

# The Migration of Poles to Belgium and Their Return to Poland Between 1918 and 1952 – the Migration Story of the Szotek Family

AGNIESZKA KULESA<sup>1</sup>

ORCID: [0000-0003-2895-102X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2895-102X)

CASE, Center for Social and Economic Research

ANETA NISIOBĘCKA<sup>2</sup>

ORCID: [0000-0003-4292-4482](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4292-4482)

Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance

The aim of the paper is to serve as a reminder of Polish economic migrations to and from Belgium between 1918 and 1952, largely absent from the collective memory of Poles or frequently identified with migrations to and from France. Based on the account of the Szotek family, collected in accordance with oral history methodology, the authors present the family's complex story of migration: first a journey from Ujków Stary to the Charleroi coal basin in Belgium and then a return to Poland, where they lived again in Ujków Stary, then in Zalesie and Bystrzyca Kłodzka, only to finally return to Ujków Stary. The family's reasons behind the decision to go to Belgium and then re-migrate to their homeland helps to comprehend the historical context of economic migration to and from Belgium, as outlined by the authors. The issue of adaptation of emigrants in the country of settlement, and then their adjustment as re-emigrants to the new reality forged by the authorities of the "democratic" Polish People's Republic occupies an important place in the paper.

**Key words:** Polish economic migrants in Belgium, mining industry, remigration, oral history

## 1. Introduction

The interwar period went down in Polish history as a time of mass labour migration from the territories of the Second Polish Republic. Given that France played a central role

---

<sup>1</sup> Contact: [aga.kulesa@gmail.com](mailto:aga.kulesa@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Contact: [aneta.nisiobECKA@interia.pl](mailto:aneta.nisiobECKA@interia.pl)

in the Versailles system after World War I and due to the Polish–French convention on emigration and immigration of 3 September 1919, Polish historiography has been dominated by the issue of Polish migration to and from France. Meanwhile, the question of economic emigration of Poles to Belgium has not attracted much interest among researchers. The reason for this state of affairs should be seen in the rather insignificant role of Brussels in diplomatic relations with Warsaw at that time. The fact that fewer Poles left for Belgium, a country much smaller than France, is probably also of relevance. Similarly, the number of those who returned from Belgium to Poland was proportionately smaller: in the years 1945–1950 about 10,000 people (both economic and war migrants) returned from Belgium, while in the case of France that number stood at about 140,000<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the interwar emigration of Poles to Belgium and their return to their homeland after World War II are in many cases interpreted as synonymous with the migration of Poles to and from France<sup>4</sup>. This is because in both destinations of migration the French language was used, and Poles found employment mainly in coalmines. The lack of a relevant bilateral agreement between Poland and Belgium also contributed to the lower visibility of the migration flows in question.

At this point it is worth recalling that Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR) in 1970–1980, and Wincenty Pstrowski, who with his call "Who will hew more than me?" started the labour competition in Polish industry, were both re-emigrants from Belgium.

The aim of the paper is to outline the nature and historical context of the migration of Poles to Belgium in the interwar period and their return to the country after 1945, also taking into account the period of adaptation of the re-emigrants to the realities of communist Poland. Research studies, archival sources and available journal and diary entries as well as oral history sources were analysed. There is a separate subsection of the paper devoted to an oral history testimony of the Szotek family.

The starting point is the year 1918 when World War I ended, after which economically and demographically devastated Belgium began seeking foreign labour to work in the mines. The end is 1952, when the Belgian government demanded the reimbursement of the costs of arranging the re-migration, concluding diplomatic talks between Warsaw and Brussels on organisational issues related to the return of Poles to their homeland. 1952 also marked the end of migration for the Szotek family.

---

<sup>3</sup> I. Goddeeris (2005), *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Semper, p. 57; A. Nisiońska (2018), *Z Lens do Wałbrzycha. Powrót Polaków z Francji oraz ich adaptacja w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1945–1950*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> See, inter alia A. Kurpiel, *Polscy „Francuzi”. Francuska struktura odczuwania w powojennej dolnośląskiej rzeczywistości/The „French” Poles. The French experience structure in the post-war Lower-Silesian reality*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331330864\\_Polscy\\_Francuzi\\_Francuska\\_struktura\\_odczuwania\\_w\\_powojennej\\_dolnoslaskiej\\_rzeczywistosci\\_The\\_French\\_Poles\\_The\\_French\\_experience\\_structure\\_in\\_the\\_post-war\\_Lower\\_Silesian\\_reality](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331330864_Polscy_Francuzi_Francuska_struktura_odczuwania_w_powojennej_dolnoslaskiej_rzeczywistosci_The_French_Poles_The_French_experience_structure_in_the_post-war_Lower_Silesian_reality) [Accessed: 9.08.2019]. In the title of the article, the author cites the accounts of a re-emigrant from Belgium, Wiktor Gut.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first one discusses the current state of research on the issue, while the second one examines the historical context of Poland–Belgium–Poland migration in the years 1918–1952 and its economic, social and political causes. The third part of the text “gives the floor” to oral testimony<sup>5</sup> of a first-hand witness to those events, Waclaw Szotek, a re-emigrant from Belgium, born in 1937 in Couillet near Charleroi (in the Hainaut province)<sup>6</sup>.

Oral history sources give priority to “silent” social groups, including migrants, peasants and workers. Their testimonies convey the meaning of the event to the interlocutor, not the information about it, and therefore in their basic function provide additional material from which the historian composes the structures of the historical sense<sup>7</sup>. Marta Kurkowska-Budzan points out that oral history sources cannot be rejected only because they do not fit into the “sacred canon of fact”, since the accounts of the “little ones” do not focus on “great” events, but on everyday routine<sup>8</sup>. In the case of migration studies, it should be remembered that a critical literature and administrative sources analysis does not fully reflect the life of a migrant in the country of settlement. Therefore, it turned out to be important to supplement the analysis of these sources with accounts which are available in the archives of oral history, as the participants of the events referred to in this article provide information about which other sources are silent<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. State of research

Among European countries, Belgium was the third destination (after Germany and France) to which Poles emigrated the most in the interwar period in search of “bread”<sup>10</sup>.

The problem of economic migration of Poles to Belgium in the interwar period was most often mentioned by Polish and Belgian researchers in the context of the overall issue of Polish exile there or the activity of Polish communists. Such an approach is reflected in the works of, among others, Marek Żmigrodzki<sup>11</sup>, Wiesława

<sup>5</sup> The term used by Anna Kurpiel. A. Kurpiel, *Polscy „Francuzi”...*, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> Couillet is now the district of Charleroi. *Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Bolesław) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno)*, personal archives of Agnieszka Kulesa.

<sup>7</sup> W. Kudela-Świątek (2011), *Historyk na rozstaju dróg badawczych. Interdyscyplinarny charakter współczesnej oral history*, P. Plichta (ed.) *Przeszłość we współczesnej narracji kulturowej. Studia i szkice kulturoznawcze*, vol. 2, p. 11; P. Filipkowski (2014), *Historia mówiona jako historia ratownicza: doświadczenie, opowieść, egzystencja, Teksty Drugie*, issue 5, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> M. Kurkowska-Budzan (2011), *Informator, świadek historii, narrator – kilka wątków epistemologicznych i etycznych oral history*, *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*, issue 1, p. 10, 12.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kałwa (2017), *Historia mówiona w polskich badaniach dziejów najnowszych*, *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*, issue 7, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 24. In the mind of those emigrating to European countries, such migration was essentially temporary and economic in nature, rather than permanent and residential, as in the case of overseas migration.

<sup>11</sup> M. Żmigrodzki (1978), *Polonia w Belgii*, Lublin: Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.

Eder<sup>12</sup>, Ryszard Dzwonkowski<sup>13</sup>, Kazimiera Maj<sup>14</sup>, Tadeusz Panecki<sup>15</sup> and Idesbald Goddeeris<sup>16</sup>. One exception is an article by Jakub Szumski, in which the author presents (primarily on the basis of materials from the Archiwum Akt Nowych/New Files Archive) the circumstances of the emigration of Polish miners to Belgium between 1919 and 1939<sup>17</sup>.

The scarce database of archival sources and oral accounts available in Poland does not permit an in-depth investigation. The Internet databases of oral history archives do not contain any testimonies. However, several accounts of communist officials from Belgium are stored in the collections of the Testimonies and Accounts Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR) in the New Files Archive in Warsaw<sup>18</sup>, while in the Archive of the Remembrance and Future Centre in Wrocław there is one account of a re-emigrant from Belgium, Wiktor Gut<sup>19</sup>.

The diary material of Polish emigrants who left for Belgium in the interwar period is also limited. Only one diary of a Belgian emigrant can be found in the collection of diaries published as early as 1939<sup>20</sup>. In the collection of the Society for Diary Studies (TPP), kept in the New Files Archive, there are two journals: Stefan Gurdziel's and Zygfryd Maciejewski's<sup>21</sup>.

