

Australian Colonial Society and Its Ethnic Diversity in Polish Diggers' Memoirs

Jan Lencznarowicz

Abstract: This paper examines three memoirs written by Polish gold diggers Seweryn Korzeliński, Bolesław Dolański and Sygurd Wiśniowski with the aim of showing how each of them portrayed East Australian colonial societies and their ethnic composition in the 1850s and 1860s. The authors' reading and explanation of Antipodean social realities are strongly anchored in their earlier experiences, particularly their political and cultural formation in the historical context of their partitioned homeland, their participation in the military struggle for its independence and contribution to European national uprisings and movements. This, as well as the fact that they addressed their observations and opinions to their countrymen, and tailored them accordingly, make them interesting and point to the importance of this outsiders' representation of colonial Australia. Therefore, the article brings into focus this particular perspective, with an emphasis on its presentation of ethnic diversity and reflection of early Polish-Australian intercultural encounters.

Keywords: Seweryn Korzeliński, Bolesław Dolański, Sygurd Wiśniowski, Polish people in Australia, gold miners, colonial Australia

If we put aside Polish peasants from the Prussian-controlled territories, who following their German neighbours settled in South Australia, among dozens of Poles who arrived in Australia in the 1850s and early 1860s predominated participants of the armed struggle for the independence of Poland. Most of them took part in the Spring of Nations in Poland and Hungary in 1848-49. To this group belonged Seweryn Korzeliński and Bolesław Dolański, who reached Australian shores in 1852 and after a couple of years on the Victorian goldfields returned to Europe. Sygurd Wiśniowski, a well-known Polish traveller, sailed to Sydney a decade later. He dug for gold in Victoria and Queensland and after a prolonged stay left Australia. Each of them wrote a memoir, describing his experiences in the Antipodes.

These memoirs differ in many respects and their intellectual and literary value is uneven but they give an illuminating insight into their authors' encounters with colonial Australia. They tell the story of those Polish mid-19th century arrivals who decided not to make Australia their new home and maintained an outsider's perspective. Drawing on the memoirs I try to trace the way Polish diggers attempted to comprehend a totally new and alien social setting they had plunged into. The focus is on their perception of colonial society, especially its social characteristics as well as its ethnic diversity. This term refers to a range of differences in the ethnic composition of colonial society. It is a category allowing for consideration and comparison of the plurality of its ethnic and cultural characteristics. In this sense it corresponds to Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural diversity, which treats culture as an object of empirical knowledge and recognises its pre-given contents and customs. However, when we analyse the narratives of the Polish memorialists, we may deal with what Bhabha terms cultural difference—"the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable,'

authoritative, adequate to the system of cultural identification” (34). In the light of his theoretical approach, the memoirs discussed here belong to the “process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity” (Bhabha 34).

Seweryn Korzeliński was the author of *Opis podróży do Australii i pobytu tamże od 1852 do 1856 roku* [*Description of a Voyage to Australia and Sojourn There from 1852 to 1856*], which came out in print for the first time in Kraków in 1858. The author was born in 1804 in a noble family settled in Eastern Galicia—the part of pre-partition Poland annexed and renamed by the Habsburgs, today in Ukraine. First he served in the Austrian cavalry, left for central Poland, which was under the Russian Tsar’s control, and fought in the Polish-Russian War in 1831, although this is not fully confirmed. He joined the Polish National Guard in Galicia in 1848 at the time of the Spring of Nations. When it was suppressed by the Austrians, Korzeliński, as an officer of the Polish Legion, took part in the Hungarian campaign of 1848-49. Hungarian historian György Gratz described him as “one of the most valiant heroes in the Polish Legion” (qtd. in Kovács 184).¹ After the capitulation he was interned in the Ottoman Empire (Szumla, Kutahia). In 1851 with other ex-combatants he succeeded in travelling to Britain where he stayed in London and on Jersey. However, as he could not find employment there, a year later he left with other Polish officers for Australia. Polish-Australian historian Lech Paszkowski came to the conclusion that it was impossible to trace all Poles who fought in the Hungarian Uprising and found their way to Australia but there were not less than fifty of them (22). At first Major Korzeliński prospected for gold, usually together with his countrymen, on the goldfields of Forest Creek (today Castlemaine), in Ovens, near Beechworth and later in the vicinity of Bendigo. He met with no success, gave up prospecting and in 1854 set up a shop in the Quartz Mountains close to Maryborough. Although he was naturalized in 1856, the same year he returned to his homeland in the Austrian part of Poland. Two years after arrival Korzeliński was appointed headmaster of the agricultural college at Czernichów near Kraków and published his memoir. In 1866 he married and settled in Bereźnica, his birthplace, where he died in 1876 (Chłędowski 145-147; Czarniecki 161-162; Paszkowski 202-209).

Bolesław Dolański’s memoir *Trzy epoki z życia mego, czyli wyjazd do Australii, tamże mój pobyt i powrót do Europy* (*Three Periods of My Life, or Departure for Australia, My Sojourn There and Return to Europe*) were written in France in 1855 but published no sooner than in 1981. The author, born in the Russian occupied part of Poland in 1824, studied agriculture in Warsaw. For political reasons he had to flee to Prussia, where he was imprisoned. Released during the revolution of 1848, he fought against the Prussian Army in the Poznań region, annexed to Prussia in 1793 and again at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. After the collapse of the Spring of Nations Dolański went to the UK and France. In 1852 he sailed to Melbourne. With mixed success he prospected for gold in the Campbell’s Creek mines and ran a store near Castlemaine. In 1854, when the news of the outbreak of the Crimean War arrived in Victoria, he returned to Europe to fight against Russia. What became of him after that is unknown (Paszkowski 210-17; Walaszek, Wstęp 5-34; Walaszek, “Australijska” 123-135)

Sygdur Wiśniowski was a famous globe-trotter and a journalist. His birthplace, Paniowce Zielone, was in the western part of Podole, a historical province of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In 1772 the area was incorporated by the Habsburgs and became a part of the province of Galicia, today in Ukraine. Like Korzeliński and Dolański, he came from a

¹ All translations by the author, unless otherwise stated.

