized and reduced to a helpless marginalized minority in faraway lands, deported Poles were systematically exposed to the abuse, mistreatment and oppression of the regime that harbored deep hatred and enmity towards them and their homeland.⁵ As the Soviet ethnic deportations during the 1930s-1940s inflicted so many deaths, certain studies consider the Soviet policy as deliberate extermination and genocide of non-Russian ethnic groups. Yet other scholars question the validity of such assumptions, arguing that extermination of non-Russians was not an intention of the Soviet government. They insist that the Soviet Union under the leadership of Stalin did not pursue the goal of total annihilation of deported ethnicities, rather the objectives of the regimes were to reeducate enemy nations by removing them from their historical land and forcing them to give up their ethnic identities and cultures. The bottom line was that while those irredeemable and indigestible elements within the enemy ethnic groups would ultimately perish, those who would acquiesce and consent to the Soviet rule, would be given an opportunity to

² Martin, 2001: 330.

³ Snyder, 2010: 330.

⁴ Zemskov, 2003: 106.

⁵ Zhumatay *et al.*, 2024: 429-430.

integrate themselves into dominant Russian culture through assimilation.⁶ It should be noted that the Soviet regime inherited the aggressive policy of cultural homogenization and assimilation of non-Russian ethnic groups from the tsarist regime.⁷ Anyway, in both cases, punished and deported ethnic groups would eventually disappear in the long run, either by remaining loyal to their ethnic identity and resisting the Soviet oppression, or by embracing Russian culture and assimilating into Russian dominated society.

This study extensively focuses on the fate, experiences, suffering and plight of deported Poles in the second wave, who were brought to Kazakhstan in 1940 against their will. Archival and other historical documents, historical accounts and relevant literature provide detailed information about daily lived experiences and plight of Polish deportees in the Kazakh SSR during the first half of the 1940s. Archival sources and documents provide data regarding collective punishment of ethnic Poles in alien and inhospitable environments in the regions of Kazakhstan. Reduced to a small minority and increasingly marginalized, deported Poles and their families found themselves in a completely cruel and hostile milieu where their lives and their very survival were at stake. The top-down state-inspired Polonophobia, violence and terror against Poles were translated into actions on the ground in the regions of Kazakhstan. Prejudices, animosity and hatred of Poles were rampant on the ground and were exhibited by all segments of local society. Although the Soviet government tasked regional, district and local party and Soviet bodies and officials with the responsibility of addressing all issues of deported Poles, taking care of them, providing them with housing, jobs, food, education and healthcare, archival documents indicate how they deliberately ignored and disregarded well-being of Poles, systematically mistreating and exposing them to hardship, poverty and suffering. Archival data and documents speak about the plight and suffering of deported Poles in the regions of the Kazakh SSR. The reports and other documents that were produced by the NKVD organs as well as Soviet and party bodies report and testify to the collective misery and predicament of Polish deportees in Kazakhstan.

From this standpoint, it is essential and pertinent to look into the everyday lived experiences of deported Poles and their families in the northern regions of the Kazakh SSR at the start of the 1940s based on archival documents and relevant literature. In this regard, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: first, what were the everyday lived experiences and hardship of ethnic Poles in the Kazakh SSR at the beginning of the 1940s? Second, how did the Soviet government, Soviet and party bodies and officials address the issues pertaining to the well-being of Polish deportees, and what were the main shortcomings and pitfalls in addressing these issues? Besides

⁶ Statiev, 2009: 243.

⁷ Zhumatay & Yskak, 2025: 1141.

relevant literature on the topic, archival data and documents allow us to respond to the research questions and to get a deeper understanding of the topic. We now turn to explain how we have collected data and what research methods we have utilized to analyze primary and secondary sources, and what concepts and theories have guided and informed the study. In the result section, we present the main findings of our study based on an in-depth and critical analysis of archival data and documents. In the discussion and conclusion section, we provide a brief overview and significance of the study, explaining what the results of the study mean, linking them to previous studies, highlighting the study's contribution to knowledge on this matter, identifying main limitations of the study and providing an explanation of the implications of the findings and how they help us understand the research problem.

Materials and methods

To answer the research questions, the study utilizes archival research methods and extensively draws upon primary sources such as written official reports, directives, orders, instructions, decrees, official documentation, official statistical data, historical accounts and other important archival documents. The use of archival research methods has allowed us to conduct the data collection from archives and a series of collections of archival documents. Employing archival research methods, we have conducted an in-depth analysis of collected data, documents and textual materials. These primary sources provide direct evidence of the everyday lived experiences of Polish deportees in the Kazakh SSR and how they were treated by the Soviet authorities on the ground. We have collected and obtained the primary data from archives of Kazakhstan, specifically from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSA RK) and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (AP RK). Besides these archives, historical documents and accounts pertaining to deported Poles in the Kazakh SSR are stored in regional state archives in North Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, Kustanai, Aktobe, Semipalatinsk (currently the Abai region), Akmola and other regions. We have accessed archival data from the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (AP RK) and the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSA RK), where official written documents produced by the party and Soviet bodies are stored. In academia, archives are seen as academic institutions where a set of historical records and documents are stored and could be used for research to investigate the past events.⁸ The bulk of archival data regarding the Soviet deportations, including deportation of ethnic Poles is deposited in archival institutions of Kazakhstan, Russia and other post-Soviet republics.⁹ In these archives,

⁸ Magier & Posokhov, 2022.

⁹ Yskak & Zhumatay, 2022.

we have collected a variety of official historical data such as the decrees of the Soviet authorities, directives, instructions, qualitative and quantitative statistical data, reports of the NKVD of the Kazakh SSR and other state bodies on accommodation, housing, employment, provision of food, education, and healthcare to Polish deportees.

Besides archival data from the AP RK and the CSA RK, we have used archival documents and collections compiled and published by the state archives of Kazakhstan. Since the end of the 1990s, the AP RK has compiled and published a series of archival documents on deportation of ethnic Poles in the second half of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s. The importance of these collections of archival data for our study is immense and we have collected numerous relevant documents and conducted an in-depth analysis of the gathered data to answer the research questions and address the research problem. In 2000, the staff of the AP RK published a collection of archival documents with respect to deportation of ethnic Poles titled *Iz istorii polyakov v Kazakhstane (1936-1956 gg.)*.¹⁰ This volume of archival data was followed by the publications of other volumes regarding the Soviet deportations in the 1930s-1940s. The team of then AP RK have subsequently published three volumes of archival documents on the Soviet deportations in the 1930 and 1950s *Iz istorii deportatsiy. Kazakhstan in 1930-1945*.¹¹ These volumes are essential for research into both class-based and ethnic-based deportations, including the uprooting of ethnic Poles in 1936 from western Ukraine and Belarus and in 1940 from eastern Poland. We have referred to these volumes to investigate deportation of Poles to the Kazakh SSR, Siberia and other parts of the Soviet empire. These volumes contain a wealth of historical data on ethnic-based deportations, virtually covering all periods of the Soviet ethnic removals and forced relocations.

