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Honderd jaar heimwee: De geschiedenis van Polen in Nederland

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Edited by Dutch historians Wim Willems and Hanneke Verbeek (University of Leiden) and funded by The Mondriaan Fund, a state-financed organization for cultural heritage, *Honderd jaar heimwee: De geschiedenis van Polen in Nederland* tries to put a human face on the migration from Poland to the Netherlands in the 20th century. [1] The objective is to show that, despite the recent negative stereotype of the "Polish plumber," Polish immigrants in the past and present have formed a heterogenic group; "the" Pole simply does not exist. The portraits of immigrants (microhistory) fits in the increasingly popular non-fiction in Dutch literature over the last fifteen to twenty years. [2] The resulting twelve chapters form a well-documented, revealing, but also very accessible book, even for laymen, which is not irrelevant considering the ever growing Polish community in the Netherlands and European integration. This review will focus on important events and remarkable facts which might be of interest to the international reader.

In the 1920s, 3000 Central and Eastern European (CEE) workers (many of whom Poles) were recruited to work in the coal mines in the South East province of Limburg. [3] The Polish government stimulated their national conscience via the financial support of Polish education, courses and a blossoming Polish club life and the founding of a local Polish consulate. The Catholic church in the Netherlands considered the Poles as allies against the socialist 'danger.' In 1928, a German with a basic knowledge of Polish became the

[1] *Hundred years of homesickness: The history of Poles in the Netherlands* (translation by the reviewer, JS). A Polish translation of the book is currently being planned.

[2] More information on non-fiction in Dutch literature in the last twenty years in Ceelen, Han,Jeroen van Bergeijk. 2007. *Meer dan de feiten. Gesprekken met auteurs van literaire non-fictie*. Amsterdam: Atlas.

[3] The history of coal mine workers is told via the portrait of the Stachowski family in the village of Brunssum.

popular priest for the Polish community, which by 1930 had expanded to approximately 6000 people. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, more than 50% of the Polish miners became redundant and many lost their accommodation and (temporary) residence permits. The German and Soviet invasions prevented many families, who never desired a permanent stay, from returning to Poland. During the occupation, the miners in Limburg were not forced to work as convicts in Germany because of the economic importance of the coal industry. The Germans attempted to persuade the Poles to become *Volksdeutsche*, which made some go into hiding while others became members of the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging in Nederland* (NSB). [4] After World War II, approx. 5000 new CEE labour immigrants were attracted (including demobilized Polish soldiers in England) and the social life revived, although half of the immigrants left after six months to the USA and Canada. Remarkably, until the mid-1970s, the Polish community only acknowledged the Polish government-in-exile in London, not the communist authorities in Warsaw.

The second chapter, focusing on the Polish-Jewish immigrants in The Hague, represents an image of the Jewish entrepreneur via the portrait of the Sprecher family. Although little information can be found on pre-war Polish Jews in the Netherlands, a Polish-Jewish community did live in Scheveningen, a popular seaside resort close to The Hague, and worked mostly in the hotel and catering sector. These 1300 immigrants kept strong ties with relatives in Krakau. After World War I, Eastern European Jews were taken care of by the authorities in The Hague. Many Chassidic Jews stayed in the Netherlands because the newly independent Polish state did not recognize them as Polish citizens. In the 1930s, the rather Zionist-oriented Polish-Jewish community had a blossoming club life, just as in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Although official numbers are absent, an estimated 5000 Jewish refugees from CEE came to the Netherlands between 1933-40. It is also unknown how many Polish Jews in The Hague escaped during the German occupation. [5]

The elaborate portrait of judge Michał Rostworowski at the Permanent Court of International Justice, who was honored in 2011 at the Polish embassy, is the steppingstone for the overview on Polish early 20th century history. The subsequently fourth chapter concerns the liberation of the city of Breda in the southern North Brabant province, where the Polish 1st Armoured Division was commanded by General Stanisław Maczek. Because many locals had never heard of Poland, Maczek's soldiers distributed information cards with a map of Poland. Since the local barracks did not have enough space, local families hosted the soldiers, and despite sermons in the churches against too friendly behaviour with the liberators, more than one local girl got married to a soldier. About 250 Polish soldiers stayed in Breda, relying solely on themselves, and were quickly absorbed by the local community. In the 1950s, Polish associations provided cultural activities, educational facilities and societal and financial support. In the 1950s, approx. 5200 Poles lived in the

[4] *National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands*.

