Iran and India as Places of Refuge for Polish Children During the Second World War

Case Studies Based on Documents and Memoirs

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Abstract

The article presents the fates of Polish children who were deported into the USSR after 17 September 1939 and then evacuated to Iran and India in 1942, following the Sikorski–Mayski Agreement and the "amnesty". The analysis is based on two egodocuments: the diary of Wanda Barbara Kociuba and the memoirs of Franek (Franciszek) Herzog, which make it possible to reconstruct the exiles' journey, living conditions – both in exile and in the camps (Isfahan, Balachadi), education, religious practices, the scouting movement, and holiday celebrations, as well as how the children's paths diverged after the war (they moved mainly to the UK and the US). The article juxtaposes personal accounts with official documents produced by the Polish Government-in-Exile and secondary literature to show how community, school and religion helped the children preserve their identity.

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On 17 September 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland, which had already been attacked by the German Reich on 1 September, as a result of which the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic were occupied by the USSR. Numerous Poles, including women, children and the elderly, were deported deep into Russia, the final destination being often Kazakhstan or Siberia. Living conditions were extremely difficult there, and included hard labor, lack of money, no house of one's own, incessant hunger. Many people of weaker mental health or physical constitution did not survive the ordeal and perished far from home and homeland – among them were both men and women, as well as people of all ages, including children.[1] This was the fate that befell the mother of Franciszek Herzog, one of the main characters in the present paper.[2] Franciszek and his two brothers were orphaned after their father was murdered in the Katyń Massacre. Both Franek and Wanda Barbara Kociuba, the other important person in this text, wrote their memoirs of the wartime years, which – alongside other source documents and publications – serve as the primary research material for exploring the fates of children who were evacuated among others to India and various countries in the Middle East in early 1942.

Egodocuments are very good sources for the reconstruction of history. Diaries, journals, memoirs, reports and accounts allow the researches to examine past events and attempt to recreate an image of bygone years. These documents, however, are highly subjective, and it has to be borne in mind that the facts and events described therein may not be accurately represented. Despite such challenges, these texts present the past from an individual perspective, and supplemented with other source documents can thus provide ample material for an attempt to describe the past, taking into account interpersonal moods and the state of social consciousness, i.e. the human factor in the history of facts (Szulakiewicz, 2013).[3]

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1 For more on deportations, cf. *Deportacje Polaków w głąb Związku Sowieckiego*, 2025.

2 In the present paper, two memoirs are analyzed, both written by children who were deported deep into the USSR and later, following the amnesty, evacuated to India and various countries of the Middle East. The available material is obviously more extensive, although only two egodocuments by Franciszek Herzog and Wanda Barbara Kociuba were selected to allow for a more in-depth analysis of the places where the children stayed and their subsequent fates. The paper does not aim to conduct a formal comparison of the inherent features of these documents, such as the number of pages or the linguistic characteristics, nor does it aim to comment on other similarities and differences between the two sources. Central to this paper is an attempt to reconstruct the children's journey after they had been deprived of their homes and their efforts to create an ersatz security and homeland during these hard times. Cf. also Grudzińska-Gross, Gross, 2008.

3 In her paper, Władysława Szulakiewicz analyzes the problem of utilizing egodocuments in scholarly research. She believes that egodocuments are an important and valuable source, but adequate research skills are essential in their examination (p. 73).

Amnesty was one of the consequences of the signing of the Sikorski–Mayski Agreement of 30 July 1941, which reestablished the diplomatic relations between Poland and the USSR that had been severed on 17 September 1939. As a result, Poles were evacuated among others to Iran and India, which became places of refuge for numerous women and children, while the majority of the menfolk joined the army of General Władysław Anders. In the Circular No. 31 of 29 August 1941 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Republic in London, the Polish-Soviet agreement was commented as follows:

> The release of Poles in Russia – prisoners of war, deportees and political prisoners – began immediately upon the publication of a relevant Soviet decree on 12 August. It is the first practical consequence of the agreement. As can be inferred from messages received from Russia by eminent Polish military and civilian figures, who were released immediately upon the signing of the agreement, the latter was generally welcomed as a necessary political step in the circumstances produced by the German invasion of Russia. Those who had been placed in Russian prisons and concentration camps do not hesitate to inform us that, despite their own ordeal in Russia, they unequivocally support the position taken [...] by the Polish government. The signing of the agreement saved many Poles from the carrying out of death sentences that had already been passed against them by Soviet courts (Circular No. 31..., 1941, p. 172, 174).

Circular No. 14 of 20 April 1942 indicates that 120,000 civilians and three divisions of the Polish Army were evacuated from the USSR. Support was provided by the Allies, particularly the United States. Edward Raczyński, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, observed in a circular: "The present evacuation of three divisions of the Polish Army from Russia to Iran,[4] which were accompanied by more than 120,000 civilians, is an unquestionably positive development" (Circular No. 14..., 1942, pp. 94–95). 116,131 people were transported to Iran – 43,597 during the first evacuation and 69,840 during the second, while 2,694 people were sent there by land via Mashhad (Kociuba, 2020, p. 23). India became the final destination for around 4,600 Poles (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 207).[5]

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4 The memoirs analyzed in the present paper and many source documents use the name of "Persia", even though the country was officially known as Iran since 1935 (*Iran*, n.d.).

5 The 1946 report of the Office for Refugees gives the following figures for the camps/settlements for Polish nationals in India: Balachadi: 1943 – 588 residents; 1944 – 459; 1945 – 327; Valivade: 1943 – 2,534 residents; 1944 – 3,621; 1945 – 3,914.

The situation as of 1942 was summarized by Raczyński in Bulletin No. 4 of 6 November:

> Evacuation from the USSR
> We have evacuated approx. 70,000 military personnel; as for the Polish civilian population, thus far 40,000 people have been evacuated to Persia, this including 18,000 women and 17,000 children, of whom more than 3,000 boys joined the junior cadets. The Polish government aims to evacuate all Polish refugees out of Persia. The British government will receive about 30,000 people in its territories in eastern Africa, where they will find employment on farms and in the agricultural industry. More than 10,000 people have already left, and the evacuation is presently under way. The Poles who remain in Persia after the completion of the evacuation to Africa will be sent to Mexico. As for the departure of other Polish citizens from the USSR, there are great difficulties, particularly as concerns transport across the Soviet territory, especially in winter. The Polish government unequivocally aims to first evacuate the children, and we have a place for 10,000 children in India already secured (Bulletin No. 4..., 1942, pp. 212, 214).

The evacuation from the USSR in 1942 was fraught with difficulties, and the final destination was far away. Many people did not live through the journey, but those who made it were given a chance for survival and further life after the Second World War. Among the survivors were Wanda Barbara Kociuba with her family and Franek Herzog with his brothers Tadek and Wacek. In the years 1939–1947, Wanda wrote a diary containing 219 handwritten pages of recollections and descriptions interspersed with her own poems and drawings (Pamiętnik Basi..., n.d.). Following Kociuba's death, "Pamiętnik Basi"[6] was deposited in Poland with the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw. In 2020, in was published in book format: Wanda Barbara Kociuba, *Pamiętnik z Syberii, Iranu i Libanu*, with a preface, footnotes and commentary by Wojciech Kujawa (Kociuba, 2020). Wanda's short recollections and notes from the years 1947–1953 are annexed to the publication. In 2021, an album version appeared under the title *"Zamiast Twojego uśmiechu, Polsko, mamy łzy i uśmiech niedoli". Pamiętnik z Syberii, Iranu i Libanu*, again prefaced and compiled by Wojciech Kujawa. Franek Herzog's memoirs are available

6 The original version of "Pamiętnik Basi" was handed over to the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw by her family in 2018, as part of the project "The Archive Full of Remembrance" (Zamiast Twojego uśmiechu..., 2021).

in English in Anuradha Bhattacharjee's book titled *The Second Homeland. Polish Refugees in India*, which was published in New Delhi in 2012.

The accounts by Wanda and Franek make it possible to reconstruct: 1) how Polish children ended up in Iran and India, starting with the deportation deep into the USSR; through 2) the amnesty of 1941 and evacuation to the countries of final destination, with stopovers in transit camps in Mashhad on the way to Isfahan, Iran and Balachadi, India; life in the receiving country, including 3) settlements for refugees in Iran and India; 4) school and education; 5) leisure activities; 6) cultivation of Polish traditions: religion, homeland, the scouting movement; 7) holiday celebrations; to 8) postwar fates.

The deportation was a harrowing experience for both the adults and the children. Entire families – adults, children, the elderly and babies – were unexpectedly woken up at night, deprived of their homes and deported to unknown regions. The conditions of transport were harsh and inhumane. As many as 30 people had to travel in one freight car, which was adapted to transporting people – as Franek noted – by making a hole for excrement in the floor, converting long tables into beds and placing a stove in the middle. At the last station before the border, the deportees asked through cracks in the walls to be handed some Polish soil to take with them into exile (Bhattacharjee, 2012, pp. 52–53). Wanda described her deportation in the following words:

> I was repeatedly woken up by groans, heavy sighs and the coughing of children and the elderly… The train keeps moving on and on. I'm crying, I'm sobbing uncontrollably.
>
> There were about 40 people in the car. We had one stove, which was our only salvation, for we could melt snow to obtain water. And water was absolutely necessary (Kociuba, 2020, p. 85; Pamiętnik Basi…, n.d., p. 17).[7]

Saying goodbye to her homeland amidst the groaning and crying of terrified compatriots, Kociuba wrote a poem to her beloved country:

Farewell to Poland (Homeland)

With the Vistula's blue sash you did embrace;
You covered me all with the morning mist's veil.
You bid me to look into waters that race –
To sing and to laugh with an evening bell.

7 In the original: "And water constituted was absolutely necessary."

I hear the train rattle into the station;
It is high time for us to say our goodbyes.
Good Lady, you beg me not leave the nation.
Don't you cry! Don't you worry! We will survive.

I'm leaving. Oh, Virgin, I bid you farewell.
Let's hug – thoughts of going give me a shiver;
In thorny grey lands henceforth I'll dwell.
Dear Homeland, I want to hear your heart quiver.

I'm going away to the sound of your sobs.
Poland, you shed many a bitter tear.
I blow you a kiss, your beauty in thoughts,
Whispering: "Hush! We'll be back, don't you fear!".
(Kociuba, 2020, p. 83; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 16–17).

On 10 February 1940, Wanda was deported together with her family to the settlement of Christoforof (Kristoforof), and three months later to the special settlement of Maromitsa (Kociuba, 2020, pp. 17–18). Franek, his brothers and mother were deported on 13 April 1940 to Kazakhstan (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 52). The living conditions in these places were very difficult, particularly in winter, when the temperatures were below freezing. The constant lack of money, which could not be remedied with any amount of work, made it impossible to properly heat the rooms where the exiles lived, and as a result hunger was accompanied by disease, which easily attacked exhausted organisms, oftentimes leading to death. On 17 January 1942, Franek's mother died (p. 61). His brothers Tadek and Wacek buried her in the local cemetery, in a wooden box made of rough planks. Franek "stayed home, for he had no shoes" (p. 62). The evacuation of Poles from the USSR was conducted in the first months of 1942. Orphans from Kazakhstan, including Franek, Tadek and Wacek,[8] joined the Polish Army and went through Tashkent, Ashgabat, the camps in Pahlavi (an Iranian port city on the Caspian Sea) and Bandra (a coastal suburb in Bombay, India) to finally reach their destinations in Isfahan, Iran and Balachadi, India (Bhattacharjee, 2012, pp. 63–64). Franek remembered one of the caregivers, Hanka Ordonówna aka Marianna Tyszkiewicz *née* Pietruszyńska, who was a Polish singer, dancer and actress. During their stay in Mashhad, she made the evening gathering around the bonfire with the locals even more special by dancing in a traditional Polish costume and singing Polish songs (p. 65).

8 Wacek did not go with his brothers to India, as he remained with the Polish Army.

In a publication titled *Tułacze dzieci*, Hanka Ordonówna wrote thus about the sadness and longing for home, family and homeland experienced by the children in her care:

> In the adjacent room, which served as the recreation room, Franek was poring over the map of Poland. His eyes were fixed on one point.
>
> "Warsaw," he was devouring the word with his eyes.
>
> Franek [not Franek Herzog – author's note] was an intelligent boy. Other children from the orphanage dubbed him a "Scholar" and often asked him various things or begged him to tell them stories; he patiently complied with all such requests. It made him feel as if he were answering his siblings, as he used to do in the past whenever he read something interesting.
>
> Franek's eyes were fixed on the map, but his thoughts were racing across thousands of kilometers to reach the threshold of his family house.
>
> Warsaw! How will he get there and when? What are his mother and siblings doing? Are they alive? How many kilometers separate them now and will separate them still in the future?
>
> A crowd of children gathered around Franek, peeping over his head and shoulders; the children jostled each other to get a better look at the map.
>
> "Here is my city," shouted Kostek.
>
> "Where? Where?"
>
> "Here," he pointed. "Lwów, my Lwów," he exclaimed and his eyes welled up with tears.
>
> "Stop crying," big Józek pleaded with him, himself swallowing with visible difficulty.
>
> Kostek was crying. He missed Lwów and wanted to go back, then and there. He yearned to see the familiar stairs and banisters, down which he used to slide, the former exhibition square, the lions sleeping in front of the town hall. He missed the friendly slaps dealt to him by the cook, Mrs. Stasiowa, he missed his school with boring teachers, but first and foremost he missed his home and his mother, who was lost forever.
>
> "Kostek, stop crying," said Bobiś soothingly. "Lwów wasn't bombed, you'll go back one day."
>
> Kostek looked at him with wet eyes.
>
> "I'll go back," he repeated, misty-eyed. "Of course I'll go back. We won't stay in India forever."
>
> "No, not forever," agreed all the others.

> "As soon as the war is over, we'll go back to Poland!" exclaimed Krzysztof.
>
> "Yes, we will," repeated the children with deep conviction.
>
> There was movement and buzz.
>
> "Franuś, please find Zapródzie in the district of Święciany," pleaded Wincuk.
>
> "It's a small village, it's not on the map, but here you have Wilno."
>
> Wincuk was happy with Wilno, too. He did not know why he immediately thought of Saint Casimir's Fair with its colorful stands crammed full of various commodities and the old women with their herbs – his heart sunk, but he clenched his teeth and did not burst into tears (Ordonówna, 2021, pp. 174–175).

Wanda and her family were sent from Maromitsa to the sovkhoz near Ekaterinovka (Yekaterinovka), and in February 1942 they approached G'uzor, where the Anders' Army was based. They spent two weeks in quarantine there, because typhoid fever was claiming many lives:

> About 60 corpses a day were being removed from G'uzor and the nearby kolkhozes. Hundreds of Polish crosses went up in these faraway Asian lands. For this very reason, G'uzor was dubbed "the valley of death". I would often see a line of several carts, all loaded to the brim with corpses. They were transported to the cemetery... A few girls from our tents were also sent to the hospital for typhoid patients. Such an unexpected calamity befell us here in G'uzor ... (Kociuba, 2020, p. 111; Pamiętnik Basi..., p. 43).

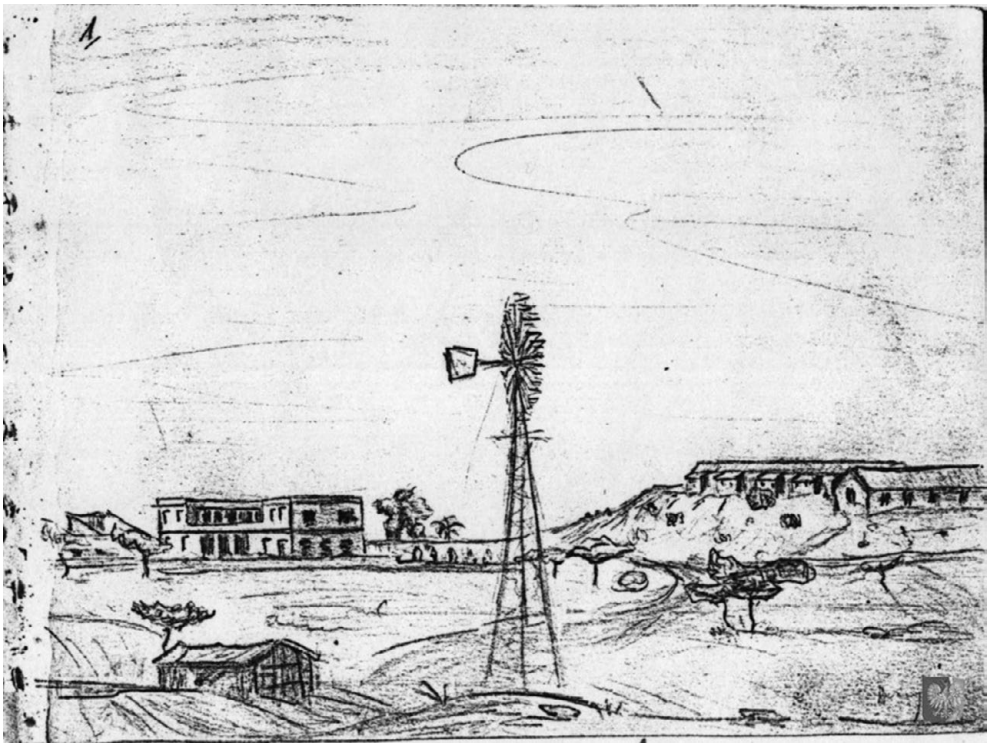
The evacuation to Iran was carried out in March. Having crossed the Caspian Sea, the Polish refugees made a stop in Pahlavi and then went on to their final destination in Isfahan. At the beach in Pahlavi, the children were able to enjoy a dinner and a bath, which meant an end to the hunger and dirt. This is how Wanda remembered the meal:

> Oh God, how great and different it was – two years had passed since I had a sweet roll, chocolate, apples etc. Next we were taken to the bathhouse. I was so happy; I was no longer hungry (Kociuba, 2020, p. 121; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 50–51).

In order to prevent the spread of germs, insects and disease, all the possessions of the Polish refugees were burned on an Iranian beach.

Writing about the camp in Bandra, Franek also mentioned a meal, a bath with the luxury of hot water and a bed with clean sheets.

1. Polish children in Isfahan; source: collections of Lonia Sarniak, the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum



2. The camp and school in Isfahan; source: *Poles in India*, the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum

The children were examined, and many of them who were found to have anemia, including Franek, were taken to the hospital in Bombay, where they spent about two weeks convalescing (Bhattacharjee, 2012, pp. 67–68).

Having arrived in the camps of final destination, the children began a new life composed of school, inspections and trips; cultivation of Polish traditions – love for the homeland, Catholic faith and scouting ideals.

In Isfahan, there was a boarding school, various educational facilities, a middle school, as well as a monastery section, a dining section and a lounge area. At first, the older girls attended a facility run by the Sisters of Charity outside of the camp; one of them was Cesia, Wanda's sister. Wanda herself was first placed in the boarding school, and then attended the educational facilities no. 9 and 5, the middle school and facility no. 2. The daily schedule looked as follows:

> We were woken up at 7 a.m. with a loud bell, and we got up amidst shouts and laughter. At 7.30 a.m. another bell summoned us for prayers. Next we had breakfast, lessons, lunch, two hours of silence, homework, dinner, prayers and back to bed (Kociuba, 2020, pp. 160–161; Pamiętnik Basi..., p. 61).

The camp inhabitants worked towards a common goal; the adults would help in the kitchen, while the older children would watch the younger and help them do their homework. In Iran, the classes were organized according to age, while in India, as Franek noted – according to the level of knowledge. In Balachadi:

> Reveille was at 7 a.m., followed by some physical exercises and then washing up. Before breakfast, we marched to the main square for the ceremony of raising the flag. After breakfast, we had classes till lunch, followed by a one-hour compulsory rest period.
>
> In the afternoon, we had a variety of activities depending on the day, for example, going for a swim, scout meeting, choir and orchestra practice, drama lessons, games in the clubroom or sport. Before supper, especially after monsoon, when there were many mosquitoes, we had to put on long pants and shirts with long sleeves. During the hours of most intense sun, we had to wear tropical helmets of cork (Bhattacharjee, 2012, pp. 86–87).

The insects and mosquitoes posed a significant problem, as they transmitted various diseases, including malaria; 80% of children and adults from the camp in Balachadi suffered from malaria in the first years

of their stay there. In order to prevent infections, two training sessions with specialists were organized for the camp inhabitants and the residents of neighboring villages. They were taught preventive methods aimed at reducing the spread of malaria (p. 87).

The children staying in India also learned English to be able to communicate with the local residents and continue education in English schools (p. 93). After lessons, additional activities were organized, including music, dance and theater classes, sports and evening social gatherings. There were plays, Polish dance shows and film screenings.

3. Polish Dances and Songs Show, 1944, Balachadi; source: *Poles in India*, the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum

The children particularly enjoyed trips to various places. They added variety to school routine and made it possible to see the new country. For young refugees, the local customs and culture were unfamiliar – they both astonished and fascinated them. The language barrier and the resulting difficulties in interpersonal communication made this "otherness" even more impenetrable. Wanda remembered her first reaction to Iranian women, whom she met during a walk in Isfahan with her mother, as they were returning to the camp from a visit with Cesia. Wanda wrote:

> In the evening, as we were waiting for a cab at Chahar Bagh Boulevard, I saw a veritable procession of Persian women in their robes, though many of them no longer wear them. Some smiled kindly at me, others tugged at my hand or

> pierced me with their coal-black eyes. I responded with a smile. Their robes irritated me a little, for some of them were very beautiful, and yet they covered their faces and whole figures with long flowing draperies of various colors. I also marveled at the heavy weights they (particularly the men) carried on their heads. I wondered at everything, but not for long. I was happy that with time, I would be able to learn more about Isfahan (Kociuba, 2020, p. 161; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 61–62).

Together with her friends and caregivers, Wanda visited an old mosque near Isfahan, the "shaking minarets" (Monar Jonban) and the Palace of Forty Columns. In her memoir, Wanda captured the beauty of these landmarks and expressed her rapture over the local history, architecture, culture and ornamentation. She wrote the following about Madar-i Shah – the mosque erected in 1796 to the memory of Shah Hussein I's mother:

> On the outside, there are numerous colorful ornaments and mosaics, a dome with unreachable pigeons and two soaring minarets. Adjacent to the mosaic-decorated walls are two marble blocks depicting two Muslims paying homage to their God (sculpture). As we slowly enter the portal, we are greeted with stony silence. We go out into the courtyard, lost in thought. An aryk flows here in its old, unregulated bed (in days of yore, vast crowds would wash their hands and feet here before prayers). The mosaic-decorated walls form a quadrangle, with four naves facing the four corners of the world. The southern nave is the most important. The wealth of ornaments and mosaics creates such beauty and harmony that it is difficult to take your eyes off them. All the patterns and decorations run in symmetrical lines. A high window with a unique design lets in a bright stream of light, which plays off the ceiling. The mosaics are ablaze with color. All around and high above, there are huge-scale inscriptions of quotes from the Quran, winding up and down around the pointed arches. The central place is occupied by stairs made of a single slab of marble, from where a mullah used to preach to the faithful. Now all of this is lost in silence and gone without a trace. The mosque is now an object of curiosity for visitors, but the voice of the mullah is no longer heard (Kociuba, 2020, p. 165; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 65–66).

It was with similar delight and emotion that Wanda recalled a long-awaited hike to the top of Mount Soffeh, which took place on 12 March 1944. On her way there with her friends and their carer, Wanda passed a treeless cemetery and a hermit's cottage. The day was warm, but she "was completely enraptured by the beauty of Mount Soffeh [...], heart and soul" (Kociuba, 2020, p. 232; Pamiętnik Basi..., p. 98). Her fascination found its expression in a poem to the peak and the mountains in general. Franek, in turn, remembered trips to Jamnagar, where he went with his friends to the movies (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 103). He also enjoyed going to the maharajah's summer palace, where there were various attractions for the children, such as tennis and squash courts (p. 238). According to various accounts, Maharajah Jam Sahib Digvijaysinhji was well disposed towards the Polish people and culture, because he knew the Polish pianist and composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who had also previously served as the Prime Minister of Poland (p. 256). It was probably thanks to this emotional connection that the maharajah decided to take patronage over the "adoption" of Polish orphans, which saved them from returning to Poland before the end of the Second World War (p. 111).