Besides archival institutions of Kazakhstan, archivists and historians in Russia have extensively focused on the collection and publication of archival documents pertaining to the Soviet deportations stored in various archives of Russia. Along with the volumes of archival documents by the AP RK, Russian historians have published a series of volumes of archival data on ethnic deportations such as *Istoriya stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh – pervaya polovina 1950-kh godov: Sobranie dokumentov* which consists of seven volumes, as well as *Stalinskie deportatsii, 1928-1953 gg.*¹² In addition to the collections of archival documents in Russian, we have referred to certain volumes of archival documents published in Poland such as *Deportacje Polaków i obywateli polskich do Kazachstanu w latach 1936-1941. Dokumenty ze zbiorów Archiwum Prezydenta Republiki Kazachstanu*, as well *Z dziejów Polaków w Kazachstanie: 1936-1956: zbiór dokumentów z Archiwum Prezydenta Republiki Kazachstanu* and “Operacja polska” NKWD 1937-1938 na tle represji wobec Polaków

¹⁰ Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000.

¹¹ Gribanova et al., 2012; Abduali et al., 2014; Baikash et al., 2019.

¹² Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004; Yakovlev, 2005.

w *Białoruskiej SRS. Dokumenty*.¹³ A series of collections of archival documents on the Soviet deportations of the Poles, specifically certain volumes of archival documents compiled and produced by the AP RK have been translated from Russian into Polish by institutions and historians of Poland.

Theoretical basis of the study are the concepts of racialization and ethnicization, which help understand racial and ethnic dimensions of the Soviet deportations and punishment of diverse ethnic groups during the 1930s and 1940s. Racialization and ethnicization imply that the Soviet regime singled out and targeted certain ethnicities as enemies of the regime, constructing the Poles and other ethnic groups as antagonistic and hostile towards the Soviet Union. In this sense, the Poles were increasingly racialized and seen as having essential rigid characteristics. The Soviet regime racialized the Poles as evil, malevolent, malicious, perfidious, sinister and deeply hostile towards the Soviet Union. Such socially constructed racist and prejudiced views and perceptions of Poles were pervasive and deeply embedded in Soviet society. Archival data and studies point to deep racial prejudices, hatred and animosity of Soviet functionaries and ordinary people towards deported Poles. In this regard, Martin draws attention to the fact that racialization and ethnicization of the Soviet policy manifested in the regime's construction of enemy nations and its practice of expulsion and ethnic cleansing of various ethnic groups.¹⁴ Besides Martin,¹⁵ other leading scholars such as Baberowski,¹⁶ Gross,¹⁷ Naimark,¹⁸ Pohl,¹⁹ Savin,²⁰ Snyder,²¹ Weitz²² and Zemskov²³ point out that the Soviet deportations and practices of ethnic cleansing were motivated by racial and ethnic factors.

Results

Deportation of Polish citizens, their quantitative and qualitative composition

The removal of Polish citizens from their homeland in 1940 was carried out by the NKVD after the annexation of eastern Poland by the Soviet Union in September 1939. Even if the removed Poles in 1939-1940 were citizens of Poland, the Soviet authorities referred to eastern territories of Poland as the western regions of

¹³ Żylko & Panto, 2019; Griбанова *et al.*, 2006; Smalianczuk, Wialiki & Wyrwa, 2023.

¹⁴ Martin, 2001: 311.

¹⁵ Martin, 1998: 2001.

¹⁶ Baberowski, 2016: 290.

¹⁷ Gross, 2002: 35-36.

¹⁸ Naimark, 2002, 2010.

¹⁹ Pohl, 1999: 2.

²⁰ Savin, 2017.

²¹ Snyder, 2007, 2010.

²² Weitz, 2002, 2003: 68.

²³ Zemskov, 2003.

the Ukrainian SSR and Byelorussian SSR.²⁴ In the aftermath of the Soviet occupation of eastern areas of Poland in September 1939, the Soviet government and its punitive institutions such as the NKVD embarked upon the path of uprooting the inhabitants of these territories. Polish inhabitants of the eastern part of Poland were collectively referred to as “Osadniks”. In fact, osadniks were Polish settlers who had purchased or been given land in these areas after Poland’s defeat of Soviet Russian in 1921. As soon as eastern Poland had been annexed by the Soviet Union, its political system and legislations were extended to the conquered territories. The Soviet authorities included in the category of osadniks those who rejected the communist regime.²⁵

After its annexation and incorporation of eastern Poland into the Soviet Union, the Soviet regime applied its punitive and repressive laws and regulations to Polish citizens, systematically targeting, criminalizing them and unleashing violence against them. Likened to “kulaks”, a persecuted social class in the Soviet Union, osadniks were stereotyped as “enemies of the people”, having their property confiscated, osadniks were subjected to state-orchestrated dehumanization, vilification, violence and terror.²⁶ As a result, osadniks were recognized as the worst enemies of the working class and were removed from their homeland.²⁷ Besides osadniks, other categories of Polish citizens were increasingly targeted by the NKVD. Moreover, along with ethnic Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews and other ethnic groups were likewise subjected to punishment. At the end of 1939, the Soviet regime started to deport Polish citizens from eastern Poland to inner areas of the country.

The People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR Lavrentiy Beria proposed to conduct the deportation of Polish citizens to the regions of the Kazakh SSR for a period of ten years by April 15, 1940. It was highlighted that all categories of people ought to be deported, specifically all family members of former officers of the Polish army, policemen, gendarmes, wardens, intelligence officers, former landowners and factory owners, high-ranking officials who were held in prisoner-of-war camps and prisons in western regions of Ukraine and Belarus. Family members encompassed the wife of a prisoner of war (POW) and his children. Moreover, parents, sisters and brothers provided that they had lived with the family of the arrested person or of the prisoner of war were also counted as family members.²⁸ The NKVD of the USSR tasked the NKVD of Ukraine and Belarus SSRs with the responsibility to carry out deportation of Polish citizens. The NKVD officers, employees, transport bodies, commanders, political workers, Red Army soldiers of the internal and border troops of the NKVD who carried out eviction and deportation of Polish citizens conducted

²⁴ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 123-124.

²⁵ Bugay, 1995: 12; Alieva, 1993; Berdinskyh, 2005.

²⁶ Bronowicki, 2007: 7-20.

²⁷ Shotbakova, 2018: 2.

²⁸ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 109.

a search to detect weapons, counterrevolutionary literature, foreign currency and other items. According to the order of the NKVD of the USSR, private property, including real estate, commercial and industrial enterprises of evicted and deported families were subjected to confiscation. Deported families were given the right to take with them personal belongings and items weighing no more than 100 kg per family member, including children.²⁹ All confiscated real estate, residential and utility premises were transferred to the jurisdiction of local Soviet bodies for settlement chiefly by military personnel of the Red Army, party and Soviet functionaries and workers sent to these occupied territories.

In his report the chief of the Department of Labor Settlements of GULAG to the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR Lavrentiy Beria on the reception and resettlement of special settlers-osadniks from the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR to various regions of the USSR, Mikhail Konradov highlighted that as of April 2, 1940, in total 139,596 osadniks had been deported and settled in 21 regions of the Soviet Union in 115 special settlements.³⁰

Tab. 1. Number of Polish families deported and resettled in different areas of the USSR.

Region / oblast	No of families	Region / oblast	No of families
Vologda	1586	Chelyabinsk	314
Komi	2191	Chkalovskaya	159
Kirov	110	Bashkir ASSR	61
Molotov	1737	Altai	1250
Sverdlov	2809	Pavlodar	221
Omsk	1422	Kustanai	186
Novosibirsk	374	Yaroslavskaya	102
Gorkovskaya	530	Arkhangelsk	8084
Krasnoyarsk	3279	Ivanovskaya	25
Akmola	414	Irkutsk	2114
Semipalatinsk	300		

Source: Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 273.

In accordance with the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union of April 10, 1940, the NKVD bodies removed 61,092 Polish citizens from their homeland, transported them to Kazakhstan and placed them in six areas of the northern part of Kazakhstan.³¹ Table 2 illustrates quantitative and qualitative composition of deported Poles in April of 1940. Deported Poles from eastern Poland to Kazakhstan by the NKVD comprised all categories of the Polish population and of all ages. Men, women, infants, children, elderly people, persons with disabilities and other categories were relocated to Kazakhstan. Although many Polish men were brought to Kazakhstan,

²⁹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 110.

³⁰ Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 273.

³¹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 123-124; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 276.

the NKVD bodies had arrested and later executed a large number of Polish officers, military personnel, and intellectuals.³²

As a result, a significant proportion of deported Poles consisted of wives, children, parents, siblings and other relatives of the repressed adult male population of eastern Poland. While many officers of the Polish army were executed, others were held in camps for POWs within the Soviet Union. The Soviet punitive bodies systematically targeted the Polish male population, putting them in POW camps and executing them. These were officers of the Polish army, policemen, spies, landlords, entrepreneurs, functionaries and high-ranking officials of Poland. Due to the state-orchestrated systemic repression and purge of the Polish male population, a multitude of Polish families lost their breadwinners. Therefore, the regions of the Kazakh SSR in 1940 received families of repressed and executed Polish men. The Soviet government and state bodies designated even defenseless and vulnerable Polish women, children, elders and other disempowered and marginalized categories as anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary elements.³³ Consequently, Soviet and the communist party bodies and officials regarded all Poles deported to the Kazakh SSR as enemies of the Soviet Union and thereby they treated Polish families as such.³⁴

Tab. 2. Placement of special settlers in Kazakhstan.

N	Region	Total for the region	Districts of the region special settlers were accommodated	Quantitative composition				
				Families	Adults	Elderly people aged 60 and over	Children under 16 years of old	Prostitutes
1	North Kazakhstan	20064	in 13 out of 15	n/a	8820	n/a	n/a	342
2	Pavlodar	11411	in 12 out of 12	3587	5250	706	5403	—
3	Kustanai	8705	in 14 out of 17	2554	3886	613	3524	—
4	Aktobe	7092	in 10 out of 14	n/a	3535	713	2919	12
5	Semipalatinsk	7644	in 8 out of 13	n/a	5553	819	1988	—
6	Akmola	6176	in 15 out of 17	1894	2170	689	2754	—
Total by region		61092	in 72 out of 88	—	29214	3540	16588	354

Source: Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 124; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 276.

The Soviet regime continued to deport people from eastern areas of Poland. According to the NKVD of the Kazakh SSR of September 11, 1941, in the months of June and July of 1941, 15413 people were brought to Kazakhstan, of which 4803 people were from the occupied eastern areas of Poland, 9954 were from the Moldavian SSR and 656 from the Baltics states, respectively. These people were scattered across Kazakhstan, being resettled in the South Kazakhstan, Aktobe, Kyzyl-Orda, Karaganda, Guryev and Akmola regions. The report of NKVD stated that in order to arrange

³² Snyder, 2010: 330.

³³ AP RK. F. 708. Op. 4/2. D. 95. L. 304; Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000: 98.

³⁴ Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000: 98-99.

the reception and resettlement of the deported, special groups of the NKVD operated on the ground. They received the deported Poles at train stations, provided food and transportation means for the delivery of them to the resettlement points.³⁵

According to the report of the NKVD of the Kazakh SSR to the Military Commissariat of the Kazakh SSR on the total number of Polish citizens in various areas of Kazakhstan, as of January 28, 1942, in total 103,757 Polish citizens lived in the republic. Table 3 illustrates the statistical data regarding the Polish population in Kazakhstan.³⁶ Besides the northern regions of Kazakhstan, Polish citizens were resettled in western and southern areas of the country such as Guryev, west Kazakhstan, south Kazakhstan, Kyzyl-Orda, Dzhambul, Alma-Ata and other regions. Nearly half of Poles lived in South Kazakhstan and Dzhambul regions. In addition to collective and state farms, Polish citizens were employed by industrial sites and zones, being involved in building infrastructures such as the Akmola-Kartaly railway.

Tab. 3. The total number of Polish citizens resettled in the Kazakh SSR as of January 28, 1942.

N	Region / oblast	Number of people
1	South Kazakhstan	25998
2	Dzhambul	22051
3	North Kazakhstan	12362
4	Kustanai	5317
5	Pavlodar	9233
6	Semipalatinsk	9000
7	Aktobe	5646
8	East Kazakhstan	454
9	Alma-Ata	184
10	Kyzyl-Orda	1000
11	Karaganda	373
12	Guryev	187
13	West Kazakhstan	159
14	Akmola	7793
15	Working on the construction of the Akmola-Kartaly railway	4000
In total		103757

Source: CSA RK. F. P-1146. Op. 1. D. 287. L. 9; Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 155-156.

Everyday lived experiences of deported Poles and policy of Soviet authorities

The contingents of deported Poles to various regions of Kazakhstan referred to as “special settlers” were placed in state farms, collective farms and industrial enterprises of the regions. Table 4 shows that an overwhelming majority of special settlers were placed chiefly in collective and state farms, and only a small proportion of them were placed in industrial enterprises and state institutions.

³⁵ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 152.

³⁶ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 155-156; CSA RK. F. P-1146. Op. 1. D. 287. L. 9.

Tab. 4. Placement of special settlers in state farms, collective farms and industrial enterprises.

N	Region	Number of special settlers in the region	Quantitative composition			
			In state farms	In collective farms	In industrial enterprises	In government institutions
1	North Kazakhstan	20064	4000	16040	n/a	n/a
2	Pavlodar	11411	5081	4763	1567	39
3	Kustanai	8705	2935	5737	15	30
4	Aktobe	7092	750	3017	54	106
5	Semipalatinsk	7644	4376	1412	1570	286
6	Akmola	6176	758	4559	493	271
Total by region		61092	17900	35528	3699	732

Source: Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 124; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

The report of the top leadership of the NKVD of the Kazakh SSR, classified as top secret, to the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR Lavrentiy Beria on the placement, employment, state intelligence and operational work among special settlers expelled from the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, as of October 15, 1940, by Alexey Babkin (People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Kazakh SSR) and Fyodor Kharitonov (Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Kazakh SSR) provided an in-depth and detailed account and description of the conditions of Polish deportees in northern regions of Kazakhstan. The conducted inspection by the NKVD officers of the Kazakh SSR in regard to the employment of special settlers indicated a high rate of unemployment among special settlers and many of them were completely unemployed.³⁷ The NKVD officers of the Kazakh SSR who carried out this inspection and monitoring in northern regions of Kazakhstan where deported Poles had been placed were rather candid and forthright in their description and assessment of the predicament and plight of Polish citizens in these remote and inhospitable environments. The hardship, predicament and suffering of uprooted Poles in different areas of Kazakhstan were well documented by the Soviet authorities, especially by the NKVD officers who were in charge of implementing punitive measures against purported enemies of the Soviet regime. Yet one matter was evidently clear, specifically the uprooting, suffering, hardship and inhumane treatment of Poles were solely caused by the Soviet regime's genocidal policy against these people. Moreover, the root cause of Polish suffering was not mentioned and acknowledged in the reports and accounts of the NKVD officers.