In view of this modest source base, the number of scholarly studies on the emigration of Poles to Belgium in the interwar period is likewise small. Therefore, this issue – investigated largely on the basis of Polish source material – reflects the social and political causes of migration to and from Belgium solely from the Polish perspective. A single monograph and articles by Belgian researchers do not fully fill the gap in the analysis of source materials stored in archives in Belgium on this subject<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> W. Eder (1983), *Dzieje Polonii belgijskiej 1919–1980 (w zarysie)*, Warszawa: Epoka 1983; W. Eder (1975), *Osadnictwo emigrantów polskich w Belgii*, „Przegląd Zachodni”, no 5–6, p. 67–83; W. Eder (1979), *Polonia belgijska. Skład społeczno-zawodowy, jego przemiany i skutki tych przemian*, „Przegląd Polonijny”, issue 3, p. 57–67; W. Eder (1981), *Ruch wychodźczy ludności polskiej do Belgii w okresie międzywojennym (1919–1939)*, „Przegląd Polonijny”, issue 4, p. 79–95.

<sup>13</sup> R. Dzwonkowski (1976), *Polacy w Belgii w ostatnich pięćdziesięciu latach*, „Studia Polonijne”, vol. 1, p. 7–25.

<sup>14</sup> K. Maj (1976), *Polscy komuniści we Francji i Belgii (1919–1944)*, „Ideologia i Polityka”, issue 9, p. 80–90.

<sup>15</sup> T. Panecki (1978), *Polonia belgijska (1918–1939)*, „Przegląd Polonijny”, issue 2, p. 51–63.

<sup>16</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*

<sup>17</sup> J. Szumski (2015), *Między stabilizacją a radykalizmem – polska emigracja górnicza w Belgii*, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Neerlandica Wratislaviensis”, issue 3685, p. 19–37.

<sup>18</sup> New Files Archive (AAN), Testimonies and Accounts Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR), ref. no. R-246.

<sup>19</sup> Born in Belgium in 1940, he returned to Poland with his parents at the age of six. *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, Archives of the Remembrance and Future Centre (AOPIP), ref. no. AHM 433.

<sup>20</sup> Pamiętnik nr 36 emigranta z Belgii (1939), Krzywicki, L. (przedm.), *Pamiętniki emigrantów, cz. 2: Francja*, Warszawa: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, p. 641–689.

<sup>21</sup> Collections currently not accessible, interview with Włodzimierz Janowski, Warszawa 19 IX 2018.

<sup>22</sup> See, inter alia the works of Idesbald Goddeeris and Machteld Venken, whose publications focus on wartime emigration and the overall theme of Polish emigration. I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, M. Venken,

The issue of repatriation and re-migration of Poles after the Second World War (including the adjustment processes after the return), is dominated by studies documenting arrivals from the Eastern Borderlands<sup>23</sup> and Western Europe<sup>24</sup> and concerning the presence and resettlement of the German community from the Recovered Territories<sup>25</sup>, which only occasionally mention the return of Poles from Belgium. There is a lack of separate studies on the arrangement of the return of miners from Belgium to their homeland and adjustment strategies employed by re-emigrants to adapt to the realities of Stalinist Poland, supported by administrative documents of the Polish People's Republic and the Security Service (UB), as well as direct accounts of the participants in the events under discussion<sup>26</sup>.

### 3. Economic, social and political reasons for migrating to and from Belgium

The origins of Polish economic migration to Belgium date back to the beginning of the last century. Due to the manual and arduous nature of work, it was mainly foreigners who worked in the mines, rather than Belgian citizens<sup>27</sup>.

The influx of Polish economic migrants to Belgium intensified after World War I. The post-war demographic and economic losses and the exodus of qualified Belgian miners to mines in the north of France forced the Belgian authorities to take

---

(2011), *Międzynarodowe i lokalne próby aktywizacji byłych żołnierzy Pierwszej Polskiej Dywizji Pancерnej w Belgii w latach 1947–1970*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość”, issue 1, p. 333–351.

<sup>23</sup> See, inter alia M. Ruchniewicz (2000), *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1955–59*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Volumen; A. Paczoska (2003), *Dzieci Jalty. Exodus ludności polskiej z Wileńszczyzny w latach 1944–1947*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek; Tracz, B. (red.) (2012), *Kresowianie na Górnym Śląsku*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięi Narodowej.

<sup>24</sup> See, inter alia J. Wróbel (2009), *Na rozdrożu historii. Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięi Narodowej; W. Gołasz (2016), *Aby podnieść z gruzów Polskę. O repatriacji Polaków – górników z Francji i Belgii oraz ich rodzin po II wojnie światowej*, „Czasypismo”, issue 2(10), p. 22–33; R. Bełdzikowski (2015), *Reemigranci z Francji, Belgii i Westfalii w Wałbrzychu*, Bielawska, S. (red.), *Waldenburgiana-monografie. Wałbrzyskie szkice*, Wałbrzych: DTP Service, p. 155–186, [https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/10010/Wa%C5%82brzyskie%20szkice\\_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/10010/Wa%C5%82brzyskie%20szkice_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [Accessed: 6.09.2019].

<sup>25</sup> See, inter alia Borodziej, W., Hajnicz, A. (red.) (1998), *Kompleks wypędzenia*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak; T. Willenborg (2019), *Fremd in der Heimat. Deutsche im Nachkriegspolen 1945–1958*, Hamburg: Verlag&Druck.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth mentioning that the subject of mining migrants from Belgium was noticed by reporters: in July 2018 Paolo Riva, a freelance journalist who is working on *The Last Miners* project about miners from various European countries who worked in Belgian mines in the first half of the 20th century, interviewed Waclaw Szotek, a post-war re-emigrant from Belgium, <https://www.facebook.com/thelastminers/> [Accessed: 26.12.2019]. The journalists admitted that due to the small number of re-emigrants from Belgium and the “merging” of those with their French counterparts, it was extremely difficult to find witnesses to the history of the returns from the Kingdom of Belgium.

<sup>27</sup> Working in the mine was not very popular among the locals due to low wages for working in hazardous conditions. M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 27–29; W. Eder, *Osadnictwo emigrantów...*, p. 70.

remedial action and recruit foreign workers. Poland, which was struggling with overpopulation caused by mass returns to an independent country, did not hinder those wishing to leave. The authorities believed that emigration would improve the economic situation of the country, weaken the frustration of job seekers, and protect the miners working in Poland and coming from Westphalia to the Upper Silesian mines, escaping from German persecution for participating in the Silesian uprisings<sup>28</sup>. The post-war period was marked by an increased wave of *westfalaks* (Poles who at the end of the 19th century emigrated to work in the mines of the Rhineland and Westphalia from the regions of the Grand Duchy of Posen, Silesia and Masuria), who were forced to leave Germany as a consequence of the provisions of Article 91 of the Treaty of Versailles (it provided for granting Polish citizenship to all citizens permanently residing in Poland from 1908 to 1920), as well as because of the ongoing economic crisis there<sup>29</sup>.

Poles left for Belgium thanks to the Polish employment offices, which had been organising such migration since 1922, after the Polish Emigration Office established contacts with its Belgian counterpart Fédéchar (National Federation of Mining Industry Employers)<sup>30</sup>.

The lack of legal regulations on emigration under an international agreement<sup>31</sup> resulted in the fact that Polish workers in Belgium failed to be granted many social guarantees (including pensions). The efforts of the Polish side to sign a comprehensive emigration convention which would regulate the legal and social situation of Polish economic migrants proved unsuccessful. This is because Belgium treated mining immigration as a temporary phenomenon, helping to make up for the deficit in the mining labour force. Consequently, the Polish authorities banned Belgians from conducting recruitment in Poland, although, as sources say, such recruitment activities did take place<sup>32</sup>. According to Jakub Szumski, the reluctance of Belgian entrepreneurs to support concluding a bilateral emigration agreement, as manifested to the

---

<sup>28</sup> H. Janowska (1964), *Polska emigracja zarobkowa we Francji 1919–1939*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza, p. 40; J. Ponty (1988), *Polonais méconnus. Histoire des travailleurs immigrés en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, p. 43–44.

<sup>29</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 28; I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 17; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 29; I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 17; J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją...*, p. 23. Until 1923, recruitment for Belgian mines was carried out through French recruitment missions. E. Kołodziej (1982), *Wychodźstwo zarobkowe z Polski 1918–1939. Studia nad polityką emigracyjną II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza, p. 104.

<sup>31</sup> The existing Trade Convention of 30 December 1922 between Poland, Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (ratified on 1 June 1923) only regulated the issues related to trade and industrial activities in both countries. Dziennik Ustaw (Dz.U.), 1923, No. 106, item 836, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19231060836/O/D19230836.pdf>, [Accessed: 19.08.2019]. As regards the issue of emigration, the Treaty made a general statement that care for emigrants will be applied on a reciprocal basis. E. Kołodziej, J. Zakrzewska (1982), *Raporty konsulatów polskich w Belgii w Brukseli i Antwerpii w latach 1929–1932*, „Teki Archiwalne”, issue 19, p. 126. (125–176).

<sup>32</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 29; I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 17; J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją...*, p. 23.

government in Brussels, can be explained by their preference for temporary residence and different employment conditions for foreigners. This allowed them to easily adapt their activities to the changing economic and demographic circumstances<sup>33</sup>.

Until 1924 the most important condition that the Belgian authorities imposed on Polish migrants was to arrive without a family<sup>34</sup>. Mining companies signed a contract with miners for a year, after which they could either return to the country or extend the contract. In fact, the Belgians were very keen to extend the contracts, as the Poles had a reputation for being disciplined employees<sup>35</sup>.

It is estimated that between 1920 and 1924, 3360 people came to Belgium from Poland<sup>36</sup>. Between 1920 and 1930 the number of Polish migrants in Belgium increased to 50,626<sup>37</sup>. The difficult political and social situation in Poland after the May Coup in 1926 contributed to the fact that the Polish government consented to the recruitment in Poland of unskilled workers for Belgian mines, which continued to struggle with a shortage of labour. Travel expenses were covered by the Belgian side<sup>38</sup>.

In 1939, according to available statistics, the number of Poles in Belgium stood at 61,809. They were clustered into the Hainaut, Liège, Limburg and Brabant provinces; whereas Poles of Jewish descent resided in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent<sup>39</sup>.

At the turn of 1939/1940 an outflow of Polish miners to work in mines in France was recorded. They were disappointed with the treatment by the authorities in Belgium, which charged high fees for renewing identity cards. The concerns about the tense international situation and the growing security threat from Nazi Germany were also significant. Moreover, despite the signing of the Polish-Belgian Social Security Convention at the turn of 1932/1933, old-age pensions were still not being paid as the Convention had not been ratified. The efforts of the Polish consular authorities to improve the situation of Polish workers fell on deaf ears in Brussels. During one of the talks with the Polish Consul in Brussels, Feliks Chiczewski, the then Belgian Minister of

<sup>33</sup> J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją...*, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> E. Kołodziej, J. Zakrzewska, *Raporty konsulatów...*, p. 126. According to W. Eder's findings, at the end of the 1930s the Belgian authorities organized transports for the families of Polish miners (about 5 thousand people). W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPIP, ref. no. AHM 433, M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> According to W. Eder's findings, in 1924 the number of Poles amounted to about 5,000, of which 74% (3700) worked in coal mines. W. Eder, *Polonia belgijska. ...*, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> For the dynamics of Polish migration and its distribution in Belgium until 1939 see, inter alia W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 21–33, 48–67; *Statistics on emigration in the consular district [1933]*, fol. 3, AAN, MSZ, ref. no. 10083. According to the Belgian Statistical Office, in 1937, the Polish community of about 50,000 people was the third most numerous foreign community in Belgium, after the citizens of France (70,000) and the Netherlands (64,000). *Poles in third place in Belgium, 6 IV 1937*, fol. 4, AAN, OPnRnO, ref. no. 66.

<sup>38</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 29–30; I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 17; *Annex to the administrative report for 1929*, fol. 4–5; AAN, MSZ, ref. no. 10379.

<sup>39</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 33; J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją...*, p. 19. According to the 1939 consular census, the number of Poles living in Belgium was about 35,000. Another 35,000 was made up of Polish citizens of Jewish descent. R. Dzwonkowski, *Polacy w Belgii...*, p. 11.

Labour and Social Welfare, August Balthazar, reaffirmed that Poles were considered a “temporary element” and as soon as the Belgian government considered them “superfluous”, it would take steps aimed at expelling them from Belgium<sup>40</sup>.

The geological conditions in the Belgian mines affected working conditions, which were extremely difficult, with the most challenging pits located in the district of Liège. The miners in those mines were plagued by poor ventilation, high temperatures, high levels of coal dust in the air (the main cause of mortality from black lung) and an uncomfortable working position due to low corridors (60 cm and lower, miners had to work on their knees)<sup>41</sup>. In some mines the work was particularly dangerous due to the presence of explosive gases (*grisou*)<sup>42</sup>.

Wages were regulated by dedicated committees – the *Comités Nationaux d’Industrie* – which included representatives of workers, employers and the government. Wages in the mining industry, with a minimum wage guaranteed by a collective agreement of 1920, increased from around 750–1140 Belgian francs in 1924 to around 1100–1400 Belgian francs in the 1930s. The salary was supplemented by social benefits: the family allowance, *allocation familiale*, ranged from 18.75 Belgian francs for one child to 792.75 Belgian francs for ten children<sup>43</sup>.

Adapting to new living conditions was not easy. In the absence of knowledge of the language, customs and culture of Belgium, the longing for the homeland was particularly felt<sup>44</sup>, and the adjustment was further impeded by the low social position of foreign workers and the consequent lack of opportunities for professional advancement<sup>45</sup>.

An ersatz of the homeland was created by involvement in cultural, educational, religious and political associations. The greatest initiative in creating social institutions was manifested by the *westfalaks*, a group which was best organized. The largest central social organization of Poles in Belgium was the Central Association of Polish

---

<sup>40</sup> [What prompts miners to leave] *n.d.*, fol. 27, AAN, Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels, ref. no. 33; Note of the Minister of Social Welfare Mr. Stańczyk with Achille Delattre, Member of the Belgian Parliament, 8 XI 1939., fol. 2, AAN, Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels, ref. no. 9. During the talks with A. Balthazar, F. Chiczewski presented the position of the Polish government, emphasizing that Polish workers do not come to Belgium as intruders, but rather at the request of the Belgian government and therefore deserve to improve their economic situation. *Demarche faite mardi le 5 mars 1940 auprès de Monsieur Balthazar, ministre du travail*, fol. 41, AAN, Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels, ref. no. 33.

<sup>41</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia...*, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> 1930 maj 26, Bruksela – Raport emigracyjny za rok 1929 Konsulatu RP w Brukseli, Kołodziej E., Zakrzewska J., Raporty konsulatów..., p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 85–87.

<sup>44</sup> W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 101–102; AOPIP, *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, ref. no. AHM 433.

<sup>45</sup> J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją...*, p. 28–31. Generally, it was difficult for foreign workers to achieve a higher social status. Polish miners were obliged to fulfil a one-year contract with one of the Belgian mining companies. However, some of them did not mentally endure the underground work, broke the contract, agreed to pay it off voluntarily and started working in other companies, factories or road and canal construction. W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 83, 90.

Societies and Organizations in Belgium, established in 1926<sup>46</sup>. The opinion of emigrants was shaped by the two most important dailies that were published while still in Westphalia – *Narodowiec* and *Wiarus Polski*, whose editorial offices were located in the mining region of northern France<sup>47</sup>. In 1926, the Polish Catholic Mission in Belgium was established, which took over the pastoral care of Poles in Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg<sup>48</sup>.

In 1924, members of the Communist Party of Poland, Edmund and Tadeusz Engelhard, founded the Polish Cultural and Educational Association in Liège and Charleroi. At the turn of 1927 and 1928, the Communist Party of Belgium established the *Main d'œuvre étrangère* (Polish national section), and its leader Georges Ver-eecken ran the Polish language magazine *Proletariat*. Another communist magazine titled *Informator* was also published in Belgium<sup>49</sup>.

As the years went by and the stay abroad grew longer, Polish migrants adapted to the new environment. They accepted the lifestyle of the country of settlement: the way of dressing, eating, and even the housing design. In Belgium – the “land of beer”, as W. Gut put it – Polish miners willingly accepted the custom of drinking this beverage. Fathers sometimes even let their children taste beer on a teaspoon<sup>50</sup>. The generation born in Belgium (similarly to France) was emotionally attached to the country of birth, and not that of their parents, despite the cultivation of Polish traditions at home. The raising of children in the Polish spirit, mother tongue education, passing on the tradition and history of the country were taken care of by women who were responsible for running the household and usually did not have any gainful employment<sup>51</sup>.

The statistical data available from the Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels show that the number of Polish migrants in Belgium in 1949 totalled 80,000 (most of them economic migrants). The increase in the number of Poles from 60,000 to 80,000 between 1939 and 1949 may be explained by the influx of war migrants and the massive recruitment by Belgian mining companies carried out among the displaced persons of Polish background in the occupation zones in Germany<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Report by W. Marcinkowski for 1936/1937, *Belgium*, [n.d.], fol. 5, AAN, MSZ, ref. no. 10380; M. Żmigrodzki, *Polonia*..., p. 29; W. Eder, *Polonia belgijska*. ..., p. 60; W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii*..., p. 102–112.

<sup>47</sup> W. Eder, *Polonia belgijska*. ..., p. 60. For more about the role of the press among Polish exiles see W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii*..., p. 113–115.

<sup>48</sup> T. Panecki, *Polonia belgijska*..., p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> J. Szumski, *Między stabilizacją*..., p. 31–33.

<sup>50</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPIP, ref. no. AHM 433.

<sup>51</sup> W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii*..., p. 161–172; R. Dzwonkowski (1979), *Geneza i rola przywódczej grupy społecznej w historii polskiej emigracji zarobkowej we Francji (1920–1945)*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, issue 3, p. 78; J. Ponty, *Polonais méconuus*..., p. 161, 390; P. Sękowski (2019), *Les Polonais en France au lendemain de la seconde guerre mondiale (1944–1949)*, Paris: Presse de l'université Paris Sorbonne, p. 135–162.

<sup>52</sup> Report on the situation of the Polish community in Belgium by A. Krajewski, Member of Parliament to the Ambassador, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw Stefan Wierbłowski, Brussels, 14 VI 1949, fol. 8–9, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMSZ), Fonds 8, fasc. 46, vol. 605; W. Eder, *Polonia belgijska*. ..., p. 61; W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii*..., p. 35.

The recognition by Brussels of the Provisional Government of National Unity on 9 July 1945 had repercussions on the re-migration of miners. The course of events and the position of the Belgian government resembled the Polish–French re-migration scenario<sup>53</sup>. Just like Paris, despite the recognition of the government in Warsaw, Brussels was averse to the idea of Polish miners returning to their homeland, even though it formally “did not question the right to re-emigrate at any time”<sup>54</sup>. The Belgian authorities believed that Polish miners benefited from the hospitality of Belgium and thus “incurred liabilities towards it”<sup>55</sup>. Moreover, they assumed that a bilateral re-migration agreement would provide an incentive for Poles to leave<sup>56</sup>.

Brussels’ position reflected the point of view of the mining companies, which did not conceal their negative attitude towards re-migration. They forbade entry into mining settlements and barracks for the distributors of the pro-Warsaw *Gazeta Polska* newspaper, which urged people to return to Poland. Moreover, the communist government in Warsaw was confronted with an effective counter-propaganda by Polish organizations abroad, which were opposed to the return, and which were aligned around the Polish Government-in-Exile<sup>57</sup>.

The organisation of returns to the homeland was taken care of by the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Brussels, in agreement with the Belgian Commissioner for Repatriation (Commissaire Belge au Rapatriement). Concerned about the Belgian government’s reaction, he decided that it was not advisable to conclude a separate remigration agreement and argued that “asking Belgium to conclude an agreement would create [...] a non-existent problem and would only entail restrictions on liberal conditions for leaving Belgium”. The travel costs (2 million Belgian francs) were borne by Belgium. Reimbursement of that amount was claimed in 1952. The claim was justified by a clause in the mining contracts for the reimbursement of travel expenses for the return journey to the country<sup>58</sup>.

According to Idesbald Goddeeris, the first re-migration transports were organized by sea. The free seats on board the ships *Ragne* and *Arage*, which sailed twice

---

<sup>53</sup> For more see, inter alia A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 97–204.

<sup>54</sup> *Letter from the chargé d'affaires a.i. in Brussels inz Edward Bartol to the Director of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, Minister Józef Olszewski, 25 II 1947*, fol. 5–7, AMSZ, Fonds 22, fasc. 1, vol. 21.

<sup>55</sup> *Letter from a Polish Member of Parliament in Brussels A. Krajewski to the Director of Department II of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw Stanisław Gajewski, Brussels, 12 III 1952*, fol. 45–46, AMSZ, Fonds 8, fasc. 46, vol. 605.

<sup>56</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 151.

<sup>57</sup> *Report No. 26 of the Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels, 2 XII 1948*, fol. 12, AMSZ, Fonds 8, fasc. 1, vol. 7; *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 III 1949*, fol. 7 AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Letter from chargé d'affaires a.i. in Brussels inz. Edward Bartol to the Director of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, Minister Józef Olszewski, 25 II 1947*, fol. 5–7, AMSZ, Fonds 22, fasc. 1, vol. 21; *Letter from a Polish Member of Parliament in Brussels A. Krajewski to the Director of Department II of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw Stanisław Gajewski, Brussels, 12 II 1952*, fol. 45–46, AMSZ, Fonds 8, fasc. 46, vol. 605.

a month on the London–Antwerp–Gdynia route, were used. However, at the turn of 1945/1946, with considerable interest in leaving among war and labour migrants, this solution proved insufficient. Thus, railway transports were organized, which consisted of 2nd class carriages. According to the source material and oral accounts, the train route ran through the territory of occupied Germany<sup>59</sup> and Czechoslovakia. They ended up at the border crossing in Czechowice-Dziedzice, where the returnees had their Belgian passports taken away<sup>60</sup>.

At the beginning of the re-migration operation, the Polish government had hoped that about 10,000 Poles would return to Poland from economic emigration<sup>61</sup>. According to the statistics of the Polish Consulate in Brussels, 10,000 Poles did indeed return to Poland in the period 1945–1950, but they were mostly war migrants. The number of returning economic emigrants in the period from July 1946 to December 1949 amounted to 3738 people, of which over 2,000 returned in the first half of 1946<sup>62</sup>.

This unfavourable trend for the Polish authorities remained unaffected by the visit to Poland in January 1947 of a delegation of Polish miners from Belgium, headed by Edward Gierek, who positively assessed the settlement conditions in the country and presented a memorandum on the return of Poles<sup>63</sup>.

There is no doubt that Polish miners feared the loss of their livelihood earned in Belgium after their return to the country, as well as the lack of entitlement to a pension for the years worked outside Poland, which could only be guaranteed by a bilateral convention, the conclusion of which was requested by a delegation of Polish miners from Belgium<sup>64</sup>. They were also put off by alarming news from the first re-emigrants disappointed with the difficult conditions in Stalinist Poland<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> In 1947, the passage through the American and British occupation zones was secured by an agreement regulating the rules of transporting re-emigrants and their property, which the Polish authorities signed with Joint Export–Import Agency, *Agreement for the transportation of Polish national re-emigrants, crossing the U.S. zone of occupied Germany and the U.K. zone of occupied Germany*, 2 V 1947, fol. 1–4; AMSZ, Fonds 22, fasc. 1, vol. 23.

<sup>60</sup> *Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Boleslaw) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno)*, personal archives of Agnieszka Kulesa; *Repatriation plan from Belgium for 1947, 26 February 1947*, fol. 5; AMSZ, Fonds 22, fasc. 1, vol. 22. According to W. Gut, the train on which his family was returning first set off to a destination in France, from where they departed together with other French re-emigrants. *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPiP, ref. no. 433.

<sup>61</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 147.

<sup>62</sup> *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 III 1949*, fol. 7, AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41, I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 149–150. W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> W. Eder, *Osadnictwo emigrantów...*, p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 March 1949*, fol. 7; AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41; *Memorandum of Polish Exiles in Belgium on re-emigration, Warsaw 17 I 1947*, fol. 1, AMSZ, Fonds 22, fasc. 1, vol. 21; I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 149–150. W. Eder, *Dzieje Polonii...*, p. 37; W. Eder, *Osadnictwo emigrantów...*, p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 March 1949*, fol. 6–7, AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41.

Although, as Idesbald Goddeeris points out, Belgium's position on remigration was more flexible than that of France and it did not interfere with the organisation of Polish returns<sup>66</sup>, the Warsaw government's re-migration policy, which was not able to provide returnees with similar standards of work and housing to Belgium, did not motivate Poles to return. Their main motivation was the longing for the homeland<sup>67</sup>. A significant role was also played by the promise of professional advancement made, among others, by the National Council of Poles in Belgium, which was supportive of the government in Warsaw<sup>68</sup>. As is clear from W. Gut's accounts, his father decided to return to Poland lured by the vision of better living conditions<sup>69</sup>. This is also confirmed by Idesbald Goddeeris, who believes that the miners became an easy target for communist propaganda. Disappointed with the "Sanation" Poland, from which poverty banished them to the slavish work in foreign mines, they became sympathetic to communist ideology. However, the miners were unaware that communism in Poland was a totalitarian system<sup>70</sup>.

The first disappointment, even horror at the new reality, took place at the station in Czechowice-Dziedzice. Officials of the State Repatriation Office (PUR) ordered the re-emigrants there to change from passenger train cars to cattle cars, which took them to their final settlement destinations in Upper and Lower Silesia. The idealised image of Poland, nurtured by the miners, could not withstand the confrontation with the communist reality<sup>71</sup>. Hopes for the promised professional and social advancement failed to materialize<sup>72</sup>. As stated in the report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels, the re-emigrants complained about the difficulties in obtaining supplies, mainly the lack of fat products. Suffering from unjustified aversion and hostility on the part of Poles, they experienced a "civilization shock". Young people born in Belgium struggled to adjust (also at school)<sup>73</sup>.

Returnees from the West (including Belgium) were treated in Poland as a "hostile element"<sup>74</sup>. According to the documents of the Security Ministry and administrative

---

<sup>66</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 151; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 120–130, 179–243.

<sup>67</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 151; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 251–256, 293.

<sup>68</sup> See, inter alia AAN, *Testimonies of Franciszek Szymkowiak*, fol. 208–234, Testimonies and Accounts Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR), ref. no. R-246; *Testimony of Natalia Smolińska*, fol. 172–185, *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPiP, ref. no. 433.

<sup>70</sup> I. Goddeeris, *Polonia...*, p. 149.

<sup>71</sup> *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 III 1949*, fol. 3–7, AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41; *Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Boleslaw) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno)*, personal archives of A. Kulesa; R. Beldzikowski, *Reemigranci z Francji...*, p. 167; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 269–366.

<sup>72</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPiP, ref. no. 433.

<sup>73</sup> *Report of the Polish Consulate in Brussels to the Department for Polish Diaspora Abroad concerning the Polish community in Belgium, Brussels, 30 III 1949*, fol. 3–7, AMSZ, Fonds 20, fasc. 3, vol. 41; *Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Boleslaw) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno)*, personal archives of A. Kulesa.

<sup>74</sup> For more about "alienation" in the homeland see. A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 301–316.

records, they aroused the greatest interest of the authorities in the 1940s and 1950s<sup>75</sup>. At the height of the conflict between the two geopolitical blocs, which had been going on since 1948<sup>76</sup>, the biographies of the re-emigrants from France and Belgium, working in managerial positions, including at the KWB lignite mine in Turoszów, were closely scrutinized<sup>77</sup>. Even W. Gut's father, despite being a member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), became an easy target of unfounded accusations during one of the interrogations by the Security Service<sup>78</sup>.

The disillusionment with the living conditions in Poland was also culturally motivated. The western territories were also home to repatriates from behind the Bug River, from Westphalia, Belgium and Yugoslavia. There was also no shortage of Germans, who still inhabited Upper and Lower Silesia at that time<sup>79</sup>. The chic way of dressing of the returnees, which stood out in comparison with the repatriates from the Eastern Borderlands and the resettlers from central Poland – men and young boys wearing characteristic berets and jackets, under which they wore scarves, and women and young girls in nicely tailored dresses, to which they wore knee-high socks, gloves and hats – as well as communicating in French, provoked malicious comments from Poles. The re-emigrants from Belgium decorated the apartments they received in a design typical for Belgian and French mining estates – with wall panelling, net curtains in the windows and cupboards and tables adorned with tablecloths or napkins<sup>80</sup>.

Due to their use of the French language, the returnees from Belgium were identified by Poles with the community of re-emigrants from France: they were not referred to by the inhabitants of Silesia as “the Belgians”, but as “the French”. Although there was an association of re-emigrants from Belgium in Lower Silesia, the majority of people who returned from there joined associations of re-emigrants from France. For them, too, the 14th of July, the French national holiday, was an opportunity to feast together<sup>81</sup>.

This clash of “two civilizations” in the Recovered Territories caused the re-emigrants from Belgium, trying to suppress the grief of returning to the homeland,

---

<sup>75</sup> J. Wróbel (2005), *Działania Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego przeciwko repatriantom z Zachodu w latach 1945–1953*, Terlecki, R. (red.) *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec emigracji politycznej i Polonii*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, p. 239.

<sup>76</sup> See, inter alia D. Jarosz, M. Pasztor (2001), *Robineau, Bassaler i inni. Z dziejów stosunków polsko-francuskich w latach 1948–1953*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

<sup>77</sup> R. Klementowski (2014), *Zgorzelecka bezpieka 1945–1990*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, p. 90.

<sup>78</sup> Despite being a member of the party, “he was accused of something and arrested”, and then executed by a firing squad in the Warszawa-Mokotów Detention Centre. His remains were buried on the ‘Łączka’ plot of land in the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw. *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPIP, ref. no. 433.

<sup>79</sup> A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 301–316. For more on the presence of Germans in Lower Silesia see, inter alia T. Willenborg, *Fremd in...*

<sup>80</sup> A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 301; *Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Bolesław) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno)*, personal archives of A. Kulesa.

<sup>81</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPIP, ref. no. 433; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 334.

to spend most of their time among themselves or among the Germans, or the re-emigrants from France and Westphalia. They spoke French at home and cultivated the traditions brought from Belgium and northern France. The reason for such behaviour could have been the shared disillusionment with the Stalinist reality and the lack of understanding and tolerance for their customs, culture and traditions on the part of the Borderlanders and displaced people from central Poland<sup>82</sup>.

#### 4. The oral account of Waclaw Szotek<sup>83</sup>

The Szotek family left Poland for Belgium in 1937. It was a Mr. Gołąb (first name unknown), a friend of the family, who persuaded Jan Szotek, Waclaw's father, to leave. Although Jan's wife, Aniela, was not convinced that it was a good idea to abandon a stable life and a steady source of income for the family from Jan's work in a bakery in Bolesław (he was a master baker), eventually the couple and their two-year-old daughter Janina left Ujków Stary (now part of the Bolesław municipality in Małopolskie province). As recalled by Waclaw Szotek, the living conditions in Poland on the eve of the outbreak of World War II were hard: *There were no jobs here, after all, there was poverty [...] in Poland before the war*. Still, the emotional attachment to the fatherland could not withstand the promise of a better life – the Szotek family left.

Nothing is known about the family's journey to Belgium – its course, conditions and duration are unknown. The Szotek family arrived in Charleroi, where Jan was given a job in a nearby mine and where Waclaw was born shortly after their arrival. It is most likely that Gołąb's network of contacts was involved in organizing the journey to Belgium and finding a job for Jan there, and the family did not use the services of the employment office. This is evidenced by the fact that the Szotek couple and their daughter (Aniela, Jan's wife, was in all probability already pregnant with Waclaw at the time of departure) left together.

In his accounts, Waclaw Szotek confirmed that the main place of work for immigrants in Belgium was the mines and that the reports of harsh conditions there were true:

*All those who came to Belgium, the emigrants, went to work in the mine. It was difficult. The work was hard. The coal seams were very low, [...] [the miners] had a kind of small shovels here, on their elbows, and they had to use them to scrape the coal.*

---

<sup>82</sup> *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPiP, ref. no. 433; A. Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens...*, p. 302; *Morze łez – opowiadania Bolesława (Małgorzata) Michnicka-Bąk, żona Jana Bąka* (2015), Dudek, T. (red.) *Tu wszystko było inne. Wspomnienia bolesławieckich reemigrantów z Francji*, Bolesławiec: Muzeum Bolesławiec, p. 110–111; R. Beldzikowski, *Reemigranci z Francji...*, p. 171.

<sup>83</sup> Waclaw Szotek's account is chaotic and incoherent, therefore, in order to give it a chronological character, the authors decided to include explanations that will allow the reader to understand the migration story of the family.

After arriving in Charleroi and signing a contract with the mine, the family was accommodated in a workers' tenement:

*There were a lot of Poles living in the mine tenement houses on Marcinelle [Charleroi district – A.K.]. They were made of brick, two-storey high. The conditions were good. Whether people from other countries lived there, I don't remember, because they all spoke Belgian [French or Walloon – A.K., A.N.], and the Poles at home talked to each other in Polish.*

In the first years of her stay in Belgium, Aniela Szotek did not feel at ease. Shopping proved a big challenge for her, because she spoke neither Walloon nor French. Over time, however, the family not only learned the basics of the language, but also started to adopt some local habits, including those related to clothing and leisure activities. One of such customs was the aforementioned enjoyment of beer<sup>84</sup>. However, at home, they communicated in Polish. Little Waclaw, while listening to his mother and sister's conversations, learned to use feminine grammar forms. The family did not maintain relations with the Belgians. According to Waclaw, the local inhabitants were not interested in making friends with the newcomers, manifesting a negative attitude towards them: *The Belgians<sup>85</sup> did not respect Poles, I do not know why. Who was to blame?*

In Charleroi little Waclaw attended pre-school establishments run by nuns, but his education was interrupted with the onset of the German occupation of Belgium in 1940:

*I also went to kindergarten, we were taught by nuns. There were nuns everywhere. I went to two kindergartens. And then, after a month or so in another kindergarten, they told us to go away. Because the Germans were there.*

During the German occupation, Jan Szotek, Waclaw's father, was deported as forced labour to work in German coal mines, from where he returned suffering from ill health and exhaustion in 1942. After two weeks with his family at home, he was taken to hospital, where he died of pneumonia. He was 35 years old.

The Szotek family was left destitute. Aniela Szotek was forced not only to look for new housing for her and her two children, but also to find a gainful activity that would secure the family's livelihood. She turned to trade. This is how Waclaw recalled the times of the occupation, including his fears about the possibility of the family being handed over to the Germans:

*Because my father died there, in Belgium, he is buried there, they threw us aside. And so we found a small house there in Couillet [Charleroi district – A.K.], and we stayed there,*

---

<sup>84</sup> In the family collection of Waclaw Szotek there is a distinctive photo, depicting Jan and his friends dressed in their festive clothes, standing at a table with beer mugs on it.

<sup>85</sup> Whenever referring to Belgians, Waclaw Szotek was using the word „Belgioki” – a jargon name for Belgian nationals.

*because the house was empty. This house was kind of silver, blue [...]. The occupation was tough and the living conditions were hard. Very hard. My mum was the kind of person who was good at trading. She would go to France for food. Later it was very hard, during the occupation. We sheltered in strangers' houses, my mother hid us there, so that no one could... because we were Polish. And not all Belgians were good people, they were also mean.*

A radically different picture of wartime life in Belgium emerges from an account of the period when the American troops stayed in Charleroi – it seems that it was then that he had a chance to experience some joys of childhood:

*Later, there was a casino on Marcinelle and the Americans were dining there, right after the liberation [in September 1944 – A.K., A.N.]. When the Germans were being chased away from Charleroi, I was there, some would hang out Belgian flags and the Germans would shoot at those flags... It was towards the end of the war. The Americans were good men, because there were a lot of Poles too, and they would put up screens there, and if there was a cowboy movie or something, they would pull the sheets down, they would tell me to hang on, and they would pull me up, just like that, through the window... And I would sit between them, between the military men, I would watch these cowboy movies! Such wild things were going on there.*

Yet, in still difficult war conditions, it was impossible to have a childhood filled only with study and play. Little Waclaw supported his mother in her efforts to provide for her family. This is how he recalled one of his “commercial” endeavours:

*There, in Belgium, after the liberation, when Americans were escorting those German prisoners of war, because there were always two train cars of soldiers, in the back it was written that the whole squad of Germans was in those cars. It was a freight station on Marcinelle, I always went [there – A.K.] for scrap metal. I was collecting scrap metal on the railway, at the station, I was selling that scrap metal, buying beer, and carrying that beer. Those Germans there, shouting to give them that beer, through the window, they had such bars, to give them that beer. I say no, there is no beer! The Americans in the back were looking on, laughing really hard! I always walked up to them and they gave me cigarettes for that beer. Loaded full, I would walk back with those cigarettes! I gave those cigarettes to my mom, my mom was trading cigarettes somewhere. I enjoyed it.*

After moving to Couillait, Waclaw Szotek went to school. He admitted that at school he did not make friends with Belgian children, distrustful of foreigners, and found friends among Polish children living in the area. In spite of this, young Waclaw remembered the Belgian school with great respect, mainly due to the teachers' ability to maintain discipline in the classroom and the serious approach to the schooling obligation by the state despite the ongoing war. This is how he recalled the end of one of his truancy “expeditions”:

*Once I played truant, and there is a bridge in Couillait – we already lived in Couillait, we no longer lived in the mine tenement houses, but we lived independently, in a nice small house by the railway, so once I did not go to school... Damn! I see the police, the gendarmerie are coming. And they ask, where is your son? And [mom] had to pay a fine of 50 francs. She paid, and I was watching from that bridge there. So when it comes to school, there was discipline.*

After the end of the war, in 1945, Aniela Szotek decided to return to Poland with her children. The yearning for the homeland played a major role in this decision. As Waclaw reports, the family came back to Poland by the first railway transport from Belgium, organized by the Soviet army. The family was not charged for the journey, and each of its members received appropriate Soviet travel documents. The Russians gladly offered the transport to the Poles staying in Belgium, because they needed to collect enough people to entitle them to leave. This is how Waclaw recalls the event:

*There were barracks in Charleroi, there were ex-German barracks, and this is where they [the Russians – A.K.] recruited. How they got there, to those barracks, is unknown. They did not want to give them a steam engine or a railway car, because there were too few of them, and that is why they recruited Poles. They announced that they were going through Poland. They were soldiers – officers, colonels... So [mom – A.K.] decided to go. Grandpa was very ill [in Poland – A.K.], so we're going to visit Grandpa! And we went to those barracks. They issued us and my mother such passports as if we were going as Russians, not Poles, that if we were going as Russians, they would let us go, because they were ordered to leave Belgium in two weeks' time. There was no mention of Poles at all yet. If we said that we were Poles, it wouldn't be possible, the Belgians wouldn't allow it. I don't know why, mother didn't talk about it. It was in 1945, in the autumn, in September. We said we were Russian. Because those Russians, they didn't want to give them a train, you know? [Moscow refused to send railcars for fewer people – A.K.] There weren't enough of them. What did they have – 3 or 4 cars? And there were more Poles, wanting to go to Poland. And when they issued those passports, they gave them a bigger number, you understand, well, then Belgium provided a steam engine and all. We left illegally [...], as Russians.*

The train carrying the Russians and Poles arrived in Germany, but, for unexplained reasons, the rail cars with the Poles were unfastened and left at an unknown station in Germany. The Russians unfastened their wagons with the engine and departed in the direction of the Soviet Union, while a locomotive from Poland was brought to pull the remaining cars. Waclaw recalls:

*They later stopped in Germany, they did, I don't know what they did, they uncoupled their cars, the Russians, those leaders, went over to their cars [...], took off to the East and left us behind. We spent a week there, in Germany, left to our own devices, next to the city. The Germans would come and trade, people would give what they had, to those Germans, they had some food in their wagons. Later they called somewhere, mother said.*

*And then we look: a steam engine. A steam engine came and pulled us, took us back to Poland from there. And some people, who were smart, said they wouldn't wait, no way, because it's over, they had left us. They got up and walked back to Belgium. [...] Well, after the war, life was already good in Belgium. The worst situation was during the war, right? We waited a week for the engine. They were burning fires next to the rail cars, the Germans would come there to trade, because the Poles had a lot of savings, they had supplies, and they traded with those Germans, they came out of town in large numbers, they had jewellery, various rings, trinkets, they exchanged them.*

Wacław Szotek was not able to estimate how many Poles came back to the homeland with this first transport – he only remembered that *there were many of these rail cars*. In Poland, the family found themselves in a railway station in Bukowno, and then went to Ujków Stary nearby. During the journey across the country, more rail cars were detached and in the end only two reached the final destination:

*It was funny, because when we got to Bukowno, only two rail cars were left. On the way when we stopped at the stations they must have uncoupled them or something. And they would leave people in these rail cars, you know. And waited for some family members to come and collect them. I think so, because when we arrived, we were too collected by grandma, aunties and others, a lot of people showed up to help us take everything we had in these rail cars home.*

The reception of the family by the Polish community was far from cordial. The Szotek family encountered openly manifested hostility on the part of the inhabitants. As newcomers, they were “strangers” – they looked and behaved differently, they were wealthier. Wacław recalls the time just after their arrival in Ujków Stary:

*[...] There was one such son of a bitch there, in Ujków Stary. He said: if you don't leave Ujków Stary, I'll report you to the Security Service. And there you have it... Mother got scared, and all... Because he said that we were enticing rebellion, showing people how poor they were. And mother was overdoing it a little, dressing like some queen! Fur coats, roses, hats. Damn, she had so many shoes, this and that! Different handbags, come on! Well, she liked to show off, what can you do. And she dressed us kids like that as well, I can see that from the photos.*

Due to this explicit hostility, in 1946 Aniela Szotek decided to move with her family to the Recovered Territories, where they remained until 1952. They settled first in Zalesie and then in Bystrzyca Kłodzka. Thanks to the fact that she still had Soviet documents, she was easily granted a farm belonging to expelled Germans. As Wacław reports, the manner in which the German inhabitants of the Recovered Territories were being expelled may have shocked the incoming population:

*When we first came here, we had Russian passports. In order to make use of this passport, mother thought: we'll go [...], because the Germans were supposed to be expelled,*

*so we'll go and get a farm there. And so we went there, and got a farm with twenty hectares of land. But everybody in that village in Zalesie was still there, all the Germans were still there, just like that. And so we lived upstairs, and the Germans downstairs. After some time, the expulsions started, all Germans had to go. They went to Bystrzyca, to the station. And they ordered them to take what they could with them. And at the station the Soviets took it all away. They took it all away, they herded them into cars like slaves, robbing them.*

Work on a large farm, robbed of the most valuable resources and inventory by Soviet soldiers, turned out to be too much for one inexperienced person. Eventually, Aniela Szotek gave up work on the farm and got a job in a match factory in Bystrzyca:

*Later, my mother was not happy about our return to Poland. When my grandfather died after a year because he was sick, she had a very hard time. A woman who had never worked on a farm, how could she manage, 24 hectares! The Germans had their own workers, 10 people worked there, and her alone? What would she do there? With young children? On the farm? That's not all. Because later, as we were there on this farm in Zalesie, a month went by, everything the Germans had left was still there, they only took a pillow, one duvet and a few blankets, and all the linen was left. Even the clock on the wall kept ticking, everything. So a month goes by and then we see one car, another car and yet another! They drive uphill and there were 12 cows, 2 oxen, special ones, to pull the carts uphill, they took them all away. They took the cows, the swine, the piglets, we're lucky they left the hens and chickens, but that's because they ran and were hard to catch! Other than that, they took everything. Left behind only a goat and some smaller things.*

According to Waław, fearing arrests by the Security Service (UB), which kept the Western re-emigrant community under close surveillance, there was an unofficial ban on communication between the re-emigrants from Belgium:

*When we lived there, in Bystrzyca, it was forbidden to visit those people who returned. To avoid contact. I would go to see my friends [and they would say – A. K.]: don't come here again, absolutely don't come. I ask: why can't I visit you? Because they are watching you and we can't see each other, I can't keep in touch with you and you can't keep in touch with me. They also came from Belgium. I did not go there again, to this village. What could I do? We were still living in town, in Bystrzyca.*

Waław's return to school was not a pleasant experience either. It still hurts him to recall the lack of understanding on the part of his peers for his linguistic awkwardness: born and raised in Belgium, he spoke fluent French, but used feminine grammatical forms in Polish, which, in a Polish school, made him vulnerable to taunts. He could not seek the help and support of teachers, who themselves had huge problems in maintaining discipline in the classroom. Moreover, as his account shows, some teachers were not actually interested in helping him, and even encouraged aggressive behaviour towards him:

*School was a disaster too. No way to learn or anything. [...] It was a circus. I would run away and they [the teachers – A.K.] would not even reprimand me [...]. We would fight, jump on desks, run around – nothing! Not even some time out. Nope, they acted as if there was nothing [wrong – A.K.]. If I felt like it, I just went home and... well, there was simply no way for me to stay in school. Sometimes I would change schools three times in a school year: this one, maybe this one, maybe another one. That's no way to learn, right? To go to school for two months and stop? It was hard. We still lived in the west [of Poland – A.K.], it was in 1952, we did not finish school, they made it so hard for us, it's unbelievable. They even provoked students to beat us up.*

Wacław's accounts suggest that the Security Service also monitored the re-emigrants at school. Still in Bystrzyca, where he attended an evening school, one of the teachers warned his class, made up of children born in the West, in Canada, Belgium, the United States and other countries, to *watch out for cars coming to take the boys away. I don't know if they wanted to take me away from Poland somewhere, because all those who were born abroad were there. I was fourteen then.* In 1952, the Szotek family left the Recovered Territories and eventually returned to Ujków Stary, their home village. In the Silesian mines, where Wacław worked throughout his professional life, suspicion against Belgian re-emigrants, expressed in allegations of sabotage, continued unabated: *They kept saying I was sabotaging their work, this and that ... even when I was retiring in 1984, a foreman yelled at me, switched off the lamps, checked what I was doing, whether I was not involved in sabotage ... I thought: what fools. It was awful...*

Wacław Szotek's testimony is similar in its narrative to other accounts of returnees from France and Belgium<sup>86</sup>. It focuses on the childhood memories, the preschool years in Belgium, the time of occupation, the entry and stay of American troops, followed by the decision to return to the homeland and disillusionment with the reality in Poland and a sense of alienation in the country that should be "one's own". As Anna Kurpiel points out, such testimonies offer a very subjective view of the childhood spent in the country of birth and the day-to-day life in a communist state. The disappointment with Stalinist reality, resulting from, as the author puts it, the "French experience structure" of life in Poland at that time, triggered nostalgia for the country where the re-emigrants spent their childhood and youth<sup>87</sup>.

This subjectivity is also perceptible in Wacław Szotek's account, in which the regret and bitterness connected with his return to Poland resound. However, there is also something else that resonates in it: resentment towards his father about his

<sup>86</sup> Cf., inter alia *Testimony of Zdzisław Cedler*, The History Meeting House Oral History Archives (DSH AHM), ref. no. AHM 1140; *Testimony of Jan Gallus*, DSH AHM, ref. no. AHM 1138; *Testimony of Aleksander Jarczak*, DSH AHM, ref. no. AHM 1220; *Testimony of Stefan Włodarczyk*, DSH AHM, ref. no. AHM 1223; *Testimony of Bogdan Król*, AOPIP, ref. no. AHM 408; *Testimony of Janina Grunin*, DSH AHM, ref. no. AHM 434; *Testimony of Wiktor Gut*, AOPIP, ref. no. AHM 433.

<sup>87</sup> A. Kurpiel, *Polscy „Francuzi”...*, p. 229.

decision to emigrate (*Why go there at all?! What a foolish man [Gołąb – A.K.] talked him into it.*) and the related sense of loss – both of his father and the peaceful life in Poland. There are no happy memories of teenage years and a career in Poland. This personal testimony, which concerns not only one's own recollections, but also the stories of the "others" – the family<sup>88</sup>, has brought back painful memories.

Their fate also draws attention to issues related to identity. The feeling of "otherness" and "alienation", known to them from their stay in Belgium, after returning to Poland turned out to be so strong that it did not allow for integration in their home country. In other words, and in sociological terms, their "otherness" and "alienation" in post-war Poland were defined by the heritage of their country of origin combined with culture and social realities of the country from which they returned<sup>89</sup>. When they arrived in Belgium or northern France, they were called "Poles", and once they returned, to their fellow countrymen in their own homeland they became "the French". The issue of adaptation and identity of Poles coming from France and Belgium fits into Abdelmalek Sayad's concept of "double absence". This scholar pointed out the exceptional legal and social situation of children of returning migrants: born and raised in the country of destination of their parents, they remain foreigners there; on the other hand, they also feel foreign and are so treated, as "aliens", in the country of their parents' origin. As Sayad was describing, when the legal status of an emigrant changed in Algeria in 1962, "French Muslims from Algeria, working and living in the metropolitan area" became immigrants there and could take French or Algerian citizenship<sup>90</sup>. Waclaw Szotek shared a similar experience: in Belgium he was a Pole, and in Poland – "the French", "the one from the West".

## 5. Conclusion

The migration story of the Szotek family presented in this article is, on the one hand, part of the universal migration-related experience of the Polish community in the country of destination or settlement<sup>91</sup>. On the other hand, due to specific eco-

<sup>88</sup> A. Kurpiel (2014), *Władysław Ząbek. Biografia (nie)codzienna reemigranta z Francji*, *Wrocław Yearbook of Oral History (Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej)*, issue 4, p. 240; K. Kaźmierska (1996), *Konstruowanie narracji o doświadczeniu wojennej biografii. Na przykładzie analizy biografii kresowych*, Czyżewski, M., Piotrowski, A., Rokuszewska-Pawełek, A. (red.), *Biografia a tożsamość narodowa*, Łódź: KSK UŁ, p. 94–95.

<sup>89</sup> H. Kubiak, A. K. Paluch, G. Babiński (1980), *Procesy asymilacji i ich odbicie w refleksji teoretycznej we współczesnych naukach społecznych*, Kubiak H., Paluch A. K. (red.), *Założenia teorii asymilacji*, seria: „Biblioteka Polonijna”, Komitet Badania Polonii PAN, t. 7, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk: Ossolineum, p. 55–56.

<sup>90</sup> A. Sayad (1999), *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, Paris: Seuil, p. 126–132, 164–172, 352–365.

<sup>91</sup> The fundamental sociological monograph on everyday life of Polish emigrants is "Chtop polski w Europie i Ameryce" authored by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (W.I. Thomas, F. Znaniecki

nomic, social and political conditions which are the background of the events described in the article, the Szotek family story is a source of additional information on the migration of Poles to Belgium and their return to Poland in the years 1918–1952. Experiences related to making decisions on emigration, organising travel to the country of destination, facing difficulties with adaptation in a new place of life, making decisions on return and organising return to the homeland, and re-adaptation have been shared by many migrants throughout history, including members of the Szotek family. From a historical point of view, however, the cited oral history testimony, complementary to the analysis of administrative documents, allows to deepen the knowledge about the specificity of migration to and return from Belgium. This applies above all to the knowledge of everyday life in Belgium, especially during World War II, and the organization of the return to Poland, which in the case of the Szotek family took place in a manner different from that described in the available sources and literature.

The presented story also reveals the complexity of the migration process, which cannot be reduced to the influence of isolated factors (e.g. economic). Additionally, the story of the Szotek family indicates the existence of a strong and inseparable relationship between the individual and family decision to migrate or return and important political, social and economic factors. In this context, special attention should be placed on the active recruitment activities of the Belgian side, the role of social contacts in the decision to emigrate and the importance for the decision to return due to the difficult economic situation of the Szotek family in Belgium after the death of Jan Szotek, as well as the co-occurring nostalgia of Aniela Szotek for her homeland.

The social and political background of the processes and events described in the paper, as well as the outlined migration story, point to several issues that remain relevant to date. Indeed, history provides interesting materials for reflection on the issues currently discussed in expert and academic debates, such as the conclusion of bilateral migration agreements, recruitment of foreign workers and their integration with the host community, the obligation to educate foreign children, the return and reintegration of children of Polish citizens born abroad.

However, one should also question why the issues presented here are absent from the collective memory of Poles. Moreover, with the death of the descendants of re-emigrants, their associations cease to exist. An example is the *Dom Bretanii* association, founded by Bogdan Król, which operated since the 1990s, undertaking

---

(1976), *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, vol. 1–5, ed. J. Chałasiński, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza). Their research was based on letters from Polish emigrants collected and analysed at the beginning of the XX century, which are today treated as an important historical material for researching the history of the Polish diaspora. "Chłop polski..." addresses, among other things, issues related to emigration to a "distant" country, learning the basics of a "distant" country's language, assimilation and adaptation of Poles as well as the change of their values and attitudes in the country of settlement.

numerous initiatives to commemorate the arrival of Poles from France<sup>92</sup>. After the death of its founder, the association was dissolved<sup>93</sup>. The first re-migration transports from France and Belgium are commemorated by a plaque built into the Stara Kopalnia Museum in Wałbrzych wall in 1986.

The role of migration historians and migration scholars involved in other academic disciplines (e.g. anthropology, sociology, political science) is to continue the research related to this topic and to preserve the memory of Polish migration.

## References

### Sources:

New Files Archive in Warsaw (AAN)

Testimonies and Accounts Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ)

Polish Care for Compatriots in Foreign Lands (OpnRnO)

Polish Diplomatic Legation in Brussels

### Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw (AMSZ):

Political Department, Fonds 8

Rapatriation Office, Fonds 20

Consular Office, Fonds 22

### Diaries, memories:

Dudek, K. (red.) (2015), *Tu wszystko było inne. Wspomnienia bolesławieckich reemigrantów z Francji*, Bolesławiec: Muzeum Bolesławiec.

Krzywicki, L. (przedm.) (1939), *Pamiętniki emigrantów, cz. 2: Francja*, Warszawa: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, p. 641–689.

### The History Meeting House – Oral History Archives (Warsaw):

Testimony of Zdzisław Cedler, ref. no. AHM 1140.

Testimony of Jan Gallus, ref. no. AHM 1138.

Testimony of Aleksander Jarczak, ref. no. AHM 1220.

Testimony of Stefan Włodarczyk, ref. no. AHM 1223.

### Archives of the Remembrance and Future Centre – Oral History Archives (Wrocław):

Testimony of Wiktor Gut, ref. no. AHM 433.

Testimony of Janina Grunin, ref. no. AHM 434.

Testimony of Bogdan Król, ref. no. AHM 408.

<sup>92</sup> R. Bełdzikowski, *Reemigranci z Francji...*, p. 181–183.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Agata Augustyn, employee of the *Stara Kopalnia* Museum in Wałbrzych, 17 VI 2019.

## Personal archives of Agnieszka Kulesa

Testimonies of Waclaw Szotek of 12 VII 2018 (Bolesław) and 14 VII 2018 (Bukowno).

## Journal of Laws

Dziennik Ustaw (Dz. U.), 1923, nr 106, poz. 836, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19231060836/O/D19230836.pdf> [Accessed: 19.08.2019].

## Literature:

- Beldzikowski R. (2015), Reemigranci z Francji, Belgii i Westfalii w Wałbrzychu, Bielawska, S. (red.), *Waldenburgiana-monografie. Wałbrzyskie szkice*, Wałbrzych: DTP Service, p. 155–186, [https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/10010/Wa%C5%82brzyskie%20szkice\\_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/10010/Wa%C5%82brzyskie%20szkice_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [Accessed: 6.09.2019].
- Borodziej, W., Hajnicz, A. (red.) (1998), *Kompleks wypędzenia*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Dzwonkowski R. (1979), *Geneza i rola przywódczej grupy społecznej w historii polskiej emigracji zarobkowej we Francji (1920–1945)*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, issue 3, p. 61–77.
- Dzwonkowski R. (1976), *Polacy w Belgii w ostatnich pięćdziesięciu latach*, „*Studia Polonijne*”, vol. 1, p. 7–25.
- Eder W. (1983), *Dzieje Polonii belgijskiej 1919–1980 (w zarysie)*, Warszawa: Epoka.
- Eder W. (1975), *Osadnictwo emigrantów polskich w Belgii*, „*Przegląd Zachodni*”, issue 5–6, p. 67–83.
- Eder W. (1979), *Polonia belgijska. Skład społeczno-zawodowy, jego przemiany i skutki tych przemian*, „*Przegląd Polonijny*”, issue 3, p. 57–67.
- Eder W. (1981), *Ruch wychodźczy ludności polskiej do Belgii w okresie międzywojennym (1919–1939)*, „*Przegląd Polonijny*”, issue. 4, s. 79–95.
- Filipkowski P. (2014), *Historia mówiona jako historia ratownicza: doświadczenie, opowieść, egzystencja*, *Teksty Drugie*, issue 5, p. 27–46.
- Goddeeris I. (2005), *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Semper.
- Gołasz W. (2016), *Aby podnieść z gruzów Polskę”. O repatriacji Polaków – górników z Francji i Belgii oraz ich rodzin po II wojnie światowej*, „*Czasypismo*”, issue 2(10), p. 22–33.
- Janowska H. (1964), *Polska emigracja zarobkowa we Francji 1919–1939*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza.
- Jarosz D., Pasztor M. (2001), *Robineau, Bassaler i inni. Z dziejów stosunków polsko-francuskich w latach 1948–1953*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Kałwa D. (2017), *Historia mówiona w polskich badaniach dziejów najnowszych*, *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*, issue 7, p. 163–183.
- Kaźmierska K. (1996), *Konstruowanie narracji o doświadczeniu wojennej biografii. Na przykładzie analizy biografii kresowych*, Czyżewski, M., Piotrowski, A., Rokuszewska-Pawefek, A. (red.) *Biografia a tożsamość narodowa*, Łódź: KSK UŁ, p. 85–103.
- Klementowski R. (2014), *Zgorzelecka bezpieka 1945–1990*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej.
- Kołodziej E. (1982), *Wychodźstwo zarobkowe z Polski 1918–1939. Studia nad polityką emigracyjną II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza.

- Kołodziej E., Zakrzewska J. (1982), *Raporty konsulatów polskich w Belgii w Brukseli i Antwerpii w latach 1929–1932*, „Teki Archiwalne”, issue 19, p. 125–176.
- Kubiak H., Paluch A. K., Babiński G. (1980), *Procesy asymilacji i ich odbicie w refleksji teoretycznej we współczesnych naukach społecznych*, Kubiak H., Paluch A. K. (red.), *Założenia teorii asymilacji*, seria: „Biblioteka Polonijna”, Komitet Badania Polonii PAN, t. 7, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk: Ossolineum, p. 53–78.
- Kudela-Świątek W. (2011), *Historyk na rozstaju dróg badawczych. Interdyscyplinarny charakter współczesnej oral history*, P. Plichta (ed.) *Przeszłość we współczesnej narracji kulturowej. Studia i szkice kulturoznawcze*, vol. 2, p. 11–21.
- Kurkowska-Budzan M. (2011), *Informator, świadek historii, narrator – kilka wątków epistemologicznych i etycznych oral history*, *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*, issue 1, p. 9–34.
- Kurpiel K., *Polscy „Francuzi”. Francuska struktura odczuwania w powojennej dolnośląskiej rzeczywistości/The „French” Poles. The French experience structure in the post-war Lower Silesian reality*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331330864\\_Polscy\\_Francuzi\\_Francuska\\_struktura\\_odczuwania\\_w\\_powojennej\\_dolnoslaskiej\\_rzeczywistosci\\_The\\_French\\_Poles\\_The\\_French\\_experience\\_structure\\_in\\_the\\_post-war\\_Lower\\_Silesian\\_reality](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331330864_Polscy_Francuzi_Francuska_struktura_odczuwania_w_powojennej_dolnoslaskiej_rzeczywistosci_The_French_Poles_The_French_experience_structure_in_the_post-war_Lower_Silesian_reality) Accessed: 9.01.2019].
- Kurpiel A. (2014), *Władysław Ząbek. Biografia (nie)codzienna reemigranta z Francji*, „Wrocław Yearbook of Oral History” („Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej”), issue 4, p. 237–265.
- Maj K. (1976), *Polscy komuniści we Francji i Belgii (1919–1944)*, „Ideologia i Polityka”, issue 9, p. 80–90.
- Nisiobęcka A. (2018), *Z Lens do Wałbrzycha. Powrót Polaków z Francji oraz ich adaptacja w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1945–1950*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej.
- Paczoska A. (2003), *Dzieci Jałty. Exodus ludności polskiej z Wileńszczyzny w latach 1944–1947*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Panecki T. (1978), *Polonia belgijska (1918–1939)*, „Przegląd Polonijny”, issue 2, p. 51–63.
- Ponty J. (1988), *Polonais méconnus. Histoire des travailleurs immigrés en France dans l’entre-deux-guerres*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne.
- Ruchniewicz M. (2000), *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1955–59*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Volumen.
- Sayad A. (1999), *La double absence. Des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré*, Paris: Seuil.
- Sękowski P. (2019), *Les Polonais en France au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1944–1949)*, Paris: Paris: Presse de l’université Paris Sorbonne.
- Szumski J. (2015), *Między stabilizacją a radykalizmem – polska emigracja górnicza w Belgii*, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Neerlandica Wratislaviensis”, issue 3685, p. 19–37.
- Thomas W.I., Znaniecki F. (1976), *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, Vol. 1–5, ed. J. Chałasiński, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Tracz, B. (red.), (2012), *Kresowianie na Górnym Śląsku*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej.
- Venken M. (2011), *Międzynarodowe i lokalne próby aktywizacji byłych żołnierzy Pierwszej Polskiej Dywizji Pancerniej w Belgii w latach 1947–1970*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość”, issue 1, p. 333–351.
- Willenborg T. (2019), *Fremd in der Heimat. Deutsche im Nachkriegspolen 1945–1958*, Hamburg: Verlag&Druck.

Wróbel J. (2009), *Na rozdrożu historii. Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięi Narodowej.

Wróbel J. (2005), Działania Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego przeciwko repatriantom z Zachodu w latach 1945–1953, Terlecki R. (red.) *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec emigracji politycznej i Polonii*, red. R. Terlecki, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięi Narodowej, p. 185–240.

Żmigrodzki M. (1978), *Polonia w Belgii*, Lublin: Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.

### **Strony internetowe**

<https://www.facebook.com/thelastminers/> [Accessed:26.12.2019].