[5] The remarkable difference in the percentages of killed Jews in the Netherlands (75%), Belgium (40%) and France (25%) is mainly caused by the monopoly of the German police in the organization and execution of the deportations. In the Netherlands, organized resistance and hiding possibilities came later than in Belgium or France (Griffioen & Zeller. 2011. *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België.* Amsterdam: Boom).

Netherlands, as opposed to 60.000 in Belgium. [6] During the martial law (1981-83), Polish associations in the Netherlands were involved in the transport of food and clothing packages to Poland. Until the end of the Cold War, the communist authorities controlled letters, thus making correspondence with relatives in the homeland limited and difficult.

The political and media interest in Poland increased in the 1980s. The representation of Solidarity (*Solidarność*) in the Netherlands was founded on the efforts by bilingual Polish immigrants, who attempted to narrow the gap between the two countries and were supported by the Dutch peace movement. [7] The majority of the Polish immigrants and asylum seekers, who were employed in the horticulture as seasonal workers, were not politically active, partly because of warnings by the Polish embassy. The main Dutch trade union FNV and the social-democrat PvdA expressed solidarity with the strikers. [8] The relation between left-wing Dutch supporters of the strikes and Polish dissidents and refugees was characterized by mutual confusion and discomfort.

The seventh chapter gives an impression of the representation of Polish immigrants in the Dutch press over the last 15 years, and is followed by a number of love stories, forming an interesting but slightly strange intermezzo between hard topics such as WWII, Solidarity and the current labour market. [9] In 2011, 9600 Dutch-Polish couples were in existence (2/3 married). In 90% of the relationships the woman was Polish and the overwhelming majority lived in the Netherlands. The reason for migration has not always been marriage, but also education, work or adventure. The thread in these relationships seems to be differences of opinion because of cultural differences and communication problems because of the language barrier.

The portraits of three young Poles belonging to the so-called "generation 2000," that migrated around that year, show that also the recent immigrant group is heterogenic. Previously conducted studies have already shown the goals, experiences, chances and problems on the labour market of these young immigrants. [10] In the reports of exploitation of workers (salary, housing), Dutch society, that complains about annoyances caused by CEE immigrants, does not give a positive impression. It is difficult to predict how many Poles will stay in the Netherlands in the long term (although research has indicated at least 40%).

The people chosen for the stories include fortunately both elite figures (scientists, judges, ambassadors) and the man in the street (soldiers, small entrepreneurs and

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[6] Jan Nikerk, former representative of the Polish government-in-exile in the Netherlands and later social demographer and urban planner, is the subject of the fifth chapter.

[7] Informatiebureau Solidarność (translations of press reports), Merpol (financial support), Polencomites (in the major cities, active during the martial law). The 6th chapter provide the portraits of Jan Minkiewicz, Sasza Malko, Michel Korzec and Jan Zielonka, who were actively involved with Solidarity in the Netherlands and later followed media or academic careers.

[8] *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging*, *Partij van de Arbeid*.

[9] For an earlier published and extensive analysis of the representation of Polish and Central and Eastern European immigrant workers in Dutch media and political discourse, see Sterckx, J. 2012. *Het beeld van de Midden- en Oost-Europese arbeidsmigrant in Nederlandse nieuwsmedia en het politieke discours (2000-2011).* Comparatieve Neerlandistiek (09-2012, nr. 3).

[10] Korf, Dirk J. (e.a.). 2009. *Polen in Nederland*. Utrecht: Forum.

workers). Regrettably, the photo portraits of artists from Polish descent do not provide information on their life or work and wander about in the middle of the book which is actually beautifully published. It would be interesting to quantitatively analyse to what extent homesickness, chauvinism and patriotism are present in the Polish community in the Netherlands in 2013. The book reinforces the old stereotype of the patriotic Pole, but eventually it does achieve its noble objective, namely, attempting to extend the knowledge among the general public of the history of the Poles in the Netherlands.

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