

The book poses interesting questions about the role and responsibility of the intelligentsia in the face of colonial or totalitarian domination. The authors of the essays are historians, philosophers, sociologists, or philologists. Seven of the articles are written in Polish, four in Russian, and five in English. The only blemish I can point to is that only seven out of sixteen essays are accompanied by summaries in English. This thought-provoking book invites further discussion. ♦

## The Ice Road: An Epic Journey from the Stalinist Labor Camps to Freedom

**By Stefan Waydenfeld.** Los Angeles, CA and Uckfield, UK: Aquila Polonica Publishing, 2010. x + 406 pages. Photographs. ISBN 978-1-60772-002-7. Cloth. \$28.95.

### Katherine Jolluck

**I**n his memoir *The Ice Road: An Epic Journey from the Stalinist Labor Camps to Freedom*, Stefan Waydenfeld details his experiences from the eve of the Nazi and Soviet invasions of Poland in September 1939 to his arrival in Iran in August 1942. During these three years Waydenfeld, age fourteen when the Second World War began, experienced traumas and trials shared by hundreds of thousands of Poles who lived in or fled to the eastern part of their newly divided country: incorporation into the USSR, the struggle to reunite family members, the loss of a relative in the Katyń massacre, deportation to the Soviet Far North, forced labor in the forests, hunger, disease, vermin, and a tortuous odyssey to freedom. These ordeals remain practically unknown to Americans, for whom this edition of Waydenfeld's original 1999 publication was prepared. The volume includes useful and enlightening supplementary materials: family and historical photographs, an epilogue by his wife that discusses their postwar lives, a report providing the historical context to Waydenfeld's experiences (not using, however, the most up-to-date sources), and a brief interview of the author by his daughter.

Before the war Waydenfeld lived with his family in Otwock, a health resort located near Warsaw. The child of a physician-father and a pathologist-mother, he enjoyed the fortunate life of the middle class. Although

their world was destroyed in autumn 1939, their status, skills, and possessions served them well in the ordeals to come, ultimately enabling them to survive Soviet exile and ensure their evacuation to Iran with the Anders Army (Polish Army in the East).

Soon after the Nazis reached Warsaw, the young Waydenfeld fled eastward, planning to join his father, a doctor in the Polish army. Several months later father, son, and mother were reunited in the city of Pińsk, now under Soviet occupation. Hoping to wait the war out back in Otwock, they applied for repatriation to German-occupied Poland. In June 1940 Soviet agents came in the middle of the night, ostensibly to transport them to Warsaw; instead, they were deported to the northern reaches of the USSR. Deposited in the settlement of Kvasha, near the town of Kotlas, Waydenfeld and the other deportees were forced to perform hard labor in the forest, otherwise they would not eat. It is from this part of his odyssey that Waydenfeld takes the title of his memoirs. For more than six months of the brutal winter of 1940–41, he worked to maintain a road on the compacted snow over which horses could draw a sledge loaded with trees felled by the deportees. In the dark of night, in temperatures lower than minus 40 degrees (Celsius and Fahrenheit), he walked over thirteen miles, pouring water fetched from holes he bored in the frozen river over parallel icy grooves, making sure that they were smooth. Waydenfeld writes that this ice road “has remained forever my idea of purgatory” (131).

The calamity of the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941 led the Soviets to seek temporary amends with the Polish government-in-exile, located in London. The resulting Sikorski-Maiskii Pact of July 1941 granted—“amnesty” to all the deported and arrested Poles, and allowed them to form an army to help fight the Germans. This treaty allowed Waydenfeld and the other deportees to leave Kvasha. Over the next year he journeyed thousands of miles to a series of destinations in southern Russia and Soviet Central Asia, using every available means of transportation: homemade rafts, trains, lorries, ships, donkeys, and on foot. At times the Waydenfelds' fortunes improved, such as when his father obtained work as a doctor in a new hospital near Samarkand. Often they endured horrendous conditions: confined to a meadow for weeks without shelter; days of transport with no food; infestations of lice and bedbugs; battles with typhus and pneumonia. The damaging effects that life in the USSR had on them can best be seen in the startling

juxtaposition of photos of his father from 1938 and 1941 included in the book.

Waydenfeld and his parents survived these ordeals through ingenuity, resourcefulness, pure hard work, and a certain amount of luck. Using their possessions brought from home and money from their labor, they grew adept at working the Soviet system through bribery to obtain food, medicine, or a place on a train. Waydenfeld describes these experiences with intriguing detail and honesty that make for lively and compelling reading. He discusses his foibles as well as his accomplishments, and admits that because of his youth and strength, life in the forest settlement was not all bad for him—a rare statement for Polish deportees (93). Unlike many Polish survivors of Soviet exile, Waydenfeld recalls his experiences without pathos, in a matter-of-fact tone that does not seek pity. He understands the evils of the Soviet system, but does not treat Soviet citizens with contempt; rather, he evinces sympathy for their plight and their lack of hope. Is this the result of writing sixty years after the events? His personality? Or perhaps his origins and upbringing? Waydenfeld's parents were both Jewish—a fact one learns late in the book, first from the copy of the family's release certificates from the Soviet settlement, and then from his recounting of the discrimination he faced from Polish soldiers on the eve of evacuation from the USSR. Only then, he writes, did he feel like a stranger among the Poles (357). Waydenfeld states only that he is an atheist. His Jewish origins hold no apparent meaning for him; he considers himself a Pole and a patriot. But he does not espouse the fervent Polish nationalism that typically included deeply felt Catholicism and anti-Russian sentiments. Unlike many other Polish memoirists of the deportations to the USSR, Waydenfeld does not attribute his survival to faith in God and nation; instead, he states, "people soon realized that they would perish unless they helped each other" (404). It may be that the lack of attachment to the spiritual aspects of the experience that so often shape Poles' accounts of their ordeals allows Waydenfeld to see and recall with a clarity and level of detail that illuminates more of the everyday existence and hard work of survival of Polish exiles in the Soviet Union. ◇

## Body. Gender. Concentration Camps

*Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy zagłady*, by **Bożena Karwowska**. Kraków: Universitas, 2009. 216 pages. Bibliography, index of names, English summary. ISBN: 97883-242-1344-3. Softcover. In Polish.

### Joanna Niżyńska

The task of analyzing camp literature presents a particular set of challenges, the greatest of which is that it requires the scholar to occupy the positions of explorer and witness simultaneously. Such positionalities may at times become mutually exclusive when the ethics of witnessing clashes with the drive to explore. Bożena Karwowska's recent book *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy zagłady* (*Body. Gender. Concentration Camps*), published in the Universitas series "Modernizm w Polsce," exemplifies the tactful negotiation of ethical complexities and the analytical approach demanded by the book's grueling subject matter.

The opening chapter, "The Body in the Concentration Camp: The Experience of Stanisław Grzesiuk," focuses on Grzesiuk's memoir *Pięć lat kacetu* (*Five Years in Concentration Camps*, 1958). In her discussion of Grzesiuk's treatment of the body and the theme of homosexuality, Karwowska proposes reading Grzesiuk's memoir via hermeneutic tools offered by feminist critics focusing on slavery in the United States. She adopts a racial discourse of slavery and its notions of bodily hierarchies to discuss a collective of white males striving for survival in the concentration camp universe. Karwowska's employment of the notion of "the theft of the body" as an operative mechanism both of slavery and of the camps allows for a nuanced reading of the typology of the body and its function as an exchange value and a medium of communication in the reality Grzesiuk represents. At the same time, the author shows that reading camp literature through the language of gender and of the body differs from reading it through other transnational categories that, paradoxically, simultaneously universalize and Other the experience. The category of the victim, after all, trumps all other categories, often turning the victim into the body deprived of its idiosyncratic qualities such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Karwowska's book reclaims gender and sexuality as operative categories to offer new, valuable readings of a broad range of texts,