Polish gentry family. Born in 1841, Wiśniowski represented the younger generation and did not participate in political conspiracy nor in the military struggle for the independence of Poland. However, he joined Giuseppe Garibaldi's forces in Italy near Naples and afterwards underwent brief training at the Polish Military School in Genoa and Cuneo. After a brief stay in his homeland he left for Australia before the outbreak of the January Insurrection in 1863 in the Russian-controlled part of Poland. Between 1862 and 1872 he travelled and worked in New South Wales, at sea, in New Zealand, Victoria, Fiji and Queensland. After his return to Poland he decided to go to America. Until 1884 he lived in and toured the USA, Canada and the Antilles. In the last years of his life he settled in his native region and took to industry. He died in 1892. His adventures in Australia and New Zealand, including gold prospecting, sheep shearing, farming, service on the barque *Woodpecker* and even the survival of the wrecking of the schooner *Terrara*, are described by Wiśniowski in numerous articles and in the book entitled *Dziesięć lat w Australii* [*Ten Years in Australia*], published in Lwów (today Lviv in Ukraine) in 1873. A prolific and very popular author in his lifetime, he contributed to Polish newspapers and published several books, including *Dzieci królowej Oceani* [*Children of the Queen of Oceania*] in 1877. (Cz., "Sygurd" 285; Tuwim and Olszewicz 5-66; Paszkowski 241-244; Gościński 469-483).

All the memoirs analysed in this article attempted to appeal to the interest of Polish readers in the exotic and mysterious, and therefore even more fascinating world of the Antipodes. The authors were clearly aware that in addition to satisfying such interest their writings could serve as a useful guide or introduction to Australia for potential Polish visitors or migrants. They attempted to present the Australian climate and flora and fauna, outlined Australian geography and history, and introduced the target Polish readership to the economy, politics and social life of the colonies. They did not avoid some factual errors, concerning for instance the number of colonies and their political systems (Dolański 127-128) or the alleged dominant role and control of governors in all other Australian colonies gained by Victorian governor Charles Hotham (Korzeliński, *Opis* 2: 196). Nevertheless, they covered all essential issues, which still today constitute the field of historical research as well as the popular image of colonial Australia, such as its Indigenous population, European settlement, colonists' life in cities, on goldfields and in the bush, as well as political and social events and institutions. Of course, Wiśniowski presented a country which had developed and changed a great deal since the beginning of the gold rush when the remaining two authors landed on the Australian shore. Interestingly, Wiśniowski, who was aware of these changes and differences and embraced them enthusiastically, was ready to admit that "Civilisation with all its ugliness is destroying all charm of nature here" (Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 59). In fact, such an individual approach and personal opinions, misguided or biased, as they sometimes were, may shed more light on Polish encounters with colonial Australia than compilation made by the authors of all kinds of information available to them at the time.

The reception of these memoirs varied considerably. Dolański's manuscript had been gathering dust in The Princes Czartoryski Library (Kraków) until 1981. But even since its publication that year the book has not attracted much interest, most probably due to its lesser literary value. Its printed version was not mentioned in Paszkowski's book—the most comprehensive study of the Polish presence in Australia in the nineteenth century. It is deemed to lack "interesting and independent observations, in-depth analyses" (Bąk, "Australia" 229). The respective memoirs of Korzeliński and Wiśniowski came out in print soon after their return from Australia. An abbreviated translation of Korzeliński's memoir was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1979, under the title *Memoirs of*

Gold-Digging in Australia. In fact, it is not even an abridged version of the original text, rather a collection of excerpts in large part paraphrased, rather than literally translated. A still shorter, popular version of this translation under the title *Life on the Goldfields: Memoirs of a Polish Migrant. 1850s in Victoria* came out in Melbourne in 1994 published by Mentone Educational Centre. Korzeliński's approach is credited with emotional distance, authentic interest in social and natural phenomena, and the way he combined Polish Romanticism with his down-to-earth, unsentimental attitude (Bąk, "Rozważny" 211-214; Mauersberger 6). Wiśniowski's *Dziesięć lat w Australii* before its publication was serialized in the Lwów daily *Gazeta Narodowa* (*Gazeta* 1). His other books only added to his popularity as a master of travel literature and reportage, highly valued by distinguished writers such as Henryk Sienkiewicz and Maria Konopnicka (Bilińska 133-134). Both Korzeliński's and Wiśniowski's books reappeared in print after World War II, whereas their first editions are accessible via the Internet. There was even a cartoon version of *Dziesięć lat w Australii* entitled *Po australijskie złoto. O Sygurdzie Wiśniowskim* [*For Australian Gold: About Sygurd Wiśniowski*] by Weinfeld and Szyszko. However, today their readership is rather limited, mostly to specialists and readers interested in nineteenth century travel and adventure literature.

All three authors differed in their views and attitudes towards Australia. For Korzeliński it was a purgatory, "where a man sweats out all his sins and suffers for them" (*Opis* 2: 139). Yes, at that time—he admitted—for a Polish refugee life in the Australian bush was more tolerable than in London or Paris. However, when he and his Polish friends heard about the formation of a Polish legion that was to take part in the Crimean War against the Russian Tsar, they went to Melbourne with the intention to sail back to Europe. Although this plan fell through, the moment Korzeliński learned about political liberalisation in his native part of Poland under Austrian rule, he left for home. He insisted that he did not regret his decision as he had met more bad than good people and had lived in primitive conditions for so long. "Where can I face something worse?"—he wondered (*Opis* 2: 309), and elsewhere he declared that he did not envy even his debtors a longer stay in Australia (*Opis* 2: 159).

Unlike Korzeliński, who recommended that if one wanted to see all that was beautiful, elegant and truly amazing, one should go to Paris, Dolański declared that he preferred a hundred times more Australia to France. In his heart it was second only to Poland. "With its healthy, clean and mild climate it was the most charming country that generously rewards the work of a diligent [man]" (218). He wished he could have stayed there, but as he explained in his farewell ode, Australia was his lover and Poland his mother (234-242) One has many lovers and only one mother, so despite the temptation, (241-242) he could not stay in his "dear" and "beautiful" Australia, where one could live like in paradise. Consequently, when the Crimean War broke out he went back to Europe. On board the departing ship, he even took pity on those of his countrymen who, for whatever reason, stayed behind (233). His praise for Australia prompted Polish historian Adam Walaszek, who published his memoirs, to conclude that in fact Dolański found there his Eldorado or Arcadia (135). Korzeliński, on the other hand, was much more cynical about such poetical portrayals. With much irony he confronted Polish poet Teofil Lenartowicz's verse, extoling an Antipodean "lost paradise", where life is without cares of the day and weary exiles return there to rest on the banks of golden rivers, with the reality of diggers' life (Korzeliński, *Opis* 2: 132). "If one finds oneself in such a faraway country, what one can do? One has to stay there but I do not feel like returning there, even if exiled"—declared the Polish soldier banished from his homeland (*Opis* 2: 139). Back in Poland, he recollected the moment when the ship with would-be gold

prospectors approached the Australian shores. With hindsight he remarked that “perhaps more than one would have preferred to jump out of the ship and end his life, if he had known what awaited him in the Antipodean Eldorado that had been so praised by European newspapers” (1: 107). However, when going back to Europe, Major Korzeliński expressed his high expectations for the future of Australia and personal gratitude:

In my thoughts I bless the remaining companions and the shores of the Antipodes, and I hope that in developing the unparalleled resources of agriculture and wealth, they grow to splendour among the mightiest and richest of countries. I wish this because of gratitude for their having kept me alive for three and half years and for providing me with the means for return to my native land. (*Opis* 2: 316)²

As will be seen in more detailed descriptions Dolański’s admiration for Australia was not without some reservations, nor did Korzeliński’s scepticism preclude some positive assessments.

Most enthusiastic about Australia was Wiśniowski, not a political exile, but a visitor. He, in turn, called it “his adopted Mother” and blamed his poor health for the necessity of departing it, even though he spent most of his later life travelling around the world (Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 474-6). Both Wiśniowski and Dolański praised social and labour conditions as well as the legal system and political reforms. In his farewell ode, Wiśniowski declared Australia to be “the land of equality and freedom” (475). He pointed to upward social mobility, better chances of a professional career, democratic political rights and just and equal social relations. In Dolański’s view, anybody who had a little common sense and was not afraid of work would achieve financial independence, if not prosperity (218). Wiśniowski stressed that in the colonies nobody was ashamed of manual work. Although Korzeliński touched upon developing Australian egalitarianism and Dolański shed light on the issue, it was Wiśniowski who openly praised social and labour relations, the way of life of the middle class and the general democratic spirit. These variations could be explained by different ideological angles through which Polish visitors saw the Antipodean world, which will be discussed a little further, and by the socioeconomic transformation of colonial societies after the beginning of the Gold Rush.

Polish writers were struck by the national and racial diversity in cities, in the bush, on the goldfields and on their voyages to and from Australia. Korzeliński claimed that on his ship there were people not just from almost all European countries but from other parts of the world too (*Opis* 1: 27, 101; 2: 317-320). Dolański insisted that “the population of Victoria consists of all nations” and recounted what one Frenchman told him about a big diggers’ rally, organized to protest against the corruption, malpractice and lawlessness of colonial police, in which “masses of Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, the Swiss, Americans, Spaniards, etc.” took part (106-107, 138). Korzeliński in turn described social and national diversity on the goldfields: “Sometimes a cheerful German tailor, a heavy English blacksmith, a light French cook, a Polish Jew, an American or Dutch deckhand, a Swiss watchmaker, a pastry cook or a hat maker, an impoverished Spanish hidalgo—all of them sat together on the heap of soil” (*Opis* 1: 291). They were joined by Africans, Indians, Chinese, Swedish fishermen, Norwegian shepherds of reindeer, Creoles from Mozambique and a multitude of others.

² Translated by Paszkowski (208).

According to Korzeliński's account, one could learn a great deal from them when they talked about their native lands and even more from their behaviour, especially when rows broke out (*Opis* 1: 291-292; cf. 2: 108-109, 183; Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 244).

In fact, the interest in people from different countries, representing many cultures, traditions and ways of life is very well reflected in Korzeliński's book. One of the reasons for the translation of its abridged version into English, given by its editor and translator Stanley Robe, was his desire to make his contemporaries aware that at the time of the gold rush, Australia "was a mixture of ethnic groups, each giving some share to what was to become the 'Australian tradition'" (Robe xiii). Robe, who came from Poland to Australia seventy years after Korzeliński's departure, among his other involvements participated in the Polish Cultural and Artistic Circle in Melbourne, grouping Polish-Jewish intelligentsia, and was a director of the Polish programme in the ethnic radio station 3EA. A founding member of the Australian Book Society and member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Robe was the author of *The Poles and Australia: A Bibliographical Record 1775-1980*, published by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in Melbourne in 1986. At the time when his English translation of *Opis podróży* was to be published in 1979, he hoped it would help Australians to learn about their history and, as a result, better organize the integration of an ethnically diverse modern society (Robe xiii). It seems that his personal perspective, focused on positive aspects of multicultural society, and perhaps a certain cautiousness, could have influenced his selection of excerpts from Korzeliński's memoir. In particular, this might have been the reason for the omission or alterations of some passages or phrases, mentioned below, which could have been construed at that time as touching on some shameful historical situations which could have been seen as too harsh or offensive, particularly to Anglo-Australians.

A different reading of Korzeliński's memoir was presented by Adam Mauersberger, the author of the introduction to *Opis podróży do Australii* that came out in Warsaw in 1954, under the Communist regime. In an attempt at lip service to official political and ideological doctrine, typical of introductions to historical texts published at that time, he depicts it as "the first Polish book on mining" (5). Korzeliński is castigated for not joining "the first uprising in the fifth part of the world against English colonial exploitation and the army of the Governor, whose name is not difficult to remember, as it was Admiral [sic!] MacArthur" (5). This was to link in Polish reader's eyes Edward MacArthur, the Commander-in-chief of British forces in Australia and after the death of Governor Charles Hotham the administrator of Victoria, with the American general Douglas MacArthur, a *bête noire* of Communist propaganda in the 1950s. Although Korzeliński is praised for "words of truth about the system of injustice" in the British Empire and sarcasm towards institutions of the "corrupted capitalist system", nevertheless "a timid arriviste is a bourgeois arriviste after all" (Mauersberger 6-7).

Australian historian Leslie Lloyd Robson in the foreword to the English edition of Korzeliński's book finds it "most salutary to have an account of this period which draws attention to the extraordinarily cosmopolitan character of the population of the goldfields" (Robson vii). However, despite Robe's attempts to sanitize the text, he wonders if it was Korzeliński's "intriguing dislike of the English" that led him to "overemphasize the importance of immigrants other than English" (Robson vii). Both these claims seem to be far-fetched. Notwithstanding considerable criticism of the English in Korzeliński's and Dolański's memoirs, there is no reason to believe that this led them to exaggerate national diversity in Victorian society during the gold rush. Nor did Wiśniowski's positive attitude

towards Englishmen cause him to downplay the presence and importance of non-English newcomers (Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 64-65; 76-77; 244-269). Besides, Polish authors are not the only ones to describe this phenomenon. For instance, William Rayment's unpublished diary, describing diggers in Melbourne on their way to the goldfields, sounds very much like Korzeliński's account quoted above:

a perfect Babel. The Chinese is jostled by the Russian. The polite Frenchman is abused by the African negro. The people of our own country are called to order by its more precocious offspring the American ... Men from all nations sit down at the same table and drink from the same bowl, they each talk and sing in their own tongue, get drunk according to their own peculiar fashion, quarrel, jangle, fight and embrace as their various natures dictate and ... reel off their respective beds. (qtd. in Serle 68).

All authors paid some attention to Aboriginal Australians. In general descriptions they are presented as a part of a wider picture—the fascinating exotica of the Antipodean world, its geography, the wonders of nature, fauna and flora. Their appearance and customs, the way they behaved and reacted to the Europeans and their perfect integration with the natural environment particularly attracted the interest of Polish writers (Korzeliński, *Opis* 1: 163-183, 380-381; Korzeliński, *Memoirs* 10-20; Dolański 161-171). Sometimes this borders on amazement and disbelief, rooted in white man's preconceived notions and preconceptions. Korzeliński was sincerely surprised to see how easily a Native woman took part in a conversation and simultaneously heard and hunted down a grub in a nearby tree. He declared: "The Natives have a wonderful sense of smell, hearing and sight which no white man will ever achieve. They have also a sense of direction allowing them to travel a few hundred miles by the shortest route to their goal through monotonous bush without any landmarks" (*Memoirs* 90). In more detailed accounts of such personal encounters with the Natives together with some negative opinions there are also friendly and sympathetic ones, although the former dominate. Laziness is frequently mentioned as the most striking feature of the indigenous population, responsible for their plight. However, the Natives occasionally acquire the characteristics of the "noble savage", a man of nature, distancing himself from civilization with its greed, envy and self-consciousness. Korzeliński, at the sight of wandering Aborigines, lacking cloths and knowledge of all that was not necessary for satisfying their essential needs, reflected: "Who knows whether with their ignorance they aren't happier than we are with all our civilization" (*Opis* 2: 4). He was convinced that only Natives had the instinct which, if they had wanted, would have led them to places abounding in the gold ore so desired by European diggers. What stood in the way was their laziness and scorn for what the white men were seeking at the risk of their health and life (2: 104). He noted that they looked indifferently and nearly with contempt at the Europeans' clothes as if they wished to say: "No need to make such a fuss to live on earth" (*Opis* 2: 28).

As the other authors did, Dolański attempted to figure out the Aboriginal way of thinking. He reckoned they considered the whites as stupid since white men worked so hard for money and some tea, whereas "a black fellow is not stupid—he is not working, he will go to a white fellow, smile to him and smoke tobacco, eat and drink, He does not need to work" (170-171). In this connection Dolański noted, albeit without realizing its meaning, an interesting example of how, in a given social context, racial categories and classifications are culturally constructed. To his surprise, he noticed that the Native people perceived working Afro-Americans and Maoris as white. When an Aborigine saw one of them, he would say "It's a

white man, who works, only he is the same colour as I am” (Dolański 171; Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 378).

The selected memoirs point to the social and moral degradation and in many cases destruction of Aboriginal communities affected by European settlement. As Korzeliński put it with acrid irony, since the beginning of the British colony “attempts have been made to civilize the native population with drink, tobacco and an assortment of diseases, all imported from England” (Korzeliński, *Memoirs* 9). This, together with sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women, led to the moral and physical decay of the indigenous population. Protective measures were not fully implemented and in some cases hampered by corruption (Dolański 163-165). Besides, general violence—killing and poisoning—as well as particular massacres were also pointed out. Dolański related, without questioning, the colonial explanation that since Aborigines attacked sheep and killed their owners, naturally repressions followed but he frankly admitted: “the English exterminated many of them with poisoned sausages, meat and bread” (163-164). Consequently, in Victoria they were few in numbers and friendly with the whites, whereas in regions not yet colonized by the Europeans they were “very bad and savage” (Dolański 164).

Korzeliński was more outspoken in his remarks about settlers’ dealings with Aborigines. He referred to a massacre that had taken place some years earlier in the area he was passing and related how brutally the Native people were murdered. Interestingly, this description was sanitized in the English translation published in 1979 by omitting a key sentence: “[White settlers] encircled defenceless [natives], as a wooden spear did not matter, at places where escape was impossible and shot them all dead” (*Opis* 1: 380; cf. *Memoirs* 79). Besides, Korzeliński added what he had heard about “another method settlers used to get rid of black fellows,” i.e. poisoning them, and concluded: “How far this should be believed I don’t know, but the certain thing is that everywhere the English had settled the number of the natives considerably decreased every year” (*Opis* 1: 380-381).

The Polish author described an incident when a group of English diggers threw stones at Aboriginal women in order to chase them away. But one of these women, fluent in English, shouted at them about all the injustices that had been committed, killings of Aborigines and the seizure of their land. Korzeliński and his friends approached the Aboriginal women, gave them a little money and tobacco and assured them that they did not belong to their persecutors. The author was dismayed by the behaviour of the English prospectors:

Such outrageous treatment of the Natives by the English happened only once in our presence, but what do they do everywhere where they imposed their rule? [...] The accident we saw is nothing in comparison to what is going on, hidden in primeval forests of many seized lands. For the public, newspapers extol salutary institutions, the abolition of abuses, the introduction and spread of the principles of philanthropy and civilization among the Natives, yet nobody mentions, as very few saw with their own eyes, that all that English kindness is applied in a very homeopathic way and only when [the English] can benefit from the occupied place. (Korzeliński, *Opis* 2: 177-179)

Characteristically, the whole incident and the author’s reflections concerning the treatment of the Indigenous population by the English were omitted in the English translation (Korzeliński, *Memoirs* 121).

Sygdur Wiśniowski, who lived for some time with an Aboriginal group in Northern Queensland, voiced totally different views. Admittedly, he acknowledged that Europeans were responsible for exploiting Indigenous women, kidnapping their children (he himself was presented with a Native boy by a friendly pastoralist), spreading syphilis, alcohol and tobacco, and consequently the destruction of Native tribes (*Dziesięć* 381-382). However, in his narratives this was just an unavoidable side effect of the spread of civilization across the continent. Although the Polish adventurer stresses the role of venereal diseases transmitted by Europeans in the decline of the indigenous population, he claims that it started to die off before their arrival in Australia (Wiśniowski, *Dziesięć* 364). As the Natives resisted the European settlement, killed the sheep, cattle and even colonists, revenge had to follow. He related in a matter-of-fact tone what he had heard about such a massacre near the Gilbert River gold-field after a group of Natives led by an ex-member of Native police killed one white tradesman and attacked two diggers. The revenge on the local tribe took the form of a “horrible slaughter,” Wiśniowski admitted (*Dziesięć* 368). He added that few men survived, some women were killed, and children found with women’s corpses were brought to a nearby town (*Dziesięć* 368). For the sake of Polish readers he colourfully described his own participation in two penal expeditions against the Aboriginal people. The first one tracked a tribe (447) suspected of killing the survivors of the *Maria*, a brig belonging to a syndicate formed to search for gold in New Guinea, which Wiśniowski joined during his stay in Queensland. He boasted how the search party surrounded the Natives and made sure that no one could escape death: “Thirty six fell victim to our vindictiveness,” was his claim (*Dziesięć* 442). He also took part in the pursuit of the alleged murderers of two fishermen, who worked for a rich Jewish tradesman from Poland: “Save for women we did not leave one living creature from the whole tribe,” the Polish adventurer recounted and concluded that it was a necessary lesson for the locals to secure the safety and lives of Europeans (*Dziesięć* 447).

In their own interest, Wiśniowski maintains, colonial governments in NSW and Victoria tried in vain to save remnants of once numerous tribes from total extinction (*Dziesięć* 385). Their presence secured the area where they roamed from the destructive impact of kangaroos on sheep pastures, since “the Negro is the best exterminator of those pests” (*Dziesięć* 386). In fact, in other places he refers to Aborigines, whom he always calls “Negroes,” as “pests,” too (*Dziesięć* 363). In their description he stresses such features as primitive appearance, tiger-like bloodthirstiness, savage behaviour, barbarous customs, shamelessness, lack of understanding and respect for private property and indifference to clothing and most other European commodities. These aspects, as well as positive characteristics (their agility, dexterity in finding food and objects necessary for life in natural surroundings, sharpened senses essential for survival in the bush), defined them as “sons of nature,” alien to the civilized world represented by European pioneers and, in contrast to the Maoris, unable to achieve a higher level of civilization.

However, the claim that Wiśniowski rejected or questioned the very humanity of the Aboriginal population is exaggerated (Forajter 163-4; 167). He definitely stresses how much their way of life was still rooted in and attuned to their natural environment and, in line with nineteenth century evolutionary ideas, focuses on their delayed development on the path to civilization, their prolonged existence in the state of primitiveness. He concedes that “looking at them one can hardly admit that they originate from Adam and Eve” (*Dziesięć* 359) but this is a description of their appearance, not an attempt at their classification in the realm of living beings. In the following sentence he adds: “They live in small tribes as usually nations at a

lower stage of civilization do” (*Dziesięć* 359). Similarly, the shape of their bodies in Wiśniowski’s eyes “shows their inferiority to other human races known to him” (*Dziesięć* 382). Notwithstanding his racist sentiments, ranging from patronizing sympathy to contempt, he stops short of excluding indigenous Australians from the human race. At one point he even declares that at heart he despised his friend, a rich pastoralist, as a butcher of a defenceless race (*Dziesięć* 358). Remarks such as these, made also in regard to the Indigenous population in America and Oceania, encouraged the authors of the introduction to the collections of Wiśniowski’s reportages, novels and sketches published in Warsaw in 1953 to present him as a “defender of coloured peoples,” although an inconsistent and naïve one (Tuwim and Olszewicz 49). They insisted that the weakness and inconsistency of his position, as was the case with some other progressive writers of the time, derived from the fact that “he did not understand that in a capitalist system social justice is out of the question and the problem of colonies and colonial peoples cannot be properly solved” (Tuwim and Olszewicz 56).

In the survey of nineteenth century Polish literature published in 1966, instances of criticism and condemnation of brutal colonization and exploitation to which the Native population was subjected by colonizing powers which occurred in Wiśniowski’s texts, but by far did not constitute the rule, were described as a “Polish point of view” (Gościński 472). It seems worth asking if the use of such a description is justified in general and applied to Wiśniowski in particular. Most recently, literary scholar Waław Forajter in his book *Kolonizator skolonizowany* [*The Colonized Colonizer*] examines Wiśniowski’s descriptions of his adventures not just in Australia but also in America and Oceania from a postcolonial perspective (12-13). He enquires into factors which determined the Polish globetrotter’s perception of the Indigenous population. Did he consider himself “colonized” or a “colonizer”? To what extent was he affected by Polish national history, with its long periods of expansion and external domination (as well as internal exploitation of serfs), and to what extent did the partitions of Poland and occupation by neighbouring powers whose policies amounted to colonial imperialism influence his judgment?

Drawing on Zdzisław Najder’s biography of Joseph Conrad, James Clifford suggests that the aristocratic values of the Polish gentry made their members in exile immune to Western bourgeois values, gave them a better ethnographical insight in their encounters with non-Europeans and distanced them from colonial attitudes (Clifford 84). On the other hand, Forajter insists that, originating from the landowning class and benefiting from its historically developed privileged position, they inherited numerous social prejudices (Forajter 131-172). There is no need to discuss these conflicting views in detail. Suffice it to say that, as the author of *The Colonized Colonizer* points out, Wiśniowski fully identified with the ethos of the British middle class and his political and social views, including those concerning evolution, progress, races and perceptions of colonized peoples, were in conformity with nineteenth century colonial ideology (Forajter 162). In such an ideological context his experiences in Australia led him to believe that with the shifting frontier of white civilization the dispossession and gradual extermination of the autochthonous population were inevitable. He appeared to deplore it and sometimes condemned especially brutal events, but as he perceived it as an objective historical process, there was little to be done. In fact, the process was justified in his eyes by general progress and the spread of civilization in the Antipodes.

On the other hand, Korzeliński expressed a great sensitivity to the plight of the indigenous people and criticism of colonizing powers. His involvement in trade and other commercial ventures did not mean that he acquiesced in dominant capitalist and colonial concepts. On the

contrary, in his book he shows a deeply rooted suspicion of any actions taken by the rich and powerful, based on business interests and justified by arguments related to general world progress. Although he felt obliged to the United Kingdom for granting him refuge after the Hungarian Revolution, drawing on his experience of resistance to foreign powers occupying his homeland, he seems to be inclined to take the side of the weak and persecuted. In a conversation with an English captain he likened British wars in South Africa against the Xhosa, at the time known as Kaffir, to Russian wars against the Cherkess. The author of *Description of a Voyage to Australia* explains his interlocutor's displeasure at such a comparison, saying that it was only their own acts of aggression that the English presented in terms of allegedly bringing civilisation to savages (Korzeliński, *Opis* 1: 55). The sight of an imprisoned Xhosa Prince, put on display by the British authorities, reminded Major Korzeliński of his own internment in the Ottoman Empire (*Opis* 1: 75-76). His attitude towards Aboriginal Australians developed similarly. All talk of philanthropy and a civilising mission among Aborigines were seen by Korzeliński as typical English hypocrisy (*Opis* 2: 179-180). In fact, he insisted, the English were motivated only by their own profits and poor peoples around the world would have been better off if they had not known English civilization at all. Korzeliński opined that England falsely justified its colonial conquests by the spread of civilisation. In reality English policies and actions of individuals were motivated by greed (Korzeliński, *Opis* 2: 180; Dolański 161-170).

All the memoirs include numerous remarks concerning England (usually identified with the UK) and the English. Sometimes the term "the English" equals "the Anglo-Australians," if not born, then at least settled in colonies for some time. In some instances the word refers to the newly arrived immigrants or does not differentiate between these two categories, in others it seems to include all British subjects in Britain and in the colonies. However, usually the English are contrasted with the Scots, who are treated more favourably, and the Irish. In *Ten Years in Australia* a positive image is more often evoked, whereas in other memoirs negative, quite often extremely negative comments dominate.

English colonists and diggers were frequently presented as drunkards and intemperance was seen as a universal feature of English colonial societies. In this respect the English were only second to the Irish. Even Wiśniowski mentions instances of alcoholism and admits that drunkenness is universal, although with time it decreases (*Dziesięć* 67, 79, 179). Immorality was widespread and authors referred to cases of rape, paedophilia and venereal diseases (Dolański 179). According to the dominant stereotype, the English were mean, inhospitable and unfriendly to foreigners. Korzeliński often points to examples of meanness, even among squatters, and contrasts it with Turkish or Polish generosity and friendliness towards visitors, especially among the poor living in the agrarian setting: "Simple, uneducated, ignorant people know human feelings, but does English civilization know them?" (*Opis* 2: 17). Again, such critical comments on Englishmen and their empire usually did not find their way into the English translation of Korzeliński's *Memoirs*.

In Korzeliński's opinion, profiteering totally pervades the English mentality, so when they cheat foreigners they regard it as a proof of their wisdom (*Opis* 2: 156). Dolański, who like Korzeliński still upheld his traditional loyalty to the honour code of the Polish gentry, was also struck by what he perceived as English commercial cunning and manipulation. Nevertheless he was more ambivalent about English relentlessness in the pursuit of their business. But he could not but admit, certainly with his homeland in mind, that it was a lucky country inhabited by lucky people when he heard from Englishmen that they had enough

money to pay the Irish and Scots to fight for them and they did not care for fame and could focus exclusively on making money and enjoying a comfortable life (Dolański 195-6). Nevertheless, in his memoir he attributed to his English friend words about colonists being divided by extreme individualism, lack of strong family bonds and characterized by self-interest and a focus on personal enrichment (76). On the other hand, Wiśniowski, as we have already seen, was evidently impressed by colonial society and its entrepreneurial spirit. In contrast to the other two authors, he insisted that the English inhabiting the Australian colonies were persistent, brave and at the same time also outgoing and hospitable (*Dziesięć* 9, 88, 163, 179). He claimed not to know a nation which would be more eager to give assistance to the needy than the English. They constantly collected donations to help the poor, while Poles stinted on this and at the same time called Englishmen egoists (*Dziesięć* 109).

Notwithstanding the criticism mentioned above, there were some positive examples, and sometimes general assessments and interpretations in the books of Korzeliński and Dolański. The latter, when he found himself back in Europe, compared positively the English attitude towards Poles and the Polish question to the French one, which he described as hypocritical and deceitful (Dolański 255, 258).

The image of the Irish that can be reconstructed from the memoirs analysed here is rather antipathetic. They were often portrayed as drunkards and troublemakers, sometimes referred to as ex-convicts or even the scum of the earth. Korzeliński could not believe the contrast between the Irish and the Scots: “Peaceful, decent and hard-working Scots stand in real contradiction to fat, quarrelsome and always drunk Irishmen” (*Opis* 2: 10). But occasionally he positively described some individuals originating from Ireland. Wiśniowski, on the other hand, when describing the Irish evidently took the English perspective: he saw them as untidy, careless and hostile to foreigners, unless they were Catholics as fanatical as the Irish themselves (*Dziesięć* 92). The Polish author complains that he had to leave the area inhabited by Irishmen when his military service under Garibaldi became publicly known. He also accuses them of being dishonest in their dealings with employers and proud of “cheating the rich” (*Dziesięć* 92-93). In contrast to all these vices he also notes such virtues as cleverness, perceptiveness, hospitality and generosity, particularly to the poor or when prompted by their priests (*Dziesięć* 92-93). Korzeliński and Dolański, although sharing the negative opinion of the Irish, independently relate a pleasant story about an Irish bushranger who became very disappointed when learned that a man he had met was Polish, since experience taught him that Poles were poor and never had anything (Korzeliński *Opis* 1: 233-234). He knew Poles in France, England and America, and considered them respectable and well-educated but so unfortunate that “money never sticks to them” (Dolański 192). He ordered his friends to bring drinks and they all gave a toast to Poles and Ireland (Dolański 190-193).

The cultural difference of the Chinese, the strangeness of their habits and their foreign appearance in the eyes of Polish diggers are all topics which are reflected in the memoirs of the Polish authors. Korzeliński seems to be less judgmental and admits that a great deal could be said about them and their enormous country but refers readers to authors who had been in China (*Opis* 2: 73). He shares some information about Chinese miners in Australian goldfields, underlines their persistence and unfavorably compares their looks to the Maoris (*Opis* 2: 75-76). On the whole, however, his account is respectful and shows no signs of overt prejudice (*Opis* 2: 73-76). Wiśniowski was evidently intrigued by them and devoted much more space to their description (*Dziesięć* 244-268). However, in his portrayal the Chinese, notwithstanding their good points, are evil and immoral. The author has no doubts about their

depravity. “Love of money, opium, comfort, gambling, card-sharping and unbridled sensual pleasures—this is the aim of the diligence of the Chinese in Australia” (*Dziesięć* 253). He saw them as treacherous and cowardly, even more than Aborigines. Their words could not be trusted, their deeds were imitative. They lacked imagination but in forgery they were better than London swindlers. As during his stay in Australian colonies Wiśniowski witnessed restrictions on Chinese immigration, he admitted that their exclusion “seemed unfair,” but if let in without any checks, millions of them would occupy the country within a century (*Dziesięć* 268). It was not just a case of “White Australia,” it was a basic difference between two civilizations. Literacy might be universal in China but was there a nation more lifeless, despised and poorly governed than the Chinese, Wiśniowski asked (*Dziesięć* 268). With his belief in progress and admiration for the British Empire, he was convinced of Western superiority and the backwardness of Chinese civilization. No wonder he openly expressed his contempt and declared that the more he met the Chinese, the more he considered the Australians right when they hated them (*Dziesięć* 246).

On the other end of the scale of cultural proximity there were Germans. In fact, the memoirs show instances of close contacts and cooperation or even friendship as well as conflicts and hostility. The latter is particularly true in the case of Wiśniowski, who sometimes treats them equally with the Chinese (*Dziesięć* 246, 269). One cannot help but wonder if his remarks on Germans encountered in Australia, but also in other regions of the world, notably in America and Oceania, reflected the rise of modern nationalism in Germany and in the Polish lands (particularly, but not exclusively, those under German control), since the Kulturkampf of the Bismark era. Another group with close cultural connections to Poles were European Jews, notably those from the Polish territories. All the memorialists write about them with warm feelings. They usually recounted cordial meetings that brought back memories of their common homeland. Wiśniowski, for instance, met a man from Lwów (today Lviv), the capital of Galicia, his native region and the city where he was educated. When after a long and warm-hearted conversation they parted, they bade each other farewell with the words: “See you in Lwów” (*Dziesięć* 220). Polish authors were grateful for help and favorable treatment they received from Polish-Jewish tradesmen and innkeepers and moved by the fact that some of them declared themselves Polish and in one instance ran an inn called the ‘Polish Hotel,’ with partially Polish cuisine (Korzeliński, *Opis* 2: 175-176, 297-300). Dolański, who cooperated closely with Melbournian Jewish merchants, wrote about Markus, a former teacher of ancient and modern languages, with whom he ran a shop, as one of his two best friends in life (112). In Dolański’s view, by his birth and religion Markus was a Jew but because of his character, the nobility of his feelings and high education he was better than many bad Christians (112).

Korzeliński and Dolański wrote about disturbances in the Victorian goldfields brought about by the opposition against licences imposed by the government and resisted by diggers as taxation without representation. They drew attention to the participation and sometimes leading role of non-English miners, Americans and Germans in particular. Korzeliński even claimed that Americans “through their emissaries prepared the minds of various inhabitants of Australia for an uprising against the government” (*Opis* 2: 86). In the English translation Americans were replaced by “representatives of the German miners” (*Memoirs* 98). The Polish author quoted some strong anti-British speeches, protesting fiscal exploitation by Her Majesty’s Government. According to Korzeliński’s account, one speaker alleged: “It is the bloody work of millions of people, dispersed all over the world, contributed by Irishmen dying from starvation, oppressed Scots working until crippled in English factories, poor day-

labourers, the deceived Turks, the Chinese oppressed by violent means, the colonists of various countries and islands, and among them, we, Australians” (*Opis 2: 87*)³.

Approached as “lions of the North” (Dolański 110) with a request for the command of military preparations on the goldfields against police and army units, Dolański and Major Korzeliński, both with considerable military experience, refused. They did not want to antagonize the British authorities and public opinion in Britain against Polish refugees and the Polish cause in European politics. Korzeliński believed that the rebellious miners were totally unprepared for a military struggle, and other Australians did not support their demands (*Opis 2: 91-2*). At that moment Australia was not yet ready to follow America, as it lacked the necessary means to maintain independence. He had a very low opinion of the miners’ military skills (*Opis 2: 91-92, 193-196*). Nonetheless, to some extent, although not without irony, Korzeliński and Dolański sympathised with the diggers, and the former shared their critical assessment of Governor Hotham and his administration.

Polish authors pointed out the dynamic economic, social and cultural development of the Australian colonies and their capitals. Korzeliński was convinced that Sydney could be compared with the most beautiful cities of Europe and Melbourne would equal, if not outclass, London (*Opis 1: 150, 197*). He was impressed by the economic rise of Australia, even though in his view many years were to pass before its demography would be strong enough to allow the county to achieve its full potential (*Opis 1: 133-134*). The authors supported the constitutional autonomy of the colonies and expected independence from Britain in the not too distant future. Korzeliński was of the opinion that there were enough wise people in Victoria to grant it autonomy. If that would not happen, Australia might follow America. He even looked forward to the day when on the Queen’s birthday Australian cities would be dark, without fireworks displays (*Opis 1: 310; 2: 189*).

Wiśniowski begins his book by emphasising the contrast between “old Europe” and new states rising under British protection overseas. Inward-looking Europe is the scene of a fierce battle between capital and labour, between oppressed nations and their oppressors. Preoccupied with the everyday struggle for bread and politics, Europeans do not pay attention to what is going on overseas. New Anglo-Saxon societies, including the Australian colonies, with quickly assimilating newcomers from Germany, Ireland and other West-European countries, live in affluence and undergo a process of social democratization: workers become capitalists and education is universally available. “Necessity itself teaches people order and self-government, without which all constitutions are just an empty letter” (*Dziesięć 3*). After a visit to a provincial school, he praised the curriculum and was impressed by students’ answers to questions regarding capital, labour, property rights, the free market and custom protection. In prophetic mood he assured readers: “In countries, where youth is taught such principles communism cannot develop, nor does a master dare to despise workers, who know their social value” (*Dziesięć 222, 240*). In Wiśniowski’s opinion, Australia, lavishly “endowed by nature with a beautiful climate and all that people value” offers great opportunity for settlement, whereas in Europe “not many are foreseeing what a source of great power is rising on a semi-wild land, from which news rarely comes” (*Dziesięć 4*). He openly predicted that “the Australian colonies would grow into manhood without much fuss until circumstances and events would push them into active participation in world affairs”

³ Transl. Paszkowski (204).

(*Dziesiąt* 4). Then, like Minerva from Jupiter's head, Australians would spring up ready to fight, much to Europeans' astonishment (*Dziesiąt* 4).

As Robson noticed, Korzeliński's experience as a participant of the 1848 revolution as well as his emotional attachment to his homeland "clarifies and sharpens his perception of Australia" (Robson viii). No doubt, Dolański and Wiśniowski's earlier experiences helped to shape the image of Australia they popularized. Of course, as always, individual experiences were filtered and structured by cultural values, ideological assumptions, political convictions and personal sensitivities. Since they were not identical, each author represented a different approach and left different, although in many aspects overlapping pictures of Australian colonial society. The attitudes and opinions in all the memoirs tell as much about their authors' expectations, cultural roots and political and ideological beliefs as about the people and situations they encountered. They acted as cultural translators and made the image of the unknown and exotic continent comprehensible to Polish readers, to whom they gave the first opportunity to learn about the exotic Antipodean world and left the door to further encounters open.

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Jan Lencznarowicz is an Associate Professor in the Institute for American Studies and Polish Diaspora, Jagiellonian University, Kraków. His main areas of interest are Polish political emigration in the 20th century, Polish ethnic group in Australia and political myths and nationalism in modern history. His publications include *Jałta. W kregu mitów założycielskich polskiej emigracji politycznej po II wojnie światowej. 1944-1956* [Yalta as the Foundation Myth of the Polish Political Emigration 1944-1956] (Kraków, 2009); *Australia* (Warszawa, 2005); and *Prasa i społeczność polska w Australii. 1928-1980* [The Polish Press and Polish Community in Australia, 1928-1980] (Kraków, 1994).
jan.lencznarowicz@uj.edu.pl