



Shaping ongoing survival in a Swedish refugee camp

A refugee-centred history of Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution in Sweden

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ABSTRACT • Among the hundreds of sites that housed survivors of Nazi persecution who came to Sweden in the spring and summer of 1945, one of the largest was at the small village of Öreryd. Between June 1945 and September 1946, around a thousand Jewish and non-Jewish Polish survivors came to this site, where they were expected to stay only until they were well enough to return to their home countries or migrate elsewhere. This article contributes to filling a gap in refugee history in Sweden, dealing with how survivors experienced Swedish refugee camps and shaped the refugee camp environment on their own terms. Thinking with Peter Gatrell’s framework of ‘refugeedom’, a wide range of sources have been examined for insight into how Polish survivors in the Öreryd refugee camp navigated the precarity and uncertainty of their existence as survivors and refugees in Sweden and endeavoured to shape their immediate and future lives.

Introduction

On 9 May 1945, the last of some 40,000 Norwegians who had transited through the refugee camp in the small, historic village of Öreryd, Sweden, since 1941 celebrated the end of the Second World War by marching off to a nearby train station with much fanfare (Johansson 2002: 142). They were returning to their homeland, only just liberated from Nazi occupation. The arrival of the next occupants of the refugee camp several weeks later stood in stark contrast to this triumphant departure.¹ Unlike their

predecessors, many of these refugees either had no homes to triumphantly return to or lacked the health or heart to do so. They were among the millions of so-called displaced persons (DPs), many of them former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, whom the Allied powers were now working to ‘disentangle’ in the wake of the Second World War (Reinisch and White 2011). In spring and summer 1945, approximately 30,000 of these ‘displaced’ survivors of Nazi persecution, about one-third of whom were Jewish, arrived in Sweden for medical treatment and recuperation through the Red Cross ‘White Buses’ and the United Nations Relief and

1 The article has been adapted from two previous versions, including a short popular history article published in July 2017 (see Martínez 2017), and a more recent version that will appear in Swedish translation in

a forthcoming popular science anthology published by the Living History Forum (Forum för levande historia).





Fig. 1. The Öreröd refugee camp circa 1945. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Öreröds Hembygdsförening.

Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) 'White Ships' initiatives (RA 06/F 5/1; Olsson 1997: 21–2). Survivors from Nordic countries formed the largest group, followed by around 13,000 Poles, one-third to one-half of whom were Jewish (Ugglå 1997: 173, 198; Olsson 1997: 21–2), with smaller groups from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, among others (RA 06/F 5/1).

All came to Sweden to some degree broken, physically and psychologically. Swedish media reports on the arrival of the survivors were filled with descriptions of their shocking appearance (Thor Tureby 2015; Wagrell 2020: 146–72). One Swedish commentator described them as having been 'degraded to animals' (Thor Tureby 2013: 151). For some, the reality was much worse. One of the new arrivals in Öreröd, the Polish Jewish survivor Abraham Frischer, was pulled from a pile of corpses shortly after the liberation

of Bergen-Belsen by British and Canadian troops in April 1945. When he arrived in Sweden several weeks later, he had to be fed with a baby bottle (Gren 2008). Many of the survivors were dangerously ill with diseases such as typhus, typhoid fever and diphtheria, and 90 per cent of the UNRRA refugees who came to Sweden in the summer had tuberculosis (Johansson 2002: 160). All were quarantined for at least two weeks, and many were hospitalised for extended periods. Before she came to Öreröd, Halina Czajkowska, an 18-year-old Polish former political prisoner of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, had spent eight weeks in hospital quarantine in the city of Gothenburg, only to return to hospital soon after her release when it was discovered she was suffering from pericarditis (Robinson 2020: 151–6), a cardiac condition which afflicted many who were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps (Aroneanu 1996: 70). Other survivors did not long survive their

rescue, as evidenced by the many graves of the Nazis' victims which can be found to this day in cemeteries throughout Sweden, including in Öreryd (Martínez 2019; Schult 2016; Thor Tureby 2008: 200–2; Wikander 2006). Those well enough were eventually assigned to one of the hundreds of sites around Sweden – including schools, sports centres and even private villas – established to accommodate them until they were well enough to return to their own countries or migrate elsewhere (Uggla 1997: 206–9). Most of these sites were small, housing no more than a few hundred survivors. Reflecting the substantial number of Polish survivors, the two largest were the Doverstorp refugee camp for Polish women (see Giloh 2006) and the Öreryd refugee camp (Fig. 1), originally for Polish men but later also women, with its extensive existing infrastructure of military-style barracks. Between summer 1945 and autumn 1946, the Öreryd refugee camp hosted as many as a thousand Jewish and non-Jewish Poles (Johansson 2002: 161; RA 12/109/1).