The officers of the NKVD observed and documented the complete deprivation, destitution and marginalization, to which the Soviet regime's criminal policy exposed deported Poles. It is evident that the agents of the Soviet regime did not attribute the agonizing conditions and misery of Poles to the Soviet regime's actions. Yet top classified secret accounts of the NKVD agents on the ground were rather frank in their documenting the agony and anguish of Poles and reporting it to their superiors in

³⁷ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

Moscow. They reported to their superiors that unemployment among deported Poles was rampant, which resulted in a lack of sources of livelihood and misery.³⁸

Regional and local authorities, enterprises, state and collective farms completely disregarded the plight of deported Poles, shunning their responsibilities to address social well-being, health care, accommodation, housing, employment, education and life conditions of Poles in general. Although many Poles were highly qualified specialists such as engineers, doctors, agronomists, mechanics, technicians and so on, regional and local authorities were rather careless and negligent in their attitudes towards special settlers, avoiding the employment of skillful Poles despite the increasing need for such workers.³⁹ For instance, in the Kustanai district of Kustanai region, among deported Poles there were 123 specialists of various professional fields, of which only three were hired according to their specialty, specifically one turner and two electricians, who worked in a machine and tractor station (MTS).⁴⁰ It was reported by the NKVD agents on the ground that regional and local officials openly or covertly sabotaged or obstructed the recruitment and taking into employment of Polish specialists. In the Kustanai district, although local workers of state farms and MTS tried to hire Polish specialists, the chairman of the District Council Dakhno categorically disallowed it on the grounds of the sufficiency of local labor force and thereby there was no need to employ Poles.⁴¹

Similar patterns were observed in other districts of Kustanai region and other regions of Kazakhstan. For instance, in the Bulaevsky District of North Kazakhstan region, several local enterprises and MTS had initially engaged specialists among Polish deportees in labor, yet at the beginning the month of August 1940, the regional committee of the Communist Party issued a decree to lay off right away all Polish employees from their work no matter where they had been working. In the Zhana-Semeysky district, there were 6 doctors, 2 agronomists, about 40 tailors, several mechanics, technicians, fitters, 15 doll makers, 2 gardeners and so on, among which only one fitter was allowed to work in his field, while the rest were barred from working by their specialty.⁴² One of the underlying conspicuous problems that was identified by the NKVD officers was an absolute lack of clear guidelines on the issues of provision of employment for Polish special settlers either in the regional party, Soviet bodies or district authorities, who were addressing labor-related issues at their own discretion. It was revealed that the regional and local authorities gave guidelines to local enterprises, state and collective farms categorically prohibiting them to hire

³⁸ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

³⁹ AP RK. F. 708. Op. 1/1. D. 1. L. 346-347; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

⁴⁰ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

⁴¹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

⁴² Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 277.

Poles by their specialty, even if there was an acute shortage of a labor force in all fields on the ground.

Perhaps one of the worst discoveries by the NKVD agents was the complete avoidance and neglect exhibited by the party and Soviet organs and officials in addressing the issues that deported Poles were experiencing. These regional, district and local authorities entirely overlooked the fate of deported Poles in terms of their employment and social well-being, asserting that the most basic survival needs of special settlers were in fact not their business. The NKVD officers figured out that these officials at regional, district and local levels were convinced that deported Poles were in essence enemies and thus would soon be apprehended by the NKVD. As these officials believed that the well-being of special settlers was not their business, they declared that it was the NKVD who brought these Poles and thereby the NKVD ought to be responsible for these special settlers.⁴³ In the Semipalatinsk region, the deputy director of the Karakol state farm Ismailov stated that the provision of jobs for special settlers was not his duty, emphasizing that it was the NKVD who brought them to this area and “let the NKVD provide them with food, with jobs and build houses for them”.⁴⁴ Due to such instances of the complete neglect and abuse by party and Soviet bodies and officials towards the Poles, it was reported that in Pavlodar region out of 11,411 Poles, roughly 45 percent or slightly over 5000 individuals were supplied with jobs.⁴⁵

On October 21, 1940, the Secretary of the Kustanai Regional Committee of the Communist Party N. Zhurin established that many secretaries of the district committees of the Communist Party and chairmen of the district executive committees failed to engage in the management of the work of accommodation and creation needed housing and living conditions for deported Poles and their families from eastern Poland.⁴⁶ It was revealed that a significant number of Polish deportees were not provided with jobs. It was also found out that the living and housing conditions did not meet normal requirements on many collective farms of the Kustanai region. 120 people were housed in a former bathhouse, which was not heated and lacked other necessary amenities. It was ascertained that in the village of Novo-Troitskoye of the Karabalyk district around 70 people were accommodated in a former stable and other non-residential premises with no basic conditions. Zhurin also reported that despite Polish workers working very hard, a number of state and collective farms failed to supply them with food products, bread, manufactured goods and other necessary items.⁴⁷

⁴³ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 277.

⁴⁴ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 277-278.

⁴⁵ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 125; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 278

⁴⁶ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 122.

⁴⁷ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 122.

Because of meager attention, complete neglect and abandonment of deported Poles by Soviet and party authorities, those Poles who had been placed on the collective farms in Pavlodar region were not provided with any jobs at all, being rendered unemployed throughout their residence in the region. It was documented that even those who were hired for 3-4 months were not given their wages for their labor. The lack of jobs and a source of income ultimately rendered Polish deportees, and their families destitute and impoverished, which exposed them to hunger and starvation, and cases of swelling from severe malnutrition were documented by the NKVD officers. In the Tsurypinsky district, it was established that out of 694 people, only 93 people were provided with jobs. Deprived of a job and means of subsistence, 20 Polish women with their offsprings were compelled to appeal to the grain state farm of the Priirtyshsky district, forwarding their demand for bread and employment.⁴⁸ It was identified that the privation and misery of Polish deportees were pervasive and ubiquitous, because of which the survival of a growing number of Poles were left at the mercy of the Soviet regime. In the Lenin collective farm of the Kustanai district, Polish deportees were not employed for field work during the whole summer. Although some of them were hired by collective farms, they did not receive anything for their work. As they were not given anything by collective farms, they completely ceased to go to work, stressing that there was no use going to work because they were not paid for their labor at all. In the Bulaevsky district, those 1381 Poles who had been placed on collective farms, were entirely unemployed.⁴⁹ Despite an acute shortage of workforce during the summer due to agricultural campaigns, Satybalidin, the director of the Mynbulak state farm, failed to provide jobs to half of Polish deportees, citing a lack of work. In a similar vein, in the Kellerovsky district, out of 810 adult Poles with job qualifications, only less than 30 percent had been provided with jobs on collective farms during the summer. Yet with the end of the summer season and field work, the latter were likewise rendered unemployed.

In their reports the NKVD officers emphasized a particular group among Polish deportees, whom they referred to as ‘prostitutes’. They mentioned over 300 prostitutes in the Airatau and Kokshetau districts of North Kazakhstan region, who likewise remained unemployed. Having no means of subsistence, these women were helpless, walking around with little dress, naked or half naked and barefoot. Having no roof over their head, they had to dwell wherever they could – in bathhouses, cattle yards, barns, or in haystacks in the steppe.⁵⁰ There were 12 prostitutes in the Irgiz district of the Aktobe region who were also jobless. It was reported that although these women were offered work on collective farms, only two of them accepted the offer and the rest continued to engage in prostitution. The NKVD officers reported that all of them

⁴⁸ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 278.

⁴⁹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 278.

⁵⁰ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 278.

attempted to escape. Despite they breached the law by trying to run away, they were soon detained and forced to return to their designated place without being held accountable under Article 82 of the Penal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).⁵¹

As there were no precise instructions on how to calculate workdays or pay for the labor of special settlers, collective farms in various districts of the regions addressed this issue as they pleased.⁵² For example, some collective farmers gave out grain based on workdays, equally with local collective farmers, while others provided only 50% or less, and some completely refrained from any payment until this issue got clarified. In the collective farm “Put’ kommuny” in the Novorossiysk district during May all special settlers without exception were assigned only one day, despite they had been engaged in labor for 10-15 or even more workdays.⁵³ In the absence of the government oversight, regulations and instructions, officials and functionaries at local, district and regional levels abused their power, exhibiting overt hostility towards Polish deportees. In the Lenin state farm of the Novoshulbinsky district, the foreman of the state farm garden brigade Ivanov made a calculation for one workday to Dreykhovskaya Yanina, a Polish woman, who carried 540 buckets of water for irrigation. Although the norm was 300 buckets, the labor in excess she produced was not taken into consideration by Ivanov. The NKVD officers documented a multitude of similar cases across the districts of the regions. For example, at a brick factory in Semipalatinsk, Polish children aged 13 to 16 were forced to engage in heavy physical work, whose working day was equal to that of adults.⁵⁴

The representative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR Dosmukhambetov and the secretary of the Novorossiysk district party committee Kovalenko gave the heads of the collective farms the order that no matter what job special settlers were engaged in and how well they performed, for them no more than half of the workday should be counted. The secretary of the Fyodorovsky District Committee of the Communist Party Antonov went even further, obliging the collective farm chairmen and rural executive committees to “stop all sales and distribution of food products to Poles as wages for their work, give the latter the most difficult work, demand that they fulfill twice as many norms as the collective farmers, and pay half as much for the work than the collective farmers”.⁵⁵

Due to such draconian instructions, it was reported that the collective farms virtually entirely ceased to issue food products to deported Poles, who were assigned to the most difficult work and even their legal just complaints on such abusive treatment

⁵¹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 278.

⁵² Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 277.

⁵³ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 279.

⁵⁴ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 126; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 279.

⁵⁵ AP RK. F. 708. Op. 1/1. D. 1. L. 347-348; Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 127; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 279.

and discrimination were not even taken into consideration and were just disregarded. In the Pavlodar state farm, the family of the settler Vodzinskys consisting of three people earned 77 rubles in two months, yet they were denied their wages for several months. Moreover, on this state farm Polish workers received wages in reduced norms. However, because their labor on state and collective farms was not paid, they had been reported to quit their jobs and engage in an anti-Soviet campaign and propaganda. The NKVD agents identified authorities and officials at all levels preferred to keep silence, not a single party or Soviet authority had discussed the problems pertaining to special settlers and no decisions had ever been made on such issues.⁵⁶

The plight of deported Poles and attitudes of Soviet authorities

The Soviet regime displayed outright disregard and indifference to the well-being of the citizens of Poland who were violently uprooted from their homeland in 1940 and removed to Kazakhstan. The Soviet regime inherited and continued deeply entrenched historical hatred and hostility of tsarist Russia towards Poland and the Polish people. The Soviet regime had destroyed the Polish statehood in September 1939 and severely punished its people by uprooting part of them to diverse areas of the country. It was revealed that the Soviet authorities had made no prior preparations whatsoever to accommodate deported Polish citizens properly. Quite the contrary, the Soviet regime subjected Poles to inhumane cruel treatment, increasingly dehumanizing and brutalizing them. For instance, the Soviet authorities brought deported Poles to barren and inhospitable areas of Kazakhstan, with no premises designed for accommodating them. Instead, the Soviet government and the NKVD, which had carried out the removal and transfer of Poles to Kazakhstan, tasked the regional, district and local authorities, state and collective farms with accommodating deported Poles. In turn, these party and Soviet authorities on the ground in Kazakhstan appeared to be fully unprepared to accommodate new hostages of the regime from Poland, exhibiting unwillingness to do so and even displaying hostility towards the Poles.

Besides massive shortcomings in providing jobs to Polish deportees in the regions of Soviet Kazakhstan, the inspection conducted by the NKVD officers in 1940 demonstrated that accommodation of Polish deportees, housing and their living conditions did not meet the minimum requirements for maintaining a normal life. Due to a lack of adequate premises and housing on the ground, regional, district and local authorities accommodated Polish deportees in non-residential premises that were completely unsuited for living. As a result, the deported people were placed in cattle depots, sheds, bathhouses, other non-residential premises, unfinished and dilapidated

⁵⁶ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 128; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 279.

buildings with no doors, stoves and other basic amenities.⁵⁷ For instance, on the Kustanai grain state farm of the Karabalyk district, 120 Poles were forced to dwell in a bathhouse and other non-residential premises that were utterly unsuitable for habitation.⁵⁸ The poor living conditions of Poles further aggravated and deteriorated not only due to their placement in non-residential premises, but also high overcrowding. In turn, this made the bad situation worse, causing diseases and other calamities. It was found out that around 50 people dwelled in the bathhouse on the Kustanai grain state farm that led to the outbreak of epidemic diseases, which claimed the lives of 7 people.⁵⁹ Moreover, it was ascertained that not all deported Poles had been provided with shelter and even there was a lack of non-residential premises in the regions. It was also established that of 700 Polish deportees employed at the “Maikainzoloto” gold processing plant in the Pavlodar region, many were not provided housing at all. The director of the enterprise openly declared that there was no need to provide any accommodation for these people whatsoever.⁶⁰

On the Proletariy state farm of the Klyuchevoy district, 12 families were housed in a barn and other 8 families were housed in unfinished buildings with no doors, ceilings and stoves. On the Vishnyakovsky state farm, an old cattle depot with partitions had been adapted for housing Polish deportees, where each room was dwelled by five to ten families.⁶¹ Besides, the stoves intended for cooking meals had only one burner, which led to a long line at the stove. It usually took a long time to heat the stove, even all day long, and Polish families lacked fuel reserves. On the Lenin state farm of the Novoshulbinsky district, it was revealed that several Polish families were forced to dwell in small rooms. For instance, of 23 families were placed in a small one-story premise, 5 families resided in one room of only 16 square meters, 11 families dwelled in another room of 25 square meters. Due to such severe overcrowding, Polish families were exposed to unsanitary conditions, which made them sick, and no medical care was provided. Moreover, such premises and rooms were infested with bedbugs, fleas and other insects.⁶² On the Chushkalinsky and Vostochny meat state farms of the Akmola region, because of a lack of housing, Polish families were housed together with local workers of state farms. Three to four families of eight to twelve people dwelled in small rooms and due to a lack of space, the rooms were overcrowded.⁶³

Among the most gruesome and horrifying facts that had been revealed by the NKVD officers were the multiple instances of homelessness of many Polish families, who were denied any housing and being rendered without a roof over their

⁵⁷ AP RK. F. 708. Op. 1/1. D. 1. L. 347; Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 139.

⁵⁸ Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁵⁹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 128; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁶⁰ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 128; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁶¹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 128; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁶² Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 128; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁶³ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 2004: 280.

head. Thrown into the street, many Polish families with their children were forced to become homeless and engage in begging and scavenging. One of the many Polish families who lived on the street was Anna Motyl's family on the Goloshchekin collective farm. The NKVD agents reported that having been forced to live on the street she and her 13 young children were denied any housing, no one let them into their apartment, neither her nor her offspring had clothes or shoes with no means of subsistence whatsoever. In addition, as Anna Motyl could not work due to her poor health condition and a baby, her other children engaged in begging.⁶⁴ Other Polish families likewise shared Anna Motyl's fate. In the Irtysh district, a Polish woman Varvara Panyuk arrived at the NKVD district office with her young children and left her four sons and two daughters aged 3 to 10 years old in the NKVD department. As she was not able to sustain her children, she was forced to abandon them. At the NKVD department, while leaving her children, Varvara Panyuk told the officers that she was not able to feed them, if they did not take her children, she would have no option other than drowning herself because of the hopeless situation. After leaving her children at the NKVD department, she was gone with her infant and disappeared. No one could find her ever since then. Likewise, in the Pavlodar district, another young Polish woman had to come to the NKVD office with her children and said that "Rather than living like this, I would rather commit suicide." She also said that she had decided to leave her children at the mercy of the Soviet government and hoped that the authorities would not abandon her children.⁶⁵

In the Charsky district of the Semipalatinsk region, 10 Polish deportees appealed to the NKVD district department with a request to take away their children from them as they were unable to sustain them. Besides destitute Polish families, numerous elderly and disabled people requested the NKVD district department to provide necessary assistance. Left at the mercy of the Soviet regime, impoverished Polish deportees scattered leaflets with the inscription "Give us bread!" On the Chistovsky grain state farm of the North Kazakhstan region, it was established that while 12 Polish families dwelled in an empty old grain storage facility, 22 families dug dugouts for themselves. On the Iskra collective farm in the Bulaevsky district, a Polish woman Zhdan Aneliya with her 8 young children had no means of subsistence, which made them beggars. As she had not been provided housing and no one let her into their house, she had to live in the forest during summer, and by winter she dug herself a dugout.⁶⁶ Even those Polish families who were housed in collective farm apartments, were not in the best conditions either.

Abundant evidence gathered by the NKVD officers indicated deep hatred and hostility of party and Soviet bodies and officials towards Polish deportees, who openly

⁶⁴ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 280.

⁶⁵ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 281.

⁶⁶ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 281.

abused their power, disregarding them and exploiting their helplessness. Besides Soviet and party bodies, it was revealed that local ordinary people also showed feelings of ill will, displaying utter contempt and harboring animosity towards deported Poles. It was found that local people, state and collective farm workers took advantage of the weaknesses of Polish deportees, systematically exploiting their vulnerability, by extorting money and other valuables from them through constant intimidation, threats and violence. The evidence collected by the NKVD agents attested to the gruesome facts of subjecting deported Poles to forced labor, and other unjust and barbaric conditions by state and collective farm workers with the approval of the authorities.⁶⁷ The NKVD officers documented multiple cases when state and collective farm workers compelled Polish deportees to work in their gardens and look after their livestock in exchange for rent or food. It was established that Polish families were charged an exorbitant fee, from 50 to 100 rubles per month, for renting houses or rooms. Besides having to pay in cash, there were cases when they were demanded payment in kind such as wearable items, precious items, consumer goods and so on.⁶⁸

When the landlords observed that tenants were running out of money and other valuable items to pay for the rent, they frequently threw them out onto the street with the assistance of local authorities. In the village of Leonidovka of the Kellerovsky district, a Polish woman Yadviga Lukovskaya was evicted from her apartment without any reason by the landlord Shless.⁶⁹ On “the World Revolution” collective farm of the Aktobe region, an owner of the house evicted a Polish woman with her two children because she was unable to pay any longer for the rent. In the Tsuryupinsky district, the head of the district department of finance gave orders to financial agents to impose taxes upon all collective farms where Polish deportees lived in apartments. The NKVD agents established that party and Soviet officials on the ground were themselves behind systemic callous and cruel abuse, mistreatment and persecution of deported Poles. For instance, on May 23, 1940, at a meeting of the district council of workers’ deputies, the secretary of the Ordzhonikidze district committee of the Communist Party Morozov gave orders to chairmen of collective farms to evict Polish families from rental property and render them with no assistance. Such top-down callous and inhumane instructions and their implementation yielded a tragic and fatal outcome. Guided by such orders, the chairmen of collective farms systematically drove Polish families out of their rented apartments. The chairman of the Dimitrov collective farm Boyko summoned a Polish woman Mailova and told her to vacate her apartment. Despite Mailova’s objections, Boyko responded that she ought to get out immediately and that it was not his concern where she would reside. After that Mailova

⁶⁷ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 281.

⁶⁸ AP RK. F. 708. Op. 1/1. D. 1. L. 347; Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 281.

⁶⁹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 129; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 281.

hanged herself, leaving her three children behind at the mercy of fate.⁷⁰ Although there were cases when some officials did exhibit empathy and compassion to Polish deportees, such empathic people were a minority. Showing empathy for the deported people was not welcome and quite the contrary, it was even discouraged and condemned. Such cases were documented by the NKVD officers. The head of the resettlement department of the Semipalatinsk Regional Council, Burnashev, ordered the eviction of Polish families from rental property on collective farms. In spite of the objections by some chairmen of collective farms, Burnashev responded that there was no need to show any sympathy for these Poles, “let them live wherever they want”.⁷¹

The hardship, impoverishment and abject poverty made Polish parents struggle to sustain and feed their children. Moreover, many Polish families were sustained mostly by females whose husbands had either been arrested or purged by the Soviet regime. As a result, these single mothers struggled to feed their children without their husbands’ support and the neglect by the Soviet government who had brought them to these areas. Unable to sustain their children, some Polish women either abandoned their children or committed suicide.⁷² This in turn rendered multiple Polish children without their parents or guardians, making them orphans. Later the Soviet government and regional authorities set up orphanages for parentless Polish children in regions. One of such orphanages was established in the Dzhurunsky district of the Aktobe region. The director of the orphanage reported that food and other necessary items were supplied by the government as well as the by the Polish embassy.⁷³

The NKVD officers also documented the cases when officials and local people engaged in fraud and other unlawful corrupt activities, scamming Polish deportees, stealing their money and other valuables, overcharging and robbing them. Systematically taking advantage of the predicament and plight of Poles and exploiting their vulnerability, locals also extensively practiced and applied the double standards, unequally treating Polish deportees and discriminating against them. It was revealed that although Polish employees in the Martuisky district did work hard and were highly productive on collective farms, a number of collective farm chairmen were reported to pay Polish workers a reduced wage and distribute food products to them at inflated prices.⁷⁴ It was determined that for milk passed through a separator, Poles were charged 2-3 times more per liter than collective farmers. On the collective farms of the Vishnyakovsky district, while Poles were paid 4 rubles for workdays, and they were charged 18 rubles for a kilogram of meat, collective farmers were charged

⁷⁰ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 281.

⁷¹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 281.

⁷² Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130.

⁷³ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 159-160.

⁷⁴ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130; Tsarevskaja-Diakina, 2004: 282.

