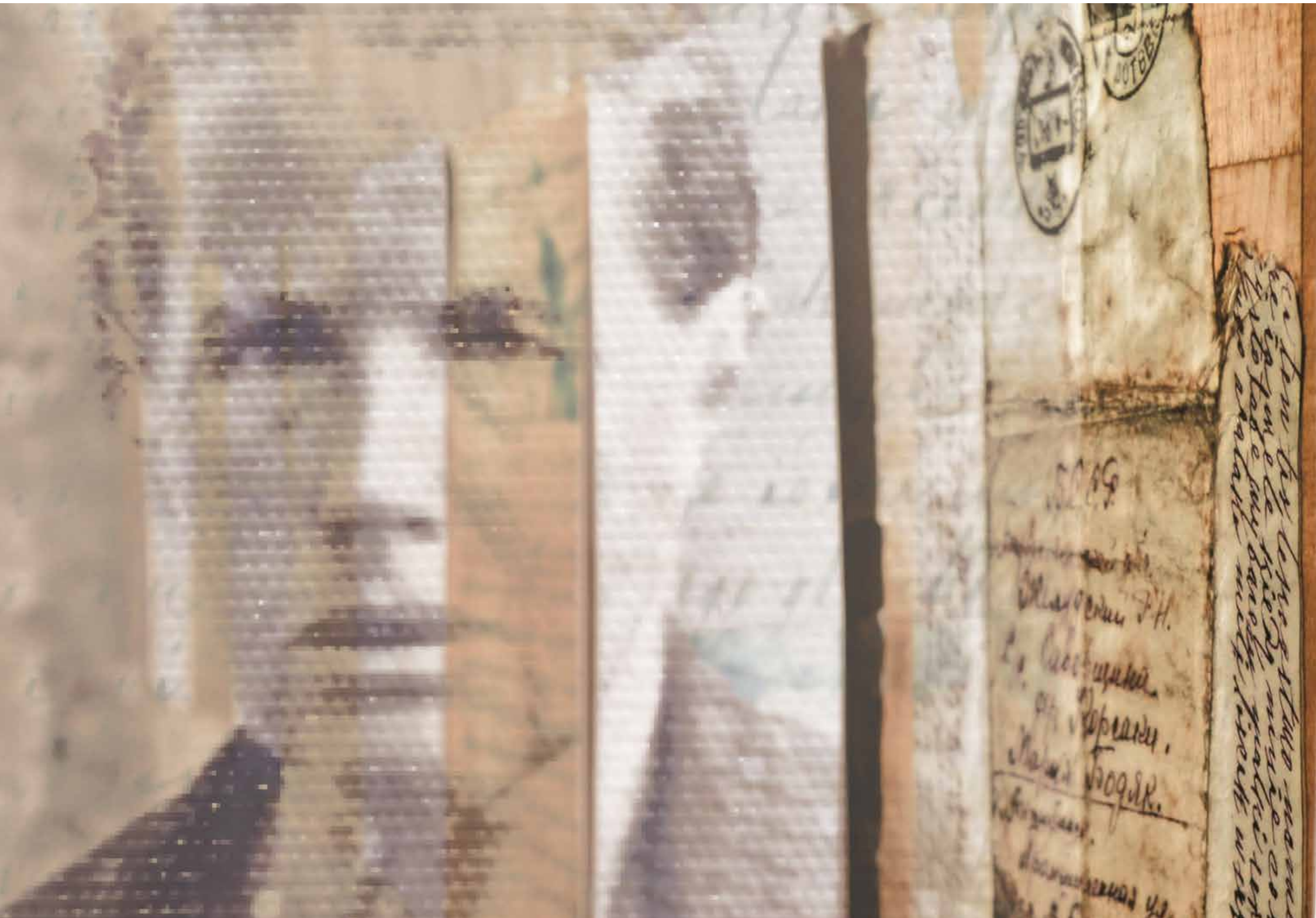




JÓZEFA'S LETTERS

Extraction from Oblivion

By: Michael Daniel Sagatis

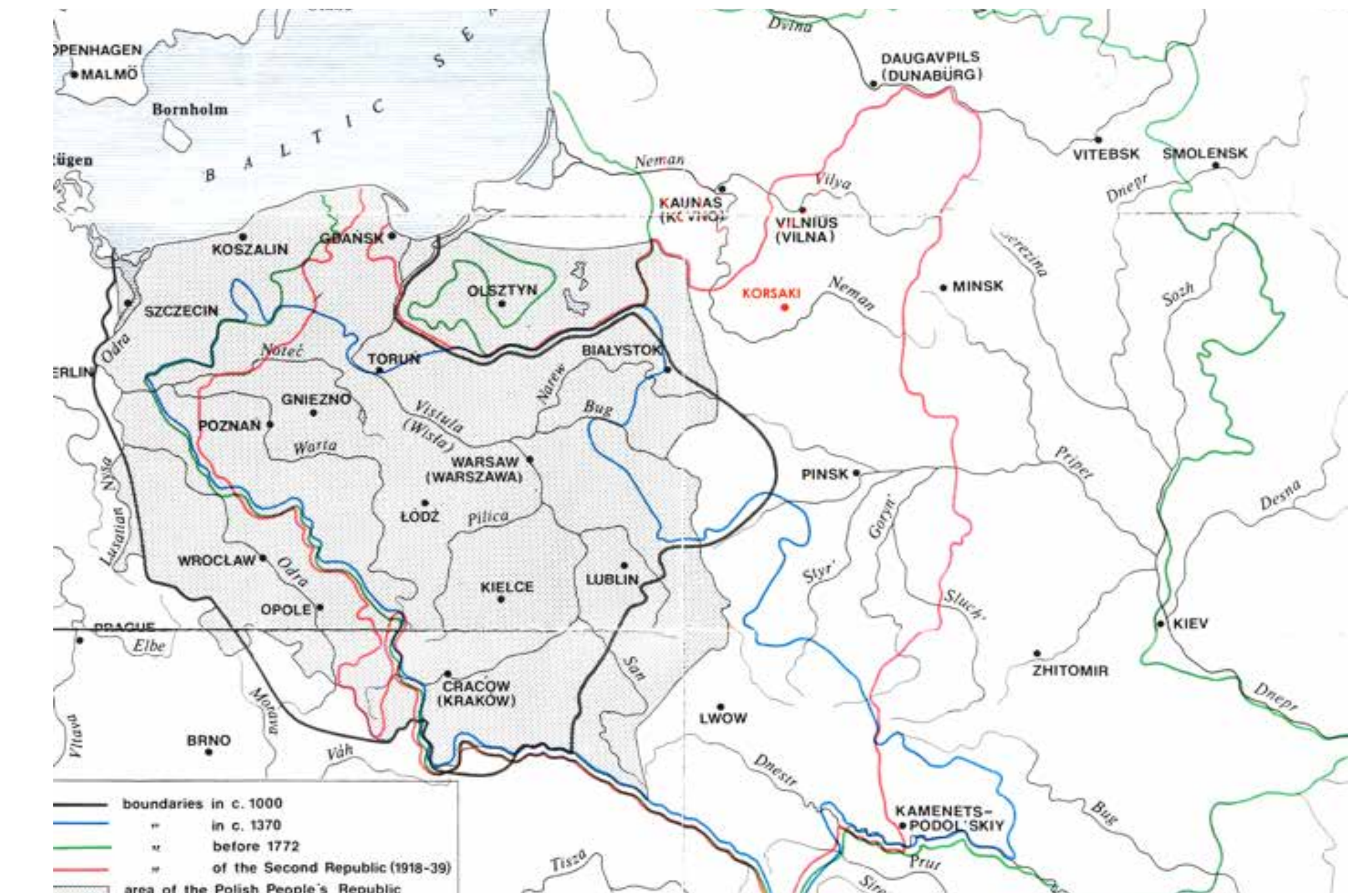
Abstract:

In April 1940, Józefa Bujdo was arrested by the Soviet state police (NKVD) and deported to Aktyubinsk in present day Kazakhstan. During her exile Józefa wrote to her children a collection of letters, which would eventually be found 75 years later, 5000 kms from their point of origin. An international team of translators have decoded Józefa's last thoughts and words to reveal a compelling, hand written account of living conditions under the repressive policies of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

Maps:



- 1. Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan:** Józefa was deported alone in April, 1940, aged 76. She would write her letters during the period 1940-1941. Ill-health would claim her in 1942.
- 2. Korsaki, Belarus:** Józefa's children receive their mothers letters. Youngest daughter Wanda, after surviving her own epic journey, enters the UK as a refugee in 1946.
- 3. London, England:** Following a reunion with her sisters in Gorzów, Poland in 1963, Wanda returns to the UK with Józefa's Letters which get lost over time.
- 4. Glyn Neath, Wales:** The letters would be found in 2015, following the passing of Wanda' daughter Sophie. The project to decode the letters would then begin.



The red circle indicates the location of Korsaki, the village where Józefa lived and raised her family. The red line indicates the pre-war border of the Polish 2nd Republic. This region of Eastern Poland or “Kresy” became occupied by the USSR following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact – a secret agreement made between Hitler and Stalin to invade, divide and occupy Poland. The Soviet regime immediately applied its premeditated policy of repression, which would lead to the forced exile of over 1.2 million citizens from this region to the extremities of the Soviet Union.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT



Konstantin and Józefa Bujdo, 1895, shown as a recently married couple. Konstantin was an Orthodox Russian from Vilnius who worked as a forester. Józefa was Catholic and came from a gentrified Polish family from Nowogródek. Their union was based on mutual love and respect and not by social class status.

As a result, Józefa lost her family support.

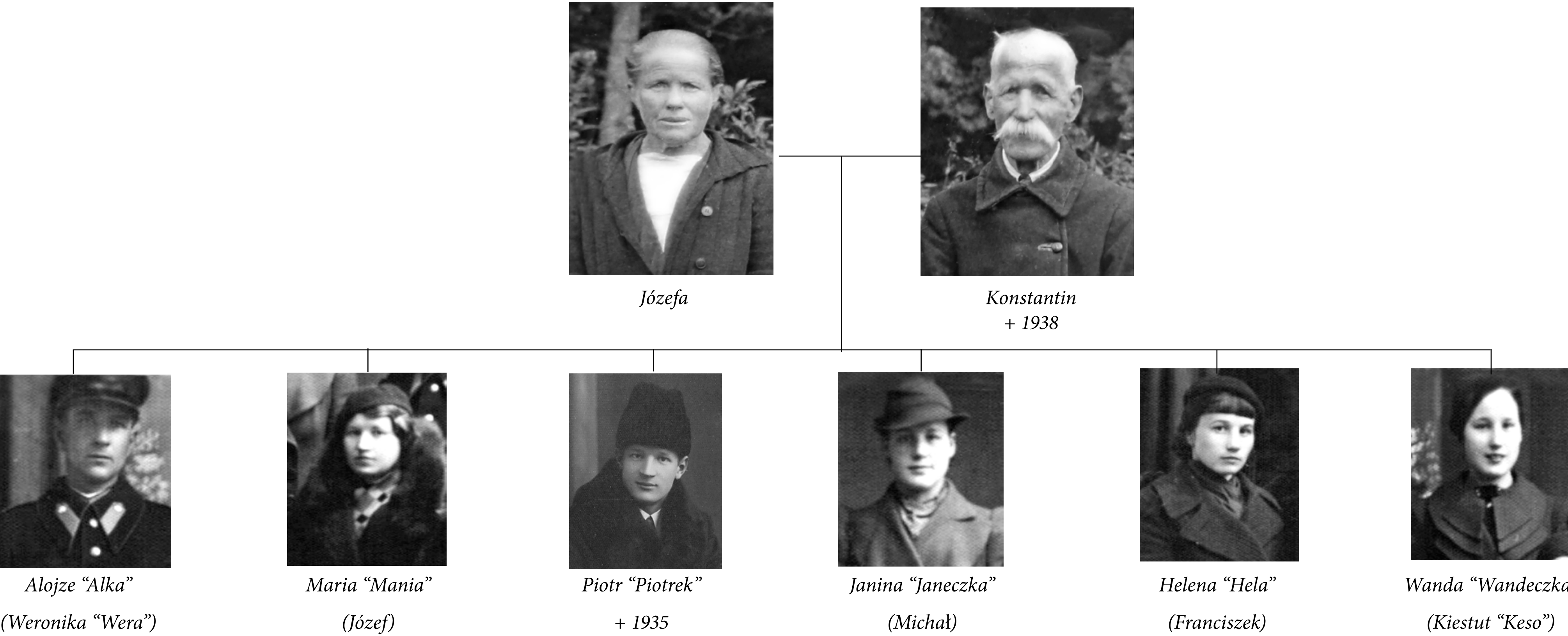
By 1925, Józefa had become a grandmother. Pictured here are Józefa and Konstantin with their daughters Janina, Helena and two granddaughters Janina and Regina. In 1946, Helena and her daughters would be repatriated to the newly formed territory of Western Poland settling in Gorzów Wielkopolskie (formally Landsberg)



This is the last image of the family gathered on the occasion of Konstantin’s funeral in 1938. Józefa is seen in the middle. The uniformed men, son Alojzy (left) and son-in-law Franciszek (right), would soon become targets of the Soviet regime. Their repression policies would be extended to family members and lead to the deportation of Józefa.



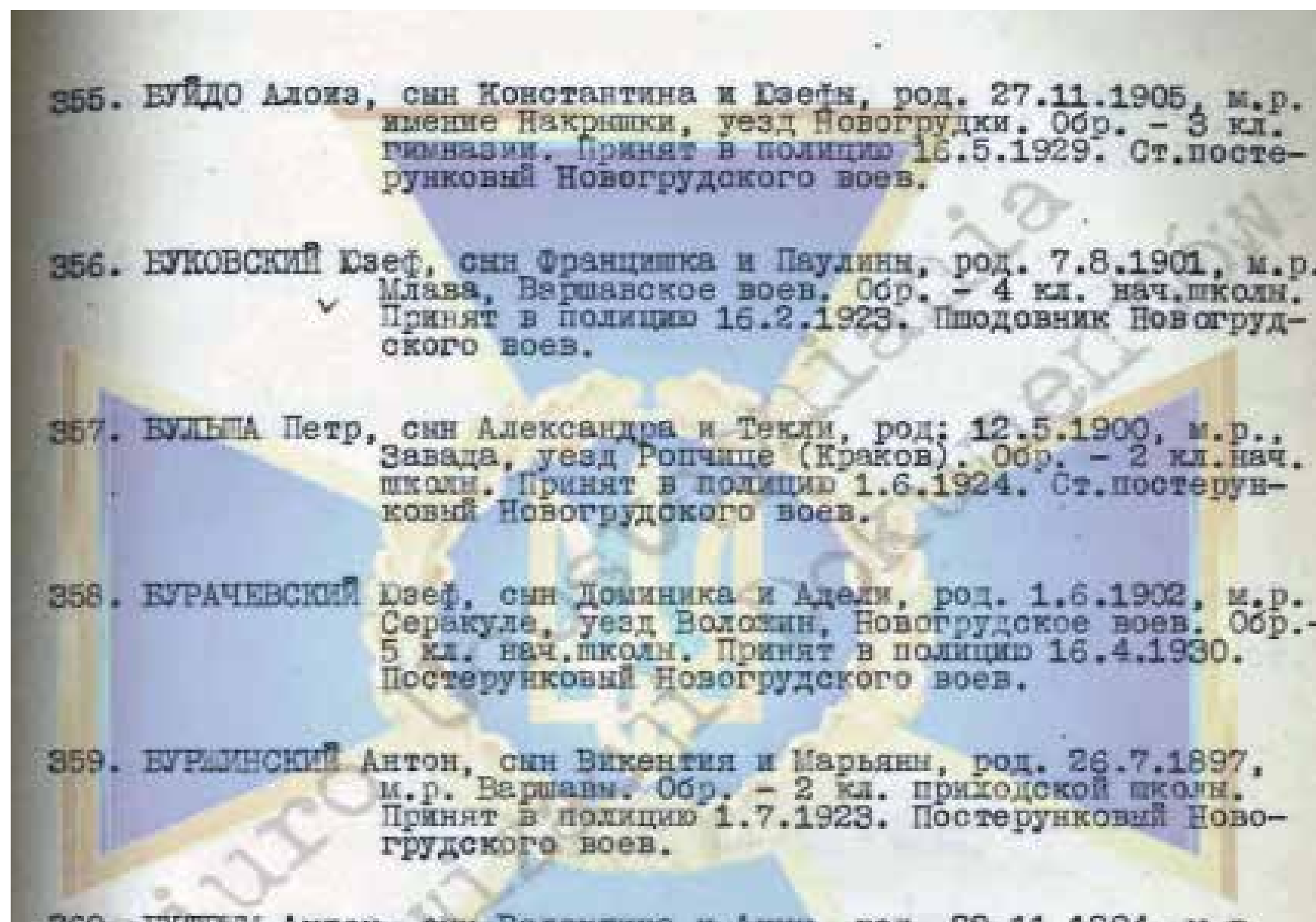
Below is the family tree of Józefa at the time of her deportation with the diminutive forms of her children’s names e.g. “Wandeczka”. In brackets are the names of the spouses, which are sometimes referred to.



WHY WAS JÓZEFA DEPORTED?

The invasion of Poland in 1939 led to the annexing of the Eastern Polish territories by the Soviet Union. The 'de-Polonisation' of this region would start soon after occupation resulting in over 1 million Poles deported from their homeland and into the extremities of the Soviet GULAG camp system. In early 2017, Russia's Memorial institute was asked to clarify why Józefa was deported alone, at the age of 76, to Kazakhstan. The institute sent an official response with photographs of pages from the original NKVD archives stored in Kiev (picture left) which confirmed the name of Józefa's son, Alojzy Bujdo (pictured on above tree) who was a serving officer in the Polish Police force.

At the time of occupation, this category was one of many professions deemed to be ‘hostile’ and its officers/uniform wearers viewed as ‘enemies of the state’. Alojzy was arrested (but would later escape). Józefa was also arrested and deported on April 13th 1940 under NKVD’s ‘parents of traitors’ policy which was the Soviet Unions’ legal justification for repressing ‘anti-communist’ elements which included parents.



NKVD archive document (courtesy: MEMO institute)

LETTERS AS LIFELINES

To be exiled meant to be separated and the reality of separation can be understood by the vast distances letters had to travel and the time taken to receive a reply. Between April 1940 and June 1941, Józefa sent 21 letters addressed only to her daughters. Each letter travelled over 2,500 kms and took, on average 2 weeks to deliver. Contact with loved ones helped boost morale and gave exiles a reason to ‘hang on’. The postal service also allowed for the delivery of money and packages from home that usually contained food and clothes. Given Józefa’s age (76) she had no other option but to write very emotional letters to her daughters in attempt to secure further help i.e. money and food that could prolong her life and allow Józefa the hope of return.



Last picture of Józefa, 1940



Józefa's Letter No. 16a, dated: February 21st, 1941

THEMES AND TONES OF THE LETTERS

Józefa wrote in a regional dialect that blended old Polish mixed with Russian which reflected the linguistic influences of the geographical area in which she lived and raised her family. As the letters were translated, it became apparent Józefa wrote with an Aesopian use of language which used different tones for different daughters ranging from warm and tender to bitter resentment. Viewing the letters as a collection of exchanges between a exiled mother and her daughters, an emotional narrative emerges where the tone of Jozefa's earlier letters is that of matriarchal mother intent on maintaining order and hopeful that she will return to her family. This tone quickly changes to frustration about being deported and forced to work in order to survive - in many letters, the costs of living are cited and the fear of being forgotten repeated. The tone of later letters reflects Jozefa's abandonment of hope as increasing ill health and working conditions take their toll.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JÓZEFA ?

Following the outbreak of the Soviet German War in June 1941, there followed a temporary cessation of repression against exiled / imprisoned Polish citizens who were released as an act of leniency to help create a Polish army that could help counter the Nazi advances. Józefa, now aged 78, who could clearly not join an army, was too infirm to be evacuated and had little option but to remain in Kazakhstan and continue working for her basic survival requirements of food and warmth.

We know from her earlier letters that Józefa refers to contracting cystitis, appendicitis, bronchitis and was coughing up blood - conditions that were clearly consequences of her nutritional deprivation and overworking. Although no formal recorded date of death was found, research of archives in Aktyubinsk places Józefa in the nearby village of Shibaevka, which is the most likely place where she died and was buried in a common grave. This location was visited by the author in early 2018.

The survival and eventual discovery of Józefa's letters is what has allowed this epic story to be researched and is what continues to motivate the authors interest.

[illegible]

Józefa shown on list of Polish exiles, 1942 (courtesy: Aktyubinsk Archive)

SHARING THE STORY:

HISTORICAL EXHIBITIONS:

In **2017** the story of ‘Jozefa’s Letters - Extraction From Oblivion’ was selected to be exhibited at the following locations:

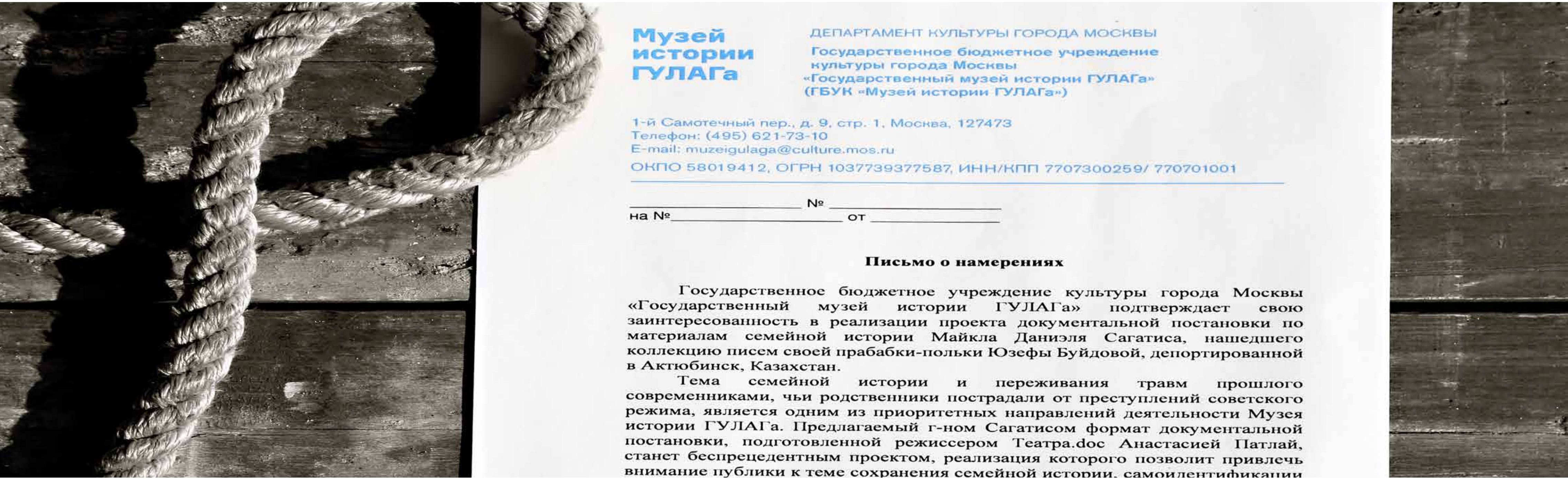
- The Museum of Genocide Victims, Vilnius, **Lithuania** (pictured below)
- The Shoah Cellar Museum, Budapest, **Hungary**
- The Kazakh’s Peoples Assembly, Aktyubinsk, **Kazakhstan.**



In early **2018** the exhibition was shown at The Territory of Terror Museum, Lviv, **Ukraine** (pictured below)



MEDIA:



ONLINE ARTICLES / INTERVIEWS relating to the development of this story can viewed by clicking or pasting the following links into your browser.

The majority will be translated as per your browser settings.

Lithuanian:

<http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2017-05-01-jozefos-laiskai-tremties-ir-atminties-istorija/158788>

http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/26/172685/ziauru_tremtines_likima_atkleidzia_laiskai#wowzaplaystart=2098000&wowzaplayduration=143000

Polish:

<http://zw.lt/wilno-wilenszczyzna/sagatis-zaczelo-sie-od-odkrycia-listow-prababci-z-wilenszczyzny/>

<http://zw.lt/wilno-wilenszczyzna/diskusja-o-listach-od-jozefy-czy-historia-ma-znaczenie-dla-mlodziezy/>

<http://zw.lt/wilno-wilenszczyzna/wydobyte-z-zapomnienia-listy-jozefy-bujdo-przemowily/>

Russian:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeG8ZJsa66U&feature=youtu.be>

http://www.inform.kz/ru/britanec-priehal-v-aktobe-v-poiskah-deportirovannoy-prababushki_a3100149

http://lenta.inform.kz/ru/britanskiy-fotograf-kazahi-nauchili-menya-pit-chay-s-tary-i-est-talkan_a3142079

http://www.inform.kz/ru/britanec-v-aktobe-v-kazahstanskom-arhive-ya-uznal-o-svoih-kornyah_a3165511

<http://avestnik.kz/puteshestvie-vo-vremeni/>

<https://www.svoboda.org/a/29453911.html>

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS:

Vilnus, Lithuania

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/posts/10156280483974966>

Budapest, Hungary

https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/media_set?set=a.10156943023624966.1073741922.603134965&type=3

Belarus (visiting ancestral village with family)

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/posts/10156292949379966>

Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Finally%20made%20it%20to%20Kazakhstan>

https://www.facebook.com/pg/jozefasletters/photos/?tab=album&album_id=201981697223698

Lviv, Ukraine

Opening event: https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/media_set?set=a.10157602255479966.1073741939.603134965&type=1&l=443727b620

Presentation of Exhibition: https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/media_set?set=a.10157700294314966&type=1&l=6610ee5538

Closing Event / Exhibition Performance:

https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/media_set?set=a.10157813444374966.1073741951.603134965&type=1&l=9a3eab17d3

PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES: ‘40 DEGREES OF IDEOLOGY’

As part of our system of physical signs, ‘landscapes’ are engaged in a complex relationship with its spectators. Forming an intrinsic part of the human identity, landscapes have become our referential view, appearing ageless and able to resist the effects of time passing which human senescence cannot. In this series taken by the author images of physical landscapes **become** the geo-political context from where Józefa would spend her remaining life in the remote settlement of her exile to and buried in an unmarked grave. Both the settlement and cemetery were visited by the author in the winter and summer of 2018 where temperatures peaked as low as -40 and +40 degrees celsius. The referential points of the solitary trees, taken from different distances, is used as the metaphor for the identities of those victims of repression that remain lost in oblivion. The barren beauty of this scenery define the physical space, terrain and weather conditions that would become the natural prison for those exiled.



MULTIMEDIA PERFORMANCE:

The story has been adapted to be told as a powerful multimedia performance using actors and musicians. During the performance, a selection of letters are read by actors, representing Józefa's daughters, who read the letters of Jozefa in multiple languages to dramatically communicate the changing tone of her writings. The performance reading lasts approx. 45 minutes and is set to a specifically composed electronic soundscape which enhances the atmosphere of the readings. Images of the event performed in Vilnius, 2017 are shown below.

One of the letters performed (with English subtitles) by an actor can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/rEnTu2Ck9Fo>

This performance has also realised the composition of a number of specific acoustic musical pieces for piano, viola, string quartet and voice which are performed as part of this multimedia event.

A recorded practice can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/michael.sagatis/videos/vb.603134965/10156258405709966/?type=3&theater>

A multimedia video promo can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8z_yg_nXm18&feature=youtu.be



CONCEPTUAL SUMMARY: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE



The above image is where Józefa’s letters were found in 2015. Everything you have thus far read originated from this chaotic scene in Glyn Neath, South Wales - a scene with it’s own sub story that would become a further metaphor of the megalomaniacal forces that would not only lead to the conditions resulting in Jozefa’s exile and the writing of her letters, but their subsequent loss and discovery decades later. In 2016, the decision was made to fully research this project which brought together an international team of philologists and translators to decode and transcribe the letters. As part of further background research, each branch of Józefa’s descendants, created by her surviving children, was identified, contacted and the majority of them visited involving trips to the US, Canada, & Eastern Europe. Below is the current Bujdo genealogical tree which shows Józefa is survive by more than 200 descendants. The recreation of Józefa’s identity allowed for her to be finally reunited with her family and thereby, ultimately, achieve the fulfillment of Józefa’s dying wish.

Following the discovery of the letters in 2015 , the decoding and research of 2016 and the exhibitions that took place in 2017 enabled the artistic recreation of Józefa’s identity and sharing of her story to a modern audience. The author is left with no doubt that the letters *found him* to not only share this personal and historically true story but also it’s wider implications of how Jozefa’s forced deportation, letter writing and eventual death, would transmit a trauma upon her children which continues to echo among subsequent generations today. It is the authors contention that the descendents of many millions who suffered as a result political ideology, especially those former Soviet union countries where discussions about repression of family members was highly discouraged, are not fully aware of how the effects of inter-generational trauma impacts on present day life.

To respectfully acknowledge the suffering of our ancestors means we can begin to understand the conditions that created us and thereby assist in the discharging of any residual effects of echoing trauma. It is in this auto-ethnographical direction - part biographical / part fiction that a book and film concept is planned to unite the perspectives of both authors Józefa and Michael (Józefa’s Great Grandson). The author has made this 15 minute video to creatively express and unite the core themes of this project - trauma, memory, inheritance and forgiveness. A selection of Józefa’s letters were read by amateur actors to show the emotional content of Józefa’s writing and the different voices of Józefa. Although Józefa wrote to 3 (out of 4) daughters, I believe it’s the letters to Wanda, her youngest daughter, that would transmit the trauma of Józefa’s repression. I also believe that Wanda would transmit this trauma to her daughter (Sophie) and her son (my father) in the years to come. The letter to Wanda is the 2nd letter read by the 2nd actor (it has Russian subtitles).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3LqTdQCQKU&feature=youtu.be>

The author of this overview, Michael Daniel Sagatis would be sincerely grateful for any constructive advice / feedback on the efforts and story thus far. Whilst still gaining experience as an author, Michael will gladly consider opportunities for investment and offers for mentorshsip or partnering to further develop this story for book publication and / or adaptation for stage or screen. Michael is flexible to attend courses, meet to discuss further ideas and temporarily relocate for the right creative development opportunity.

Please feel free to contact Michael directly on + 7 916 268 7156 or email him on: sagatism@gmail.com

Michael

Wanda (Grandmother)

Józefa (Great Grandmother)