Though they were well enough to be moved from quarantine and hospitals, the Polish survivors of Nazi persecution who came to Öreryd were nonetheless nowhere near recovered from their ordeals. On the contrary, they were just beginning a physical, emotional and psychological journey away from the atrocities inflicted on them, their families and their homeland. In this sense, the title of the book by the Swedish journalist Göran Rosenberg, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz* (2015), about his father, the Polish Jewish survivor David Rosenberg, who spent time in the Öreryd refugee camp, is particularly apt. Öreryd, like all post-war refugee camps in Sweden, was a brief stop on the survivors' journeys from Nazi persecution to a new life that they had somehow to piece together. This article examines some of the ways Polish survivors began this process of

ongoing survival in the Öreryd refugee camp, illuminating how they navigated the precarity and uncertainty of their existence as survivors and refugees in Sweden and endeavoured to shape their immediate and future lives.

Until relatively recently, the primary focus of historical scholarship on refugee movements, including those of survivors of Nazi persecution in the immediate post-war period, has been on national and international political processes related to these 'displaced' individuals – sometimes referred to as 'the refugee regime'² – rather than on the experiences and actions of the refugees themselves (Banko *et al.* 2021; Kushner 2018: 8–12; Gatrell 2017). This has been the case in Sweden, where scholarship related to the survivors brought to Sweden through 'rescue and relief' initiatives have focused mainly on Swedish agents and the Swedish perspective (as noted for example by Åmark 2021: 5, 8; Karlsson 2016: 88–9). However, a small but growing body of research places the focus on Holocaust and other survivors of Nazi persecution who came to Sweden as refugees (e.g. Bogatic 2011; Carlberg 1994; Dahl 2013, 2021; Heuman 2021; Kłoczyński 2016; Lomfors 1996; Martínez 2021; Olsson 1997; Thor Tureby 2005, 2021; Uggla 2000; Wagrell 2020). Importantly, this research is increasingly examining the ways refugees from Nazism in Sweden actively helped themselves and others (e.g. Thor Tureby 2020b, 2020a; Martínez 2021).

As yet, only a few studies examine the Swedish refugee camps that housed survivors of Nazi persecution in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and how they were experienced by the survivors

2 Peter Gatrell (2017: 178) defines 'refugee regime' as 'the principles, rules and practices adopted by government officials and others in order to manage refugees'.

(e.g. Geschwind 2020; Giloh 2016; Johansson 2002; Martínez 2017). Although the Öreryd refugee camp was one of the largest such sites for survivors of Nazi persecution in Sweden and – as this article demonstrates – is associated with a relatively extensive store of empirical evidence, it has not been thoroughly analysed by scholars. Thus, it is an important site that provides material for an analysis by which to begin to fill this particular gap in refugee history in Sweden; it provides a point of comparison with existing studies of refugee camps and can encourage further inquiry into other sites. This article contributes to this burgeoning area of research by examining the experiences of the Polish survivors in the Öreryd refugee camp ‘beyond the state’ (Banko *et al.* 2021: 11). The historian Peter Gatrell’s conceptual and methodological framework of ‘refugeedom’ encourages scholars, especially historians, to examine refugees and their existence in refugee camps ‘by acknowledging the world that refugees made, not just the world that has been made for them’ (Gatrell 2017: 179). Among those who have embraced this concept are scholars in the Nordic countries, who, by encouraging dialogue and research into forced migrants’ experiences and memories, are contributing to the transformation of refugee studies.³ Of the methodology, Gatrell and his colleagues write:

our preferred starting point for writing refugeedom into refugee history is to make the displaced more visible as purposeful agents by locating them on their own terms rather than those imposed by governments,

3 See the workshop series ‘Histories of Refugeedom in the Nordic Countries’, funded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS 2022).

prevailing state or institutional legal and administrative categories, or humanitarians. (Banko *et al.* 2021: 3)

Following this methodology, this article draws on a wide range of source material gathered over several years – including archives, survivor testimonies, oral histories, memoirs, personal interviews, newspaper articles, local histories and previous research – for insight into the lives the survivors in the Öreryd refugee camp made for themselves and their futures.

Comprehending the devastation

In some respects, Öreryd was prepared to receive the Polish survivors. After four years of hosting the Norwegian refugees, the residents of Öreryd were accustomed to living alongside the efficient and well-organised refugee camp. Construction began in May 1940, almost immediately after the German invasions of Denmark and Norway. The site was originally intended as an internment camp for what were ambiguously described as *icke behagliga personer* (in English, literally ‘not pleasant people’) (Öreryd 1985: 181; Johansson 2002: 39; Mårtensson 1985: 133). For neutral Sweden, awkwardly located between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia and their respective occupied territories, this broad terminology allowed for the internment of anyone who could not be trusted by Swedish authorities in the event the country became directly involved in the war. It was never used for this original purpose, and remained empty until March 1941, when it began receiving Norwegians fleeing their country’s Nazi occupation, most of whom stayed only for short periods (Öreryd 1985: 183). The location of the camp was strategic. With a population of 316 in 1940, Öreryd was tucked away in the dense forests

of the province of Småland, 55 kilometres south-west of the city of Jönköping; it was a site where tight controls and secrecy could be maintained (Öreryd 1985: 181; Johansson 2002: 43–50). As Sweden was officially neutral during the war, it was important that the Germans were not aware of the presence of the Norwegians.

Although the camp and its circumstances were the same as when the Norwegian refugees were there, the residents of Öreryd and the Swedish individuals with official roles in the refugee camp were not necessarily prepared for the nature of the Polish survivors' experiences. Moreover, whereas similar culture and language had meant the Norwegians and Swedes were able to socialise and communicate easily, the Poles and the Swedes in Öreryd faced major cultural and communication barriers. A local resident, Carl Gustav Davidsson, who did maintenance work at the Öreryd refugee camp, recalls that he had no understanding of what the survivors had been through when they arrived. However, some sense of the trauma became evident to him in August 1945, when a group of around forty recently arrived survivors refused to stay at the site, with its barracks no doubt resembling those of the Nazi concentration camps, and instead attempted to walk and take buses to Stockholm to protest over the conditions (Davidsson interview, 2017). This event was reported in the Swedish press, which explained that the survivors were suffering from what was variably called *barackpsykosen* and *lägerpsykos* ('camp psychosis') (e.g. *Aftonbladet* 1945; *Expressen* 1945). Today, it is understood that the survivors were experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can cause sufferers to feel and behave as though the events which caused the trauma were occurring again, especially when exposed to circumstances resembling those under which the original trauma was

experienced (Leach 1994: 177–8).

While PTSD explains the reaction of this group of survivors to the refugee camp, the action they took – refusing to stay at the camp and attempting to reach the national authorities in Stockholm to protest over the conditions – can be understood as an act of performative agency (Butler 2016: 18–19). Theirs was a radical and significant act of resistance considering that as *repatriandi*, temporary guests of the state expected to leave as soon as they were well enough (Olsson 1997: 141), they had few rights and no political power. Moreover, though the refugee camp in Öreryd was 'open', meaning the survivors were not confined in the camp by fences or other barriers and could interact with the local residents, their movements beyond the town were controlled by the Swedish authorities. Their political, social and personal circumstances were such that they existed in states of layered vulnerability (Luna 2009) that included their precarious status in Sweden, their subjectivities as survivors of trauma, and aspects related to their gender, religion, class and age. However, these layered vulnerabilities did not preclude their ability to act, nor did their actions eliminate their vulnerabilities. Rather, their vulnerabilities were part of the conditions that enabled them to act to improve their circumstances, even as that action also risked reducing their circumstances (Butler 2016: 24–7).

The tragic suicides of the former political prisoner Ignacy Hundzel on 2 December 1945, and of the Jewish former prisoner Abraham Goldman on 20 June 1946 (DoB Öreryd, 1946), further impressed upon those in Öreryd the severity of the survivors' experiences and the challenges of coming to terms with them. Although the Öreryd resident Inga Ericsson was just ten years old at the time, she recalls with gravity that 'Suicides were not a surprise. We were only surprised

there weren't more of them' (Ericsson interview, 2017). The experiences and descriptions of survivors like Anna Krasieńska allow us to understand what Inga means. Anna was also only ten years old in 1940, when she and the other children at her school witnessed the German secret police execute their teacher, who was in the Polish resistance, before loading all the students into overcrowded cattle cars destined for slave labour camps. For five years, Anna was a political prisoner in one such camp in Neustrelitz, Germany. Interviewed in 1946 during her time in Öreryd as part of an initiative by the Polish Research Institute in Lund (PIZ), Anna recounted experiences at Neustrelitz such as discovering fingers and ears in her soup. The stark summary of the interviewer, who was also a Polish survivor, reads in part: 'She gives [the] impression that underneath [the] guise of getting tame with people and with the present surroundings, she is stacked in tragedy of a lonely and wronged child who passed through [the] bottom of evil and [the] bottom of physical and moral misery' (LUB Testimony 370, 1946). Such testimony would have been incomprehensible for the Öreryd locals and the Swedish clergy and counsellors assigned to work at the camp, even if the survivors felt comfortable talking to them about their experiences. Their fellow survivors, on the other hand, could serve as responsive and empathetic listeners, and the interviews of Polish survivors by other Polish survivors which were undertaken by the PIZ historical commission, including in Öreryd in 1946, offered one way for the survivors to talk about their experiences of Nazi persecution with someone who could understand and appreciate their trauma (Dahl 2021; Martínez 2021). These interactions would have been essential to coping with the trauma caused by the survivors' experiences of Nazi persecution (e.g. Pearlman and Staub 2016: 165–6).

Starting the process of healing

Living with this devastation in distinct ways, both the residents and the Polish survivors in Öreryd nonetheless attempted to create and foster a sense of 'normalcy'. For the locals, this meant continuing much as they had done when the Norwegian refugees occupied the camp. The Öreryd resident Elsa Fält, for instance, continued to operate the café in her home that she had established for the Norwegian refugees. The family guestbook still in the possession of her daughter, Inga Ericsson, bears the signatures and warm personal greetings of Polish survivors from the refugee camp.⁴ For the Poles, conducting the tasks necessary to rebuild their lives would have given them purpose and direction, as well as the outward impression of normalcy under far from normal circumstances. Such activities included determining if loved ones had survived and, if so, where they were and how to contact them. Those lucky enough to find loved ones then had to work out a variety of logistical and practical issues. Inga Ericsson recalls how on her daily walk to school she helped a Polish man call his wife at another refugee camp. The details of that routine – including the woman's name and the telephone number – are etched in Inga's memory because they were anything but ordinary (Ericsson interview, 2017). Whether the survivors knew it or not, by establishing these new routines, they were actively creating conditions for healing themselves (Pearlman and Staub 2016: 168).

Religion and culture likewise played an important role in this respect (Pearlman and Staub 2016: 167), though they may also have contributed to real and perceived divisions

4 Gustav Fält's guestbook, in the personal collection of his daughter, Inga Ericsson, shared with the author on 13 June 2017.

between the Jewish and non-Jewish Poles, as well as between the Poles and the residents of Öreryd. Few details are readily available regarding Jewish survivors' cultural and religious observances in Öreryd. It is likely that these were rather subdued and private, both because the Nazis had specifically targeted Jews for annihilation – a trauma which led some Jewish survivors to fearfully hide their Jewish identity even after they came to Sweden – and because some non-Jewish Poles held overtly antisemitic beliefs which were manifested in hostility towards their Jewish compatriots (Giloh 2016: 39; Gottfarb 1986: 159–60; Olsson 1997: 112–13). Göran Rosenberg refers to the antisemitism his father David experienced in the Öreryd refugee camp and cites this as the reason why many of the Polish Jews were sent to other camps in late December 1945 (Rosenberg 2015: 157; see also Giloh 2016: 39). On the other hand, at least one account exists of a survivor who hid his Jewish identity when he arrived in Sweden, only to reveal it to the new friends he made in Öreryd (Gottfarb 1986: 23). Although Jewish survivors did stay in the Öreryd refugee camp after December 1945, the diminished numbers may also have contributed to the apparent lack of organised Jewish religious and cultural life, or at least of extant accounts of these facets of life there. It is known, however, that following Abraham Goldman's tragic suicide in June 1946, the Jewish Community in Gothenburg took custody of his remains and provided him with a Jewish burial in the city's Eastern Cemetery (DoB Öreryd, 1946; DoB Mosaiska, Göteborg, 1946).

More is known about the cultural life and religious observances of the non-Jewish Poles in Öreryd. Music and art were important means of expression for the survivors, who staged musical and dance performances, both at the refugee camp and throughout Sweden.

Jan Rogo, who had been a political prisoner of the Nazis for six years, later recalled painting scenes for the performances in Öreryd (Adamczyk and Nordmark 1971). A Polish men's choir composed of survivors from the Öreryd refugee camp travelled around Sweden, giving concerts at other refugee camps and to Swedish audiences in various public fora (Kłoczyński 2016: 87; Uggla 1997: 192; *Svenska Dagbladet* 1945). Initially, the gentile survivors' spiritual needs were tended to in the village church, presided over by a visiting Catholic priest from Gothenburg. Later, a Catholic chapel was established in one of the barracks, and a Polish priest provided spiritual guidance to survivors such as Halina Czajkowska, who recalled Sunday prayers there (Robinson 2020: 160; see also Uggla 1997: 182). Larger celebrations also centred around the chapel, as when Sweden's Catholic Bishop Johannes Müller presided over a mass and conducted several confirmations as part of Polish Constitution Day celebrations on 3 May 1946.⁵

These communal and spiritual activities and connections were vital to the survivors' psychological recovery (Pearlman and Staub 2016: 166–7). But the survivors' desire to seek solace in a shared sense of cultural and religious identity appears to have been interpreted by Karl Gustav Rinder, the assistant vicar in Öreryd until 1946, as placing distance between them and the local community. Rinder later said of the Polish survivors, 'They completely isolated themselves from us, took care of all the services themselves' (Öreryd 1990: 191).⁶ In particular, he noted

5 Newspaper clipping from *Öreryds Hembygdsföreningen* (the local heritage association) collection, dated 4 May 1946.

Source unknown, but probably from either *Jönköpings-Posten* or *Värnamo-Tidningen*.

6 Translated from Swedish by the author.

that though he had been aware of the deaths which took place in the camp, the burials in the Öreryd church cemetery were conducted privately by the Poles, led by the Polish priest. However, Rinder's own description of a 'Catholic burial in the cemetery with a great procession and many crucifixes' (cited in Öreryd 1990: 191)⁷ indicates that the isolation was not as total as he seems to suggest. This funeral was probably that of the former political prisoner Antoni Wierzbowski, who died of a heart attack on 21 March 1946 (DoB Öreryd, 1946). Carl Gustav Davidsson recalls Antoni Wierzbowski's sudden death (Davidsson interview, 2017), and a letter sent to his family in Poland records that he died during a Swedish language lesson (Orliński 2021). Antoni Wierzbowski's nephew writes that 'a solemn funeral took place on 25 March, celebrated in the Catholic rite by Father Bronisław Szymański. Antoni Wierzbowski, escorted by hundreds of refugees and Swedish friends like him, was buried at the parish cemetery in Öreryd' (Orliński 2021).⁸ On this occasion, it appears there was little separation between the locals and the survivors of Öreryd. Moreover, the signatures and messages written by the Poles in the Fält family guestbook indicate that Elsa Fält's café was a gathering place where they mixed readily with members of the local community. The 'isolation' Rinder describes thus seems less a characterisation of seclusion on the part of the survivors than a glimpse of how they were transforming the Öreryd refugee camp and their place in it by building a sense of community and establishing strong interpersonal connections amongst themselves, while also engaging with the local community on their own terms.

7 Translated from Swedish by the author.

8 Translated from Polish by the author.

Towards new lives

When the Poles and other survivors of Nazi persecution came to Sweden in the spring and summer 1945, their status as repatriates meant that they were expected to remain in the country for a limited period. Among the first Poles to be repatriated in autumn 1945 were 191 people from the Öreryd and nearby Mossebo refugee camps (*Dagens Nyheter* 1945). Although some Poles wanted to return to their native country, many others had nothing to return to and/or were fearful of returning to antisemitic pogroms orchestrated by non-Jewish Poles and retaliatory actions by the Soviet authorities against former members of the Polish resistance (e.g. Smolar 1987: 45–51). A few were so desperate not to return to Poland that they refused to board the ship and even jumped overboard (Tistad 2015: 31). Göran Rosenberg describes how his father and uncle emphatically stated to the Swedish authorities that they did not want to return to Poland, with his uncle writing in a letter to the authorities: 'My entire family, which lived in Łódź before the war, has been murdered by Hitler's brutes' (Rosenberg 2015: 173). This was also true for the teenage survivors Anna Krasińska and Emilia Lis, who both insisted that they wanted to remain in Sweden (RA 06/F 4 B/3). While imprisoned in the slave labour camp in Neustrelitz, Anna's entire immediate family was killed during a 1943 air raid in Gdańsk (LUB Testimony 370, 1946). There was nothing left for her in Poland. Antoni Wierzbowski's wife and children were alive and well in Poland, but he delayed returning to them on the advice of his wife, who thought the conditions there too dangerous (Orliński 2021). In different ways, these actions can again be understood as performative acts of agency and resistance similar to those undertaken by refugees in similar and

other circumstances (e.g. Banko *et al.* 2021: 78–89; Lingelbach 2020: 220–1; Nowak 2019). The results also speak to the limits of the survivors' agency and resistance because of their status as refugees/repatriates (e.g. Nowak 2019: 110).

With uncertain futures facing them, the survivors in Öreryd both took advantage of and created opportunities to work and study as a means of finding new purpose and direction in life, wherever it might take them (e.g. Bogatic 2011; Carlberg 1994). Work was easy to come by for the survivors. In fact, for those deemed fit, it was just short of mandatory. Sweden was suffering a severe labour shortage, and temporary work in factories and forests and on farms was plentiful in and around Öreryd and throughout the southern Swedish provinces of Småland and Skåne (Olsson 1997: 101–24). The Polish survivors in Öreryd – especially the women and Jewish survivors – were in high demand as temporary workers (Kłoczyński 2013: 37; Olsson 1997: 101–24; Rosenberg 2015: 164–5). Local residents Karin Johansson and Carl Gustav Davidsson recalled that Polish refugees worked on their families' farms (Davidsson 2017; Johansson interview, 2017), and David Rosenberg worked on a farm near Öreryd picking potatoes (Rosenberg 2015: 167–8). As the historian Lars Olsson has shown, survivors from Öreryd and other refugee camps who entered the Swedish workforce as labourers worked in solidarity with Swedish labourers to improve their working conditions (Olsson 1997: 110).