Apart from the trips, inspections by various state and Church dignitaries also constituted an important part of life at the camps, inspiring excitement and a desire to present oneself well. Such visits were organized on a regular basis. For instance, the following visits at the camp in Isfahan were recorded: in September 1942, Dr. Karol Bader, the Polish envoy in Iran, and Wiktor Styburski, a delegate of the Ministry of Social Assistance and Welfare to Iran (Kociuba, 2020, p. 169); on 8 February 1944, Henryk Strasburger, a minister of state for the Middle East (p. 230); on 15 March 1944, an English journalist (p. 234). Each visit caused considerable stir; there was a feeling of joy mixed with nervousness.

The life of camp communities was organized around holidays and religious practices. The analysis of Wanda's memoir – "Pamiętnik Basi" – allows for a reconstruction of the calendar composed of the following holidays: Feast of Saint Nicholas (p. 226), Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (p. 228 and 266), New Year, anniversary of Poland's wedding to the Baltic Sea (10 February) (p. 231 and 275), Marshal Józef Piłsudski's name day (19 March) (p. 234 and 300), Easter (p. 235 and 300), 3 May Constitution Day (p. 177, 240 and 304), Corpus Christi (p. 246), the name day of three political leaders: General Władysław Sikorski, President Władysław Raczkiewicz and General Władysław Anders (27 June) (pp. 182–183 and 247–248), Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw (15 August) (p. 252), All Saints' Day (1 November) (p. 262).

Following the death of General Władysław Sikorski, the camp in Isfahan sunk into sadness. A memorial mass was held in the church part of the camp. Wanda wrote:

Today the passing bells sound for him in these foreign lands, while Poland is filled with the crying of guns and bombs. A week ago his portrait listened to name day wishes and joyful songs. It looked into our happy faces, and today it listens to our sobs and watches our sincere tears. Why did God take him away from us? Why didn't you, Dear Commander, lead us back into Poland? Why? Why did you let us experience such great mourning? – keep asking the aching hearts of Poles. After a solemn memorial mass (there was a beautiful catafalque at no. 20), we returned to our educational facility, each sporting a black armband and with a heavy heart. Glory to our Dear Commander, our protector and father!

And so day after day passed in great despair and sadness. We are deprived of our homeland and our commander alike. We staunchly believed in him and his victory, and now he is gone. But we have to make peace with our fate. Such was God's will. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Nevertheless, the entire Polish nation is shrouded in sadness and despair. We are deserted by all, only sweet Jesus and his Mother are watching over us, and He will surely lead us (Kociuba, 2020, p. 285; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 79–80).

4. A memorial service to General Władysław Sikorski in Isfahan; source: the collection of Helena Moroz, the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum

5. First Communion in Balachadi; source: *Poles in India*; the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum

The Catholic faith played a huge role for children living far away from their homeland. The significance of religion in the mindset and lives of Poles was well recognized in India, and accordingly one of the buildings in Balachadi was converted into a chapel (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 121). Franek remembered Easter in the desert during the evacuation to India (p. 66). The subsequent ones were celebrated at the camp, along with other state and Church holidays. For Christmas, wafers were broken according to Polish custom and nativity plays were organized. In 1943, the children received the sacrament of confession and First Communion (p. 90).

In her actions, Wanda was guided by faith and religion. She invoked God in times of trouble and held her homeland and those fighting for Poland in her thoughts. Her words reveal that she was well acquainted with Adam Mickiewicz's messianic idea, which viewed Poland as "the Christ of nations", for the concept was long propagated and became very popular with some representatives of the Polish nation.[9] Describing the Mass of the Resurrection from 1944, Wanda compared the situation of Poland to the suffering and resurrection of Christ:

9 Mostly in communities of strong religious and patriotic convictions.

> New waves of Eastern hymns continued to sweep through the Church. I didn't hear all the words, because I was lost in prayer, or rather a supplication for return to homeland, but the phrase "Christ has risen by his own might and power" invaded my thoughts and I kept pondering them for a long time. Other songs rang out ever more cheerfully and beautifully, but I wasn't paying attention, I didn't listen, for those words seized me, taking possession of my heart and thoughts. He had risen... God. Jesus. After so much suffering. He who has risen today, Lord Jesus, had his way "paved" with thorns, he carried the Cross, he was abused by the Jews, kicked and beaten to blood, and yet he endured it quietly and patiently. Then he was tortured to death; his heart, hand and feet were pierced... He died, and today he has risen "by his own might and power", our Christ the Lord. Our Homeland is suffering in a similar manner: she was tortured, and now this martyr writhes in pain, stretched out on the cross... groaning... And now her coffin stands in a dark grave, and through the half-open lid, she shows her pale and agonized face and reaches out to us. Christ has risen today, but she hasn't. Her day of triumph is yet to come. She will also leave her dark grave and stand among her children with a smile on her face... (Kociuba, 2020, pp. 236–237; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 103–104).

Wanda became a member of the Sodality of Our Lady in Isfahan. On 5 July 1944, Wanda and her friends wrote letters to soldiers who were fighting for Poland. In her letter, she sought to express her compassion, gratitude and support for the defenders of her beloved homeland (Kociuba, 2020, pp. 248–249; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 122–123).

The Warsaw Uprising and its subsequent fall were very emotional experiences for the children, making them temporarily lose faith in victory. Their hearts and thoughts went to the their beloved homeland, for which they were praying and hoping. In "Pamiętnik Basi", these sentiments found expression in the following passage: "Warsaw! Warsaw! Did you fall? The Beautiful Lady answered with a smile, 'But I will rise again'" (Kociuba, 2020, p. 259; Pamiętnik Basi..., pp. 122–123). The girl wrote a poem to honor and commemorate Warsaw and the courageous fight of its residents:

> *Warsaw*
>
> *A few years back you were lovely, illustrious and proud;*
> *Greeting all passers-by with signs of solemn respect.*
> *Might and Freedom in your body were calling out loud.*
> *Warsaw, you meet me with silence I didn't expect.*

When the unforeseen warfare the Homeland did ensnare;
When the enemy conquered us and came here to slay;
You were the first to raise your now-shrill voice: "Don't you dare!"
You were the first to take up fight and tell them: "No way!"

The world stood in awe of your courage, my city.
The women and children fought for you despite hunger.
Eagle, you begged for help but there was no pity.
You fell down amidst moans, crushed by the German anger.
Pale, sorrowful, trembling – you're standing under the Cross.
The ruins and the corpses bring tears to your eyes.
You're all in pain and crying, I see the looming loss.
You rise one final time and smile, but then your body dies.

Sixty three days later, you have some peaceful sleep.
The wind above is miserable, it's rolling like a drum.
For all your pain and trouble, the reward from God you'll reap.
New robes from Him await you, but this is yet to come.

Your heroic deeds from years bygone, they always make me smile.
Your history brings delight to me, it's like a lovely tale.
I whisper "Warsaw!" and the echo keeps sounding for a while.
Your sweet and somber melody around me doth prevail.

Bloodied Warsaw, dearest city, you've earned eternal respect!
We'll carry the cross of pain together, you really needn't worry.
To our joy and shouts of "Warsaw!" you surely won't object.
We come to say these daring words: to heroes – enduring glory!
(Kociuba, 2020, pp. 259–260; Pamiętnik Basi..., p. 129).

These verses pay homage to Warsaw's insurrectionists, but they also touch upon the messianic idea and the suffering and heroism of the Polish nation.

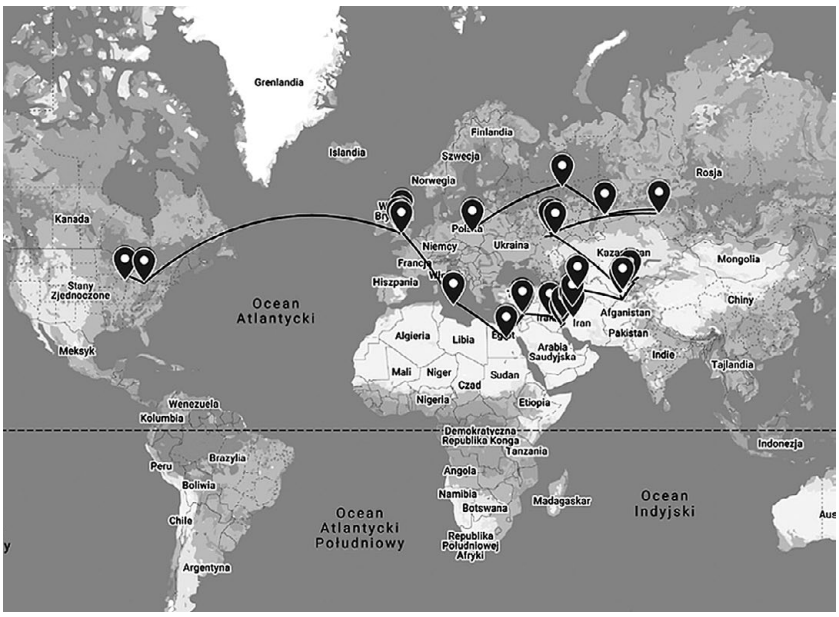
Franek Herzog's account of the uprising is less emotional; he states simple facts: 63 days, 80% of the city destroyed, thousands of casualties, the Red Army standing on the other bank of the Vistula (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 121).[10]

10 There could be several reasons for Franek's reserved approach. Firstly, the boy could have deliberately chosen a factual and matter-of-fact writing style, focusing on hard data and historical details. Secondly, his personal experiences and emotional distance to the events described could have influenced his narration.