6-8 rubles per kilogram. It was established that local officials spread rumors that Polish deportees were purportedly wealthy, and it was alright to charge them more. The chairman of the Novorossiysk District Executive Committee emphasized in a conversation with collective farmers that: “All Poles are very rich, so you can charge them more for apartments and food”.⁷⁵

Due to severe suffering, privation and intolerable levels of hardship of Polish deportees, local people were reported to systematically take advantage of the plight of Poles and trick them into selling various items for so little money. In the city of Semipalatinsk, it was documented that one Pole gave away a gold watch for 3 poods of potatoes, and another sold a gold watch for 60 rubles. In the Novoshulbinsky district, the director of the MTS of the Lenin state farm was reported to have purchased woolen trousers from Bernardskaya, a Polish woman, for two poods of flour.⁷⁶ In the Zharminsky district, Polish deportees dispersed along all roads, meeting collective farmers going to the market, with whom they exchanged food products for various items. Moreover, there were cases when officials and workers exploited the plight and suffering of Polish deportees, compelling them to engage in activities against their will. It was discovered that by taking advantage of the poor living conditions and helplessness of Polish women, officials and workers forced or persuaded them to cohabit. The manager of farm No. 1 Keribayev was reported to force females to have intimate relations with him, in return giving promises to them better living conditions. Sexual exploitation and violence against the deported women caused resistance of Polish women. For instance, a Polish woman Pelkos Nadezhda stated that “If I am not released from exile, I will be forced to leave without permission. I will be better off in prison than here, I am unable to work with a small baby, I have already run out of things to sell”.⁷⁷

As the report compiled by the NKVD officers indicated, one of the essential issues that was completely disregarded was the provision of education for Polish children. Although the report of the NKVD of the Kazakh SSR in 1940 only touched upon the issue of education of Polish children on the surface, it is abundantly clear that the right of Polish children to education was overlooked and violated. It was established that a large number of Polish children were not enrolled in schools, remaining out-of-school. On the collective farm the “Third International”, children of deported Poles who were supposed to enroll in school were denied education on the grounds of the absence of a special order from the district education department. It was determined that in the Kustanai district out of over 100 school-age Polish children about 30 were enrolled in primary school.⁷⁸ Similar patterns were observed in other

⁷⁵ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 282.

⁷⁶ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 282.

⁷⁷ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 130-131; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 282.

⁷⁸ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 131; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 282-283.

areas as well. In the Kalinin district, out of 109 school-age children, only 37 were enrolled. In the Lebyazhsky district, out of 169 school-age children, 51 were enrolled. In the Tsyuryupinsky district, out of 220 school-age children, only 70 children were enrolled. In the Urlyutyupsky district, out of 101 children, only 30 children were enrolled.⁷⁹

It was evident that the Soviet regime and local authorities failed to provide education to Polish children. Yet at the same time, there were cases when Polish parents implicitly and explicitly refused to send their children to school and rejected Soviet education. There was a fear among Polish deportees that due to multiple conspicuous matters related to cultural, identity, linguistic and psychological issues, their children were unable to study in Russian schools. Polish parents expressed various opinions regarding their children's schooling and Russian education. Some parents were afraid that their children may be subjected to bullying, mockery and demonization due to their different ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities. The NKVD officers documented cases when Polish parents rejected Soviet education and did not want their offspring to be educated in Russian schools for various reasons. In the Dmitrievka collective farm of the Lozovsky district, Abramchik, a Polish woman, stated that "I will not allow Russians to mock my child".⁸⁰

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing upon archival data and documents on the Soviet deportations and relevant literature the current study has sought to address the research questions: the first, what were the everyday lived experiences and hardship of ethnic Poles in the Kazakh SSR at the beginning of the 1940s? and the second, how did the Soviet government, Soviet and party bodies and officials address the issues pertaining to well-being of Polish deportees, and what were the main shortcomings and pitfalls in addressing these issues? Guided by these questions, the study has provided a brief overview of the background of the Soviet deportation of the Poles in 1940 from eastern Poland to different regions of the Kazakh SSR, qualitative and quantitative composition of deported Poles and their settlement. Moreover, the study has examined the everyday lived experiences and hardship of deported Poles in regions of the Kazakh SSR and how Soviet authorities managed and addressed the issues of the deported. The results of the study show that the Soviet regime was consistent in its policy of targeting ethnic Poles, demonizing, vilifying and stereotyping them as enemies of the regime and systematically uprooting them from their homeland and expelling them to distant eastern lands of the Soviet empire. A prominent Russian historian Bugay argues that

⁷⁹ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 131; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 283.

⁸⁰ Baikash *et al.*, 2019: 131; Tsarevskaya-Diakina, 2004: 283.

the deportation of Poles along with Germans from western frontier areas carried out before the breakout of the Great Patriotic War is in fact one of the gravest crimes committed by the Soviet regime under the leadership of Stalin. Furthermore, Bugay also points out that without trial and investigation, even without a written accusation thousands of people with their families were forcibly uprooted and removed to eastern regions of the Soviet empire.⁸¹ Perhaps, one of the most conspicuous findings of the study is that as opposed to its predecessor, the Soviet regime targeted and victimized the whole ethnicities, ascribing blame to a nation rather than individuals and groups.

Literature on the Soviet deportations highlights that the Soviet policy of mass removal and punishment of non-Russian ethnicities were guided by ethnic and racial concepts. Although on paper it was declared that all nationalities and races of the Soviet Union were equal in all spheres of state policy and society, numerous non-Russian ethnic groups were constructed as “alien” and “other”, being seen as a fifth column and enemies of the regime. On the one hand, the collective punishment and elimination of the Poles were guided by the historical animosity and hatred of Poland. On the other hand, persecution and oppression of the Poles were justified by the Bolshevik concept of historical territory of a people. Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders argued that if an ethnic group did not possess its own historically formed territory, then uprooting and removal of such peoples from their habitation to different areas would be justifiable.⁸² Bugay indicates that the Soviet nationality policy and ethnic deportations were shaped and guided by this view. This in turn led to the emergence of the system of a racial hierarchy in Soviet society, in which racial inclusion and exclusion were based on the allegiance and loyalty of non-Russians to the regime and their acquiescence to cultural and political primacy of Russians as the state-forming and empire-building nation.

Polonophobia and anti-Polish paranoia in the Soviet Union were influenced by both deep-rooted historical hatred of Poland and Stalin’s concept of historical territory of an ethnicity. From this standpoint, the Soviet regime removed ethnic Poles from western frontier regions in 1936 on the basis of a purported lack of historical territory of Poles and their alleged disloyalty. After the dismantlement of Poland in autumn of 1939, the Soviet regime forcibly removed Poles of eastern Poland predicated upon those reasons. The uprooted Polish citizens in the aftermath of the Soviet military takeover and annexation of eastern Poland in autumn 1939 were designated as ‘special settlers’ (spetspereselentsy).⁸³ Besides inner areas of Soviet Russia, thousands of Polish citizens of all social categories and ethnicities were removed and transported to the northern regions of the Kazakh SSR in 1940. After the destruction of the Polish

⁸¹ Bugay, 1995: 12.

⁸² Bugay, 1995: 5.

⁸³ Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000: 98.

statehood in autumn 1939 in partnership with Germany, the Soviet regime pursued and implemented its policy of fragmenting, dismantling and erasing the Polish nation, Polish identity and culture. Snyder stresses that even in remote alien eastern areas of the Soviet empire Soviet authorities continued their animosity to any manifestation of Polishness.⁸⁴ This policy manifested itself in the collective punishment of ethnic Poles by the Soviet regime. In this regard, we argue that there is continuity between tsarist Russia's historical animosity and hatred of the Poles and anti-Polish paranoia and Polonophobia of the Soviet regime. Under the leadership of Stalin, the Soviet regime behaved exactly in the same manner, continuing tsarist Russia's anti-Polish policy in its attempts to dismantle Poland and target Poles as the state-forming nation. Like Russian tsars, the Soviet regime practiced uprooting and removal of Poles from their homeland. Yet in terms of punishing Poland and the Poles, the Soviet regime went much further than its predecessor, extensively applying collective punishment and targeting the whole nation.

Although studies highlight that the Soviet regime was based on the communist ideology and it prioritized class struggle, recent archival documents and scholarship draw attention to how the Soviet regime increasingly focused on culture and ethnicity. This was especially reflected in the systemic manipulation and exploitation of ethnic factors by the Soviet regime throughout its existence. Yet this particularly manifested during ethnic deportations in the 1930s-1940s. Literature specifically calls attention to how the Soviet regime increasingly exploited and weaponized ethnicity, ethnic divisions and tensions between diverse ethnic groups. Literature indicates that during the 1930 ethnicization and racialization of the Soviet policies and practices were observed. Gross points to the fact how the Soviet regime resuscitated the old traditional Russian animosity towards the Poles, weaponizing historic antagonism and tensions between Poles and other ethnic groups, as well as between Russians and Poles. The Soviet regime intentionally painted the Republic of Poland as a predatory capitalist bourgeoisie state, which was purportedly predicated upon the systemic abuse and exploitation of the Polish proletariat and ethnic minorities. On that ground, the Soviet regime believed that the destruction of Poland and collective punishment of Poles were justified.⁸⁵ In this case, the Soviet regime encouraged and stirred up large-scale violence, terror, mass killing, plunder and dehumanization of ethnic Poles. A series of deportations of ethnic Poles in the 1930s and 1940s were in fact the manifestations of the top-down state-inspired terror campaign and violence against ethnic Poles.

In their research, Zhumatay, Yskak, Magier and Kruszynski argue that the removal of Poles and other ethnic groups was dictated and guided by a larger colonial and

⁸⁴ Snyder, 2010: 130.

⁸⁵ Gross, 2002: 35-36.

imperial blueprint of the Soviet regime, which aimed at subjecting the deported non-Russians to forced cultural assimilation and Russification. In this regard, minoritized, marginalized and fractured deported nations were expected to surrender their ethnic identities, cultures and languages, and assimilate into dominant Russian culture, transforming into Russians.⁸⁶ Subscribed to Russian ethnocracy, chauvinism and ethnic nationalism, Stalin and his followers believed that national and cultural differences among peoples of the country would disappear, and they would merge into one single nation.⁸⁷ Considering ethnicity, specifically Russianness to be a sign of loyalty to the regime, the Soviet authorities systematically suppressed and erased ethnic and cultural identities of non-Russians.⁸⁸ The state-instigated assaults on cultural institutions of Poles and other non-Russian ethnic groups were underway.⁸⁹ The Soviet leadership was convinced that the regime could easier assimilate non-Russians through removing them from their homeland to remote inhospitable environments.⁹⁰

In remote alien lands as Snyder points out, deported Poles were given two options, either go extinct or assimilate into Russian culture.⁹¹ In exile, Poles were expected to abandon Polishness and embrace Russianness by embracing and internalizing socially constructed myths of supremacy of Russian culture and way of life.⁹² The reports, memos and other documents produced by the NKVD and other Soviet bodies testify to the facts that Polonophobia was not confined within the Soviet political establishment. Anti-Polish prejudices, bigotry and hatred were implicitly and explicitly displayed by Soviet authorities at all levels and ordinary Soviet people. In the eyes of Soviet authorities and Soviet people the Poles were outcast, traitorous and hostile anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary elements, who ought to be dealt with accordingly.⁹³ In distant areas of Central Asia, the Poles were put under the strict control and supervision of the NKVD bodies.⁹⁴ Viewing the Poles as enemies of the Soviet state and a contingent under the supervision of the NKVD, regional, district and local authorities in the regions of the Kazakh SSR disregarded the plight of deported Poles and avoided addressing issues related to their welfare, housing, employment, healthcare, education and denying them social protection and security. It is evident that Soviet authorities on the ground lacked capacity to accommodate and provide social protection for deported Poles and their families. Yet at the same time, they eschewed and turned a blind eye to misery and suffering of deported Poles and their families.

⁸⁶ Zhumatay *et al.*, 2024: 426-427.

⁸⁷ Naimark, 2010, 2002: 128.

⁸⁸ Pohl, 1999: 22-23; Naimark, 2010: 80; Snyder, 2010: 130.

⁸⁹ Martin, 2001: 332.

⁹⁰ Zemskov, 2003: 107; Pykhalov, 2008: 5.

⁹¹ Snyder, 2010: 330.

⁹² Zhumatay *et al.*, 2024: 427.

⁹³ AP RK, F. 708. Op. 4/2. D. 95. L. 304; Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000: 98.

⁹⁴ Abduali *et al.*, 2014: 59; Gribanova, Zulkasheva & Maskeev, 2000: 18.

Archival data and documents provide abundant evidence of mistreatment and abuse of deported Poles by Soviet authorities who along with local people exploited and took advantage of vulnerability and helplessness of Polish women, children and other disempowered categories of Polish deported population. Due to a lack of suitable residential premises, deported Poles were accommodated in inadequate and unsuited non-residential buildings like bathhouses, cattle yards, barns and other premises with no door, windows, ceiling, roof, heat, stove, water and other essential amenities. Reports, memos and other official documents of the NKVD and other bodies attest to the cases when deported Poles were left homeless, having no roof over their heads, Polish families, women with their offspring were forced to live on the street. Besides housing issues, Soviet authorities failed to provide Poles with jobs even if there was need for workers in state and collective farms, industrial centers and other areas. As a result, Polish families were left with no income and thereby they experienced extreme hardship. Many families, especially those who lost their adult male members, struggled to feed and sustain their offspring, which compelled Polish women to abandon their children. Archival documents testify to cases when Poles escaped from their designated areas or even committed suicide. Exploiting the vulnerability of deported Poles, Soviet officials and even ordinary people engaged in deception and fraud, robbing and depriving Poles of their money, valuables and other items. At the same time, experiencing extreme privation and destitution compelled Poles to sell their property almost for nothing. Provision of healthcare and education for the deported Polish population was inadequate and scant. On the one hand, the Soviet school system had limited capacity to provide quality education for Polish children. Moreover, differences in culture, language and ethnic origin made the situation more complex. Polish parents were less willing to send their children to Russian school due to certain psychological, cultural, linguistic, ideological and political reasons. Deported Poles distrusted the Soviet regime and were suspicious of Soviet education. Polish parents were afraid that their children may be subjected to mockery, harassment and discrimination in Russian schools.

The study has shed light on the lived experiences of deported Poles in the regions of the Kazakh SSR at the beginning of the 1940s. Constructed as enemies of the Soviet Union, Polish citizens were removed from their homeland to Kazakhstan where they were forced to experience deprivation and misery. At the same time, deported Poles were subjected to oppression and mistreatment by Soviet authorities. Unlike the deported Poles in 1936, Poles who were removed from eastern Poland to Kazakhstan in 1940 were given an opportunity to leave the Soviet Union on the basis of the agreement between Sikorski and Mayski on July 30, 1941.⁹⁵ Employing the concepts of ethnicization and racialization, the study has examined how ethnicity

⁹⁵ Sword, 1994: 115.

and race determined and guided the policy of the Soviet Union regarding non-Russian ethnic groups. Although the current study has provided an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of deported Poles in Kazakhstan in the 1940s, it has certain limitations that need to be addressed. Despite sufficient archival data on this matter, there is a lack of research into the everyday lived experiences of deported Poles and other ethnic groups during the 1930s and 1940s. It is true that scholars have drawn enough attention to the macro-level issues, specifically to the Soviet deportations and the government-orchestrated removals of ethnic groups. Yet micro-level issues, including the daily lived experiences of the deported peoples and other related matters have received scant attention. Therefore, future studies ought to fill this gap in literature.

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