The fact that working was near-mandatory did not preclude the survivors from seeking work for their own reasons and/or finding work that suited them. For instance, some Jewish survivors sought work to escape antisemitism in Öreryd, as well as in other refugee camps (Gottfarb 1986: 159–60; Olsson 1997: 112–13). Some survivors managed

not only to help fulfil the demands of the Swedish labour market, but also to contribute their expertise in other capacities. An interesting example is that of 25-year-old Henryk Szmoll, a former political prisoner who went to work in a factory in the town of Värnamo and was also hired as a trainer for the football team IFK Värnamo (*Aftonbladet* 1946). In the camp, there were a variety of opportunities for temporary employment. Before his tragic death, Abraham Goldman worked as the camp dentist, and Dr Anton Popper, a Jewish survivor from Czechoslovakia, was the camp physician (RA 12/110/1; RA 06/F 4 B/3). Dozens of survivors were employed to work in the camp in various capacities: cooks, tailors, shoemakers, storekeepers, office workers, electricians, librarians and so forth (RA 12/109/7). At times, survivors in the camp considered more than one option for employment. This was the case with the former political prisoners Dr Adam Szczypiorski and Magister Wanda Madlerowa, who considered positions with the PIZ historical commission in Lund before choosing to work at the school for young Polish survivors established at the camp in autumn 1945 (LUB PIZ 46:4).

The establishment of the Polish school is what changed the Öreryd refugee camp from a men's camp to a mixed camp just a few months after it began accepting refugees. The women and girls who came as teachers and students lived in separate barracks from the men and boys, but otherwise mingled freely. Between autumn 1945 and autumn 1946, nearly 200 Polish survivors between the ages of 9 and 25 attended the school, which catered for levels ranging from primary to upper secondary, following the Polish standard used at the time. The teachers were all Polish survivors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who gave instruction to the students in the full range of subjects (RA 06/F 4 B/3). Dr

Adam Szczypiorski was the principal and a history teacher. Magister Jadwiga Jaculewicz, also a former political prisoner, taught Polish language and literature, Western European and Swedish literature and French. Ludwik Podolak, who had spent five years imprisoned in Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp (LUB Testimony 186, 1946), provided instruction in geography, the natural sciences and health education. The natural sciences teacher Magister Wanda Madlerowa had been one of many former prisoners of the Nazis who had been involved in conducting clandestine education activities in the concentration camps (Kruszewski 2001: 26). Magister Teresa Trojanowska, a political prisoner of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, taught chemistry, mathematics and the natural sciences. Before working and training in football in Värnamo, Henryk Szmoll taught physical education (RA, 12/109/6 and 06/F4 B/3). The mathematics and physics teacher Magister Piotr Eisenstadt, a Jewish survivor, was particularly inspiring to Halina Neujahr, also a Jewish survivor, who began attending the school at the Öreryd camp in summer 1946, when she was 22 years old. Halina had missed three years of school during the war, so she started at the 'gymnasium' level (compulsory secondary education in Poland), a class which consisted of sixteen students, four of whom were Jewish (Neujahr interview, 1997). Anna Krasieńska, Emilia Lis and Halina Czajkowska were also among the students at the school. Halina Czajkowska, who was part of the 'lyceum' (advanced secondary education in Poland) class, recalls:

Some of us had been prisoners for five years, and the age differences were large. Hunger and trauma had left their marks. As the studies began, they seemed extremely difficult, much more than we had expected. We all experienced memory

troubles, which at first each of us suffered in silence, feeling that something was wrong but not knowing what to do about it. Eventually the problems burst into the open, and the professors made special efforts to help us. (Robinson 2020: 159)

Nonetheless, she and the other lyceum students completed two years of study in one year and successfully passed their exams without the benefit of textbooks (Öreryd 1990: 200–1). Despite the hard work, the students also managed to have fun, throwing Saturday night dance parties, playing volleyball and going on long hikes in the forests surrounding Öreryd (Robinson 2020: 159–60). On 14 September 1946, a graduation ceremony was held for the twelve lyceum students, including Halina Czajkowska, who recalls a 'sumptuous banquet' (Robinson 2020: 161). Although it was certainly a time of joy, the occasion was also punctuated by continued uncertainty. A local newspaper interviewed 21-year-old former political prisoners Wanda Nekrasz and Kazimierz Podkuliński, who spoke about their futures with trepidation. Wanda, who was arrested in 1942 for her involvement in the Polish resistance and imprisoned for three years in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück (Felt 1949a, 1949b), expressed both her wish to study chemistry at a Swedish university and her doubts about whether she could obtain the necessary funding for this education (cited in Öreryd 1990: 200–1). Such anxieties about their futures would undoubtedly have been on the mind of other survivors in the autumn of 1946, as the time of the Öreryd refugee camp was drawing to a close, and the survivors dispersed in a multitude of directions.

Lives fulfilled

The Jewish survivor Abraham Frischer, who had been literally nursed back to health on arrival in Sweden, visited Öreryd in 2000 for the Swedish television documentary, *Abraham och Ester* ('Abraham and Ester', 2001). It was in Öreryd, he explained to the narrator, that he was 'resurrected'. For Abraham and the other Polish survivors, beyond Öreryd was the task of fulfilling the lives they had nearly lost to Nazi persecution and had only just begun to regain in the refugee camp. Abraham Frischer remained in Sweden, where he married his wife, a fellow survivor. David Rosenberg also remained in Sweden for the rest of his life, and his story is undoubtedly the most high-profile account of a Polish survivor who was at the Öreryd refugee camp, thanks to the widespread success of the book written by his son. Originally published in Swedish in 2012, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz* has been translated into ten languages. Although it is believed that most survivors left Sweden, many also remained for years and even lifetimes, including some who established their new beginnings in Öreryd. While most of these individuals are not as well known or so thoroughly documented as Abraham Frischer and David Rosenberg, the lives of many of the survivors who spent time at the Öreryd refugee camp can be traced through newspaper articles, memoirs and other sources.

Jan Rogo's future in Sweden began with the backdrop scenery he painted for the survivors' musical performances in Öreryd. His artwork impressed representatives of the office products company AB Åtvidabergs Industrier, later renamed Facit AB, during an official visit to the refugee camp (Adamczyk and Nordmark 1971). Åtvidaberg was one of several Swedish companies keenly interested in recruiting Polish survivors from

the Öreryd refugee camp (RA 06/F 4 B/3). Jan began working for the company in 1947, while at the same time attending art school. For many years, including during Åtvidaberg-Facit's long period of global significance, he was responsible for designing the company's national and international exhibitions (Adamczyk and Nordmark 1971; Turlock and Palsten 1998). Magister Teresa Trojanowska, who taught at the Polish school in Öreryd, met fellow former political prisoner Kazimierz Matuszak, who was employed in the canteen, while they were both in the refugee camp. They were married in Öreryd in August 1946 (LoV Öreryd, 1946) and later settled in Stockholm. Both Kazimierz and Teresa worked at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm – he as a laboratory engineer and she as a chemist – and were actively involved in the Polish community in Sweden (Nowakowski 1992: 104–5; *Dagens Nyheter* 1986; *Svenska Dagbladet* 1993). Among the other teachers at the Polish school, Magister Piotr Eisenstadt emigrated to Canada in 1947 (NA 1947), while Henryk Szmoll remained in Sweden for several years, continuing to work in industry and as a football trainer (Hellström 2019: 9), before emigrating to the United States in 1952 (NA 1952).

Several former students at the Polish school, which relocated to Vikingshill in the greater Stockholm area in 1946, continued their educations and embarked on their careers in Sweden. Halina Neujahr continued her studies at the Polish school after it moved to Vikingshill, where she graduated in spring 1947. She went on to study at KTH, and in 1960 became the first woman in Sweden to graduate with a doctor of technology degree in chemistry (Rydberg 1993). In addition to a long and distinguished career at KTH, Dr Halina Neujahr also devoted herself to educating others

about the Holocaust (e.g. Neujahr 1995). She died in Stockholm at the age of 81 in 2006 (Wroblewski 2006). Tadeusz Raznikiewicz, a former political prisoner of Auschwitz and Neuengamme who attended the Öreryd school, also settled permanently in Sweden and became a chemist at Uppsala University (Litsner 1971). Halina Czajkowska studied at Stockholm Technical Institute, first taking courses in architecture, then in chemistry. She graduated in 1950 and worked as a chemist in the Cancer Research Laboratory at the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, under the direction of the fellow survivors of Nazi persecution Drs George and Eva Klein (Robinson 2020: 171–2). In 1951, she emigrated to Canada, where she continued her work in cancer research and contributed to the development of an anti-cancer drug that was the earliest cure for childhood leukaemia (Duffin 2000). Unfortunately, Wanda Nekrasz's misgivings regarding her future in Sweden were realised when her plans to study chemistry at Uppsala University were halted before she could begin. With no other prospects in Sweden, she returned to Poland, where she found devastation and experienced political pressure by the Soviet authorities because of her involvement in the Polish resistance during the war. Finally, in 1948, she was able to travel to the United States to study at university there, eventually becoming a US citizen (Felt 1949b: 4; Middleton 1955: 20–1; SSDI).

The legacy of the Öreryd refugee camp

Like the survivors, the physical manifestations of the Öreryd refugee camp were scattered to the winds in the autumn of 1946. Chief among these were the barracks, which were sold for use in local industry and for a variety of other purposes. Three were preserved in Öreryd, however: one which had



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Fig. 2. The monument stone commemorating the Öreryd refugee camp in 2017.

been built as a permanent structure with a basement and had housed the camp's employment office and telephone and postal services, and two freestanding barracks. In 1993, these three remaining vestiges of the refugee camp were configured together to form the present Missionskyrka (Mission Covenant Church) (Johansson 2002: 172–5). For many years, the remaining barracks and the graves of Ignacy Hundzel and Antoni Wierzbowski stood as the primary physical reminders of the Öreryd refugee camp. This changed in 1977, when a stone monument with a simple plaque which reads 'Öreryds flyktingläger 1940–1946' ('Öreryd refugee camp 1940–1946') (Fig. 2), was placed beside Öreryd's main road. At the dedication ceremony on 22 June 1977, the Swedish, Norwegian and Polish flags were raised behind the monument. Among the Norwegian and Polish former residents

of the refugee camp attending the dedication was the former Polish political prisoner Marian Michalak (Mårtenson 1985: 137). In July 1946, he had married fellow Polish survivor Barbara Morawska (LoV Öreryd, 1946), and the couple settled in nearby Gislaved, where work in local industry was readily available. Along with other Polish survivors of Nazi persecution, they were part of a small Polish community in the area (Wutkowski interview, 2017). In this way, the cemeteries around Öreryd – like so many others in Sweden – became the final resting place not only of survivors of Nazi persecution who died soon after coming to Sweden as refugees, but also of those survivors who became Swedish citizens and lived full lives in the country. The Swedish, Polish and Norwegian flags are still raised behind the monument on significant dates, such as the national days of the three countries (Fig. 3).

Conclusion

Polish survivors of Nazi persecution who lived as refugees in Öreryd in 1945 and 1946 were faced with the task of constructing new lives in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. It was an undertaking made more difficult by the immense challenges they had to contend with, including the traumas inflicted on them by the Nazis and the precarity of their existence as refugees in Sweden. Though the physical site of the refugee camp and the local community in Öreryd had hosted tens of thousands of Norwegian refugees during the war, the Polish refugees' experiences, actions, religion, language and culture at times defied the comprehension of the Swedish locals and officials. Under these circumstances, Polish survivors in the Öreryd refugee camp were nonetheless shaping their own lives and experiences in the refugee camp and establishing the foundations for their futures. They did this by

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Fig. 3. The monument dedicated to the Öreryd refugee camp, with the Swedish, Norwegian and Polish national flags flying behind it. Unspecified date.

adapting the environment to their needs, but also, for example, by rejecting the conditions of the refugee camp and resisting repatriation when they presented real or perceived threats to their safety. They created caring and supportive outlets to begin to cope with the trauma, established religious and cultural life, found ways of making semi-mandated employment suitable to their experiences and interests, and made effective use of opportunities for education. All these efforts were part of what made their ongoing survival possible. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that ongoing survival after the devastation wrought by the Nazis was different for everyone, and these characterisations are not intended as a homogenised representation of all survivors' experiences in the refugee camp. Rather, this article has illustrated some of the ways survivors were 'purposeful agents' within the Öreeryd refugee camp and the Swedish 'refugee regime' more broadly, acting within but also beyond the structures of the state by adapting and improving their immediate conditions to better suit themselves and their needs and to construct new lives. These findings demonstrate how taking a refugee-centred approach to analysing a Swedish refugee camp uncovers perspectives that are missing from traditional histories of the Swedish 'refugee regime' in which survivors of Nazi persecution have been represented primarily as recipients of Swedish aid and support. By providing insight into the ways survivors who were refugees were actively engaged in aiding and supporting themselves and others, this analysis contributes to the reshaping of refugee studies in Sweden and internationally taking place through the creation of histories of refugeedom. ■



Victoria Van Orden Martínez is a doctoral candidate in history at Linköping University in Sweden. Her dissertation – tentatively titled 'Afterlives: Histories of Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Sweden' – is an analysis

of how survivors of Nazi persecution who came to Sweden as refugees were involved in various social and political processes during the post-war period, with a focus on women and the role of gender and other differences.

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