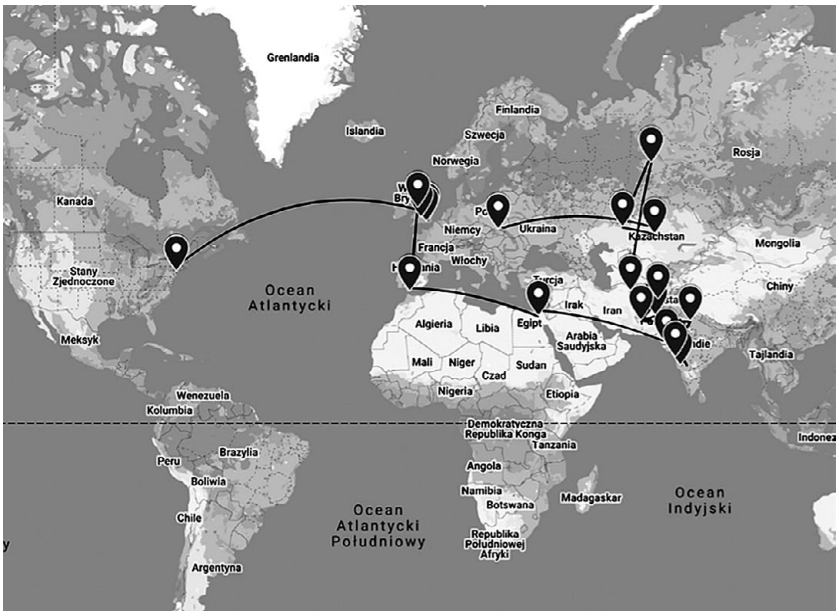
A tradition cultivated at the camps that definitely merits a mention was scouting. Both Wanda and Franek joined its ranks. The children formed patrols and troops, wore uniforms, attended scout camps, as well as organized meetings, trips and bonfires. It was a very good form of activity, allowing the children to make the most of their time after school. They felt part of the community and could effectively spend their days off. Scouting gained great popularity before the Second World War, but it was yet to become a mass movement. In faraway places, it became an ersatz homeland and thus attracted many children. They had nothing to begin with: they had to make their own tents using blankets, borrow appliances from the kitchen, and use stockings to create balls for playing. The few handbooks that survived the outbreak of the war, deportation and evacuation, helped the children learn scouting rules. The caregivers and older Poles also supported the children's initiative (*Tułacze dzieci…*, 1995, pp. 294–295).

6. Scout camp, 1944, Balachadi; source: *Poles in India*, the Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum

Wanda, Franek and other children covered thousands of kilometers in the war and postwar years, and yet – despite their best efforts and great longing – they did not reach the homeland they had lost in 1940.



7. Map showing the journey of Wanda Barbara Kociuba: Wola Piłsudskiego, Radziwiłłów, Oparino, Christoforof (Kristoforof), Maromitsa, Oparino, Chelyabinsk, Kuybyshev, Ekaterinovka (Yekaterinovka), Samarkand, Tashkent, G'uzor, Krasnovodsk, Pahlavi, Tehran, Isfahan, Delijan, Qom, Andimeshk, Ahvaz, Basra, Bagdad, Lebanon, Damascus, Beirut, Zouk, Egypt, Malta, Fairford (Gloucester), Stowell Park, Shobdon Park, Birmingham, Leeds, Cleveland, Chicago, Cleveland; source: author's own work



8. Map showing the journey of Franek Herzog: Młodów, Kazakhstan, Alga, Mashhad, Afghanistan, Nok Kundi, Quetta, Delhi, Bombay, Bandra, Balachadi, Valivade, Bombay, Aden, Suez, Gibraltar, Liverpool, Daglingworth (near Gloucester), West Chiltington, London, United States; source: author's own work

Until the end of the war, the exiled children lived from day to day in the camps. Sometimes they would forget about their sadness and longing for the homeland and get absorbed in the joy of playing together, making new friends or having a new home. After the war, however, they had to move one more time. In 1947, Wanda and her family went via Lebanon to Great Britain. In 1951, Wanda moved to the United States, where she took up a job and met her future husband Wiktor Bik. They got married in Cleveland on 3 July 1954 (Kociuba, 2020, pp. 377–382). Franek also left for Great Britain, where he reunited with his brothers. He graduated with a degree in engineering and married Kama Mikucka. In 1968, together with his wife and daughter Iwona, he emigrated to the United States. Many orphans who found refuge in the camps in the Middle East or India during the Second World War eventually took up residence in either Great Britain or the United States.[11]

Despite the ordeal of deportation and their wartime wanderings, Wanda Barbara Kociuba and Franciszek Herzog found refuge and an ersatz home in the camps in Iran and India. Thanks to education, religion and the cultivation of Polish traditions, they managed to preserve their national identity. The community and the support it provided helped them survive these difficult times. Although their postwar paths diverged, these experiences left a lasting mark in their consciousness and memory.

(transl. by Aleksandra Arumińska)

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11 Some of the children who stayed at the camps in the Middle East or India during the Second World War later moved not only to the United States or Great Britain, but also to British Dominions such as Canada, Australia and South Africa.

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