Andrii Portnov

Poland and Ukraine
Entangled Histories, Asymmetric Memories
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Entangled Histories, Asymmetric Memories
This essay addresses the routes and disruptions of some basic historical stereotypes in Polish-Ukrainian relations. It argues that in modern times the Polish and Ukrainian national projects represented two competing political legitimacies: one based on historical borders and civilization, and the other based on the ethnographic composition of the population. This essay will analyze the legacy of the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Cossack mythology, the Ukrainian-Polish war over Lviv/Lwów in 1918, the ethnic cleansing of Volhynian Poles in 1943, the activities of Jerzy Giedroyc’s “Kultura” and post-Soviet memory wars and reconciliation projects.

Andrii Portnov is Professor of the Entangled History of Ukraine at the European University Viadrina (Frankfurt/Oder) and Guest Professor at the University of Potsdam. He graduated from the Universities of Dnipro (MA in History) and Warsaw (MA in Cultural Studies). He defended his PhD dissertation (2005) on Ukrainian emigration in inter-war Poland at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in L’viv. In the years 2007–2010, he worked as Editor-in-Chief of “Ukraïna Moderna”, a Kyiv-based journal. He came to Berlin in 2012 as a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study). In 2015, he was awarded the Baron Velge Prize and conducted a series of lectures as International Chair for the History of the Second World War at the Free University of Brussels. Andrii Portnov has conducted research and has lectured at the Universities of Basel, Geneva, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, SciencesPo Paris, SciencesPo Lyon, and the Institut für die Wissenschaft vom Menschen (Institute for Human Sciences, IWM) in Vienna. In 2015, he initiated and co-founded the Berlin-Brandenburg Ukraine Initiative, which, in 2016, transformed itself into the Prisma Ukraïna – Research Network Eastern Europe at the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin.
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Introduction

My very first trip abroad was to Warsaw. In 1999, I had to board a night train in Dnipropetrovsk (nowadays, Dnipro), change trains in Kyiv and spend almost ten hours to get to the Ukrainian-Polish border. At the border we had to wait for about three hours for the wheels of our train to be changed (in all former Soviet republics the railroad tracks were broader than in Central and Western Europe), and early in the morning the next day we arrived to Warsaw. In my Soviet childhood, growing up in a closed city – Dnipropetrovsk was closed because of the strategic importance of its space rocket and missile industry – I had never seriously dreamt of seeing the world abroad. One of the first impressive buildings I noticed arriving at Warsaw central station was the neo-classical Soviet Palace of Sciences and

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1 This essay is based on research findings made possible by my participation in three international projects: “Divided Memories, Shared Memories. Ukraine/Russia/Poland (20th–21st centuries): An Entangled History” (supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation), “Modernisation of Identity? Challenges of ‘Europeanisation’, Nationalism and Post-Sovietism for Memory Cultures” (Nr. MOD-17006, supported by the Research Council of Lithuania), and Prisma Ukraїna – Research Network Eastern Europe (which I initiated and direct at the Forum Transregionale Studien). Some parts of this publication were first presented in a paper submitted to the edited volume From Reconciliation to De-conciliation: Is There a Way Back? Actors of Poland’s and Ukraine’s Politics of Memory Since 2014–2015, Joanna Konieczna-Salamatin, Tomasz Stryjek (eds.), London: Routledge, 2020. I am grateful to Elen Budinova, Georges Khalil, Viktoriia Serhiienko and Tomasz Stryjek for their helpful comments and corrections. All translations from Polish, Russian and Ukrainian in this essay were made by the author.
Culture – Stalin’s “gift” to postwar satellite Poland.

That trip to Poland – to take part in a two-week student workshop at the Warsaw University – proved to be the beginning of a very long journey. Within two years, I returned to Poland to do my second MA (at the Studium Europy Wschodniej) and to properly learn the language. It was also in Warsaw where I collected materials for my PhD thesis on Ukrainian political emigration in interwar Poland, and where I started thinking seriously about the historical, political and cultural paradoxes of the Slavic triangle: Russia, Poland and Ukraine. Entanglements within this triangle, full of mutual influences and mutual misunderstandings, became the main interest of my research. I also realized that minor differences and delicate nuances were of special importance to capture the complex diversity of the legacies and the history of the triangle, its people, societies and cultures.

It was my teacher and PhD supervisor, Yaroslav Isaievych, who introduced Poland and Polish history to me. Thanks to him, as well as a number of my Polish and Ukrainian colleagues, I became a Polonophile. A critical Polonophile, if such a definition has a right to exist. Anyway, my aspiration here is not at all to present a “Ukrainian” view on bilateral history, even though I do belong to a certain academic tradition and, in my conversations with Professor Isaievych, he often mentioned one book that attracted him to history was Łucja Charewiczowa’s “Historiography and the Passion to Lwów” (Historiografia i miłośnictwo Lwowa, 1938). This beautifully written work could hardly be described as neutral. But, for me, its lesson was a bit different. It is exactly our passion in history that could tell us to strive – as much as we can – to discuss it dispassionately.

In my essay I would like to show the roots, as well as continuities and disruptions, of some basic historical stereotypes in Polish-Ukrainian relations, without essentializing
them. I will try to describe the most widespread, living historical myths that continue to have an impact on today’s constructions of identities, rivalries and polarities. I will try to keep in mind the changing, dynamic and ambivalent nature of the very notions of “Polish-ness” and “Ukraine-ness”.

Such an overview is inevitably selective and openly faces a serious risk of making too broad generalizations. Being aware of this, I treat my essay as an exercise in synthesis and as a reminder of the crucial importance of historical contextualization. The rich and controversial footnotes and bibliography at the end of the essay are aimed to serve as an invitation to further reading and reflection. It also reminds us that, as Juliusz Mieroszewski pointed out in his programmatic article on Polish attitudes to its eastern neighbors in 1974, history is so fascinating exactly because “the same” is actually never “the same”. ²

The Polish-Lithuanian Res Publica: Strange Empire and/or Prototype for the European Union?

The history of Polish-Ukrainian encounters could be traced back to the interactions between the medieval Polan principality (baptized under Prince Mieszko I in 966 from Rome) and that of the old Rus’ (baptized under Prince Volodimer in 988 from Byzantine). In the first (Polans) case, Christianity came from Rome (or, the “West”), in the second (Rus’) case it came from Constantinopole (or, the “East”). The baptizer of Rus’ (much later started to be called Kyivan Rus’ after its main city – Kyiv) prince Volodimer in 981 retook the so-called Cherven towns (nowadays a region on the Polish-Ukrainian border on the left

side of the Buh river) from the Polish rulers. After the decline of the Rus’ principalities, East Galicia with its main city of Lviv/Lwów was integrated into the Polish state in the late 14th century, making the history of this region’s association with Poland almost six centuries long.

Almost all of the future Ukrainian lands came under the Polish crown in 1569 as a result of the creation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – a huge state (the second largest in early modern Europe after Muscovy) with eight to eleven million people of diverse denominations, speaking many languages. The domain of the *Rzeczpospolita* included the majority of the territories of present-day Poland and Ukraine, as well as the entire territory of present-day Belarus and Lithuania, and parts

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of present-day western Russia. The southeastern borderlands of the Commonwealth created a contact zone with the nomadic, tribal, and Muslim-ruled territories, the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire. It was exactly these southeastern borderlands, a steppe area at the lower Dnieper River, which became the birthplace of Cossackdom – a particular military phenomenon in this frontier which quickly turned into a great challenge to Polish-Ottoman relations.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had a unique structure of power with a Sejm (a diet) as the sovereign and as representative of all nobility (which constituted up to 7-10 percent of the entire population) and the elected king. The state had an unusually high percentage of noble stratum and the largest Jewish population in the early modern world. Historians often speak about naród szlachecki, a noble nation forged through a brotherhood of Rzeczpospolita’s nobility, irrespective of its members’ religious affiliation or ethnic origin.  

How did Rzeczpospolita deal with the diversity of its lands and people? On the one hand, it remained rather tolerant towards different religions, on the other, it still welcomed the conversion of elites to Catholicism and the establishment of a Uniate (Greek-Catholic) church with Byzantine (Orthodox) rites but subordinated to the Pope in Rome. The Church Union was proclaimed in Berestia/Breś/Brest (a town in present-day

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Belarus) in 1596.\(^5\) The Ruthenian Orthodox population was encouraged to convert to the newly created church and, by doing so, to accept the authority of the Roman Pope, the same head of church as the Polish Catholics. The appearance of the Uniate Church gave the Cossacks an important symbolic legitimacy to their social claims. Starting from the early 17th century, they strived to present themselves as the defenders of the endangered Orthodox faith and as principle fighters against the Uniates.\(^6\)

The protection of Orthodoxy and the social privileges for the Cossacks were the main claims of the biggest Cossack uprising under the leadership of Bohdan Khmelnytsky.\(^7\) It began in 1648 und rapidly turned into a bloody war against Polish troops. Hetman Khmelnytsky, who constantly looked for international alliances, finally succeeded in gaining support from Muscovy in 1654. Khmelnytsky explained his choice of alliance referring to their shared “worship of the Greek rite”, but probably underestimated the importance of Moscow’s “Third Rome” concept, as successor to the Byzantine Empire, and the power of the Moscow patriarchate – the biggest and richest Orthodox patriarchate (officially recognized by the Patriarch of Con-

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stantinople in 1589) and very closely related to the Tsar.⁸ Khmelnytsky’s pact with Muscovy, known as the Pereiaslav Treaty, initiated an era of the gradual transfer of those parts of present-day Ukraine dominated by Cossacks from Polish rule to Muscovy’s sovereignty. From a long-term perspective, it was probably Russia who profited the most from the Khmelnytsky wars.⁹

One of Khmelnytsky’s claims – the creation of a Cossack autonomy (with no Jews and Uniates allowed to settle in), including the transformation of the Commonwealth into a threefold structure of Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack – had never materialized. The last attempt to bring to life such a threefold Res Publica was made in 1658 by Khmelnytsky’s successor, Hetman Ivan Vyhovsky, who sought for the establishment of the “Ruthenian Duchy” (Kyiv, Bratslav and Chernihiv palatinates) as

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⁹ Here I am referring to a point made in: Jaroslaw Pelenski, “Russia, Poland and Ukraine: Historical and Political Perspectives”, in: Peter J. Potichnyj (ed.), *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, 308–327, here 309.
the third part of Rzeczpospolita.\textsuperscript{10} This project, known as a Union of Hadiach, was ultimately rejected by the Sejm and remained a political fantasy.

How can we summarize the balance of the Commonwealth experience for Ukraine? Polish-born Ukrainian-American Byzantinist and Slavist, Ihor Ševčenko, in his essay Poland in Ukrainian History did it this way:

Polish domination gave the Ukrainian elite a chance to participate in the currents of Western civilization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. . . . The Ukrainian and Belarusian lands are the only Orthodox Slavic territories that widely experienced the Renaissance . . . , and, above all, its aftermath – the baroque and the Counter-Reformation. They are also the only Orthodox lands where intense contacts with Protestants took place, although little of that rubbed off from the upper classes onto peasants and rank-and-file Cossacks. For a period ranging between one century and four, depending on region, Ukrainians participated in the life of a non-centralized state in which individual freedom and the privileges of the upper class of society were respected.\textsuperscript{11}

How could we summarize the balance of the Commonwealth experience for Poland? Ihor Ševčenko mentioned a particular type of “eastern” Polish accent, the formation of a class of Polish or Polonized magnats who owned enormous latifundia, kept

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ihor Ševčenko, “Poland in Ukrainian History”, in: Ihor Ševčenko, Ukraine between East and West: Essays on Cultural History to the Early Eighteenth Century, Edmonton – Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1996, 112-130, here 127.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
private armies, and opposed any centralized executive, and, by
doing so, prevented Poland from transforming into a modern
state.\footnote{Ibid, 122.}

Some Polish thinkers suggested that, by “enlarging itself
to the east”, Poland has “created an ulcer on the east side of her
body that poisoned her blood”.\footnote{See, for instance: Wilhelm Feldman, Stronnictwa i programy polityczne w Galicji 1846-1906, Cracow: Książka, 1907.} After the Second World War, Włodzimierz Bączkowski, one of the most engaged Polish com-
mentators on the Ukrainian question, repeated this point by
claiming that, as a result of territorial expansion to the East,
Poland “had exposed itself to the decomposing influences
\textit{(wpływy rozkladowe)} of East Slavic societies”.\footnote{Włodzimierz Bączkowski, “Sprawa ukraińska”, Kultura 7-8, 1952, 64-84, here 80.}

One could also say that in the early modern period Poland
became a window to the West for Ukraine, and Ukraine became
a birthplace of Polish imperial fantasies. The mythology of par-
ticular Polish borderlands (\textit{Kresy}) developed later, but this devel-
opment was inextricably related to notions of the “borders of
1772” (the year of the first Partition of \textit{Rzeczpospolita}). In the late
18th century, three imperial powers – Austria, Prussia and
Russia – partitioned the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
After then, the nobility’s \textit{Rzeczpospolita} was generally viewed as
the worst example of political chaos and backwardness, when
compared to the well-ordered enlightened absolutism of Austria,
Prussia and Russia.\footnote{Marian Serejski, Europa a rozbory Polski, Warsaw: PWN, 2009.}

The historiographical rehabilitation of \textit{Rzeczpospolita}
came much later, in the context of the post-communist trans-
formation of Eastern and Central Europe. Polish historians be-
gan to stress the achievements of the Polish-Lithuanian Com-
monwealth in parliamentarism, self-government, civil rights and religious tolerance, and criticized its sole association with modern Poland.16 Some Belarusian and Lithuanian colleagues responded positively, claiming that, thanks to Rzeczpospolita, Belarus “had a rich experience of democratic order and deep roots of parliamentarism”.17

One of the leading Ukrainian historians, Natalia Yakovenko, suggested to reinterpret the role of the Commonwealth in Ukraine’s history, to abandon both the populist and the Soviet claim of the “oppressive offensive of Polish magnats into Ukraine”, and to re-think Khmelnytsky’s uprising as a murderous civil war, rather than a national-liberation revolution.18

The international attention to non-nationalistic forms of political organization and historical alternatives to ethnic nationalism made Rzeczpospolita an attractive (and provocative) comparison to the European Union. Timothy Snyder explicitly

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made such a claim in his influential book “The Reconstruction of Nations”:

Warsaw and Vilnius, as we might say today, pooled their sovereignty at Lublin to establish the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was far greater in territory, ambitions, and European significance than the two small nation-states that today bears its names. Its citizens believed that they had created the best political order in the world. Their republic embodied practices of democracy, civil rights, religious toleration, and constitutional rule now regarded as European par excellence; but also created or sustained languages, religions, and myths now seen as Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian. The appeal of the early modern Commonwealth had more to do with a political ideal than with specific institutions, which is why its attraction outlived its polity by more than a century. Something similar can be said about the postmodern European Union: it is attractive not for its *acquis communautaire*, its body of law and practices, but for its *savoir-faire*, its reputation and civilization.\(^\text{19}\)

Does such comparison really make sense? And are all of the positive visions of the Commonwealth completely free of Polish imperial fantasies and connotations? Some historians, like Daniel Beauvois, strongly rejected the idealization of the szlachta democracy and claims that *Rzeczpospolita* was the first country in Europe to introduce civic liberties.\(^\text{20}\) He also compared Polish


literary perceptions of its eastern borderlands to French discourses about Algeria, and openly suggested to ‘put an end’ to the *Kresy* mythology.\(^{21}\)

The comparison to Algeria inevitably implies both an imperial and colonial perspective to Commonwealth history. Could the *Rzeczpospolita* be described as an Empire? Maybe, a very peculiar type of Empire?\(^{22}\) An Empire whose expansion was not based on the classical relation between metropole and colonies? An Empire that was not a “multinational federation”, but a polity where all political identifications were socially limited and

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The thoughtful works of Beauvois are still not completely free from elements of essentialization. For instance, in his harsh critique of the Polish nobility’s “collaboration” with the Russian Empire and its attitudes towards peasants, he accuses the szlachta from a present-day political perspective and prefers to ignore the late Enlightenment and early Romanticism treatment of those issues. More on this, see: Andrei (Andrii) Portnov, “Izobretaia Rech’ Pospolituuiu”, *Ab Imperio* 1, 2007, 46–62.


where there were no “Poles”, “Ukrainians” or “Lithuanians” in the modern sense. After the Partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist. As Roman Szporluk once argued:

[Russia] did not want to know that the partitions of the Rzeczpospolita meant Europe’s entry into the Russian Empire and Russia’s entry into Europe . . . and it was the Polish question that became the fundamental reason for the collapse of imperial Russia.

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries could be described as a time of open possibilities, of the coexistence and competition of territorial- and history-based concepts of nationality versus the ethnic- and language-based. The Polish case is of particular interest in this respect, because here the process of modern nation-state formation started from a political phase: from the definition of the nation as a sovereign community of citizens, not of a people with the same ethnicity. This community was limited to the noble stratum, and language or religion did not make a Polish peasant closer to the szlachcic. The very idea of winning over peasants for the nation’s cause only came to the political Avant scène later.

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In the late 18th century, the Russian Empire was an estate-dynastic monarchy that paid little attention to the ethnic composition of the population in the “ex-Polish provinces” and had considered members of the szlachta stratum first and foremost as landlords and only after them did they consider the Poles. For this reason, it was not easy (and not necessary) for the Russian administration or intellectual elites to recognize the Orthodox peasants in Belarus or Ukraine as their “natives” in the beginning of the 19th century.27

Two National Projects in Search of an Ideal Motherland

The Ukrainian national project in the 19th century adopted an ethnographic principle and claimed a goal of cultural autonomy for all territories with a predominantly Ukrainian peasant population. Its cultural claims, at least at first glance, seemed to be rather harmless for a number of imperial officials in both the Austrian and Russian Empires who were much more preoccupied with the stronger and politically-mature Polish national movement. At the same time, at least under particular circumstances, the “Ukrainian card” was used in both empires to set parties against one another. In the 19th century, Polish political discourse tended to perceive any “Ruthenian/Ukrainian” identity that would not integrate into the Polish nation as Russian or Habsburg intrigue, and Russian discourse gradually portrayed the Ukrainian movement as “Polish intrigue”.28


28 Michael Moser, Ukrains’kyi P’iemont? Descho pro znachennia Halychyny dla for-
All of this created a challenging context for the development of the Ukrainian national movement. As Serhii Plokhy noted,

To survive and extend its influence over the Ukrainian masses, the Ukrainian national movement had to make its way between the two East European cultural giants, who regarded Ukrainians as raw material for their respective nation-building projects . . . without finding the right course between Ukraine’s West, represented by Poland, and its East, represented by Russia, the Ukrainian national project would never have come to fruition.29

In the 19th century, literature played a particular role in what local intellectuals tended to call a “national awakening”. The most prominent Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko promoted a mythology of Cossacks that aimed “to reveal the innermost truths about Ukrainian existence and to serve as a touchstone on which to base an ideal future”.30 Shevchenko romanticized the anti-Polish struggle of the Cossacks. At the same time, he was very critical of Khmelnytsky’s decision to “bring the Cossacks under the tsar’s hand”. In one of his poems, he wrote: “It is true, yes, Poland fell, / But in her fall, she crushed us”.31

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In the second half of the 19th century, the leaders of Ukrainian movement in Russia eagerly expressed their anti-Polish sentiments while simultaneously stressing their cultural differences and the political inevitability of a joint development of Ukraine and Russia. This point was eloquently made by historian, Mykola/Nikolai Kostomarov, who, in 1861, argued that the Southern Rus’ (Ukraine), with its prevailing personal freedoms (in contrast to the Northern Rus’, with its traditions of communal life and political autocracy), had historically proved its “incapacity for state life”. Therefore, for Kostomarov, the two East Slavic nationalities – Russians and Ukrainians – perfectly complemented each other. At the same time, Kostomarov also highlighted the antagonism between Ukrainians and Poles: “They are like two close branches that developed completely differently: one people is profoundly democratic, the other profoundly aristocratic”.32

The next year, in 1862, leading Ukrainian writer, Panteleimon Kulish, developed Kostomarov’s point even further:

The Polish and the Ukrainian characters, over the centuries, dispersed to such a distance that a Pole, with all his diligence, cannot enter the Ukrainian nature, and a Ukrainian, with all the bait, does not want to enter the Polish nature. . . . If you [the Poles] are noblemen softened and enlightened by the spirit of the age, then we are Cossacks also breathing new, modern life. . . . You say, you brought European enlightenment into our peasant hut. Thank you for the work, although you brought it to yourself; if you brought it to us, then the hut is still ours and, in it, you are strangers.33

In 1862, Kulish radically rejected the historical and civilizational arguments of Polish writers. For twenty years, he argued for Ukrainian-Polish reconciliation, praised Polish high culture and criticized the Cossacks – the typical heroes of Ukrainian Romanticism. A man of different moods, Kulish frequently changed sides and his writings were full of contradictions.34


34 On Kulish’s personality, see this brilliant article: Yurii Shevelov, “Kuleshev lysty i Kulish u lytakh”, Suchasnist’ 12, 1983, 7–38. See also: Dmytro Doroshenko, Panteleimon Kulish, Kyiv – Leipzig: Ukrains’ka nakladnia, 1920; Viktor Petrov, Panteleimon Kulish u piatdesiati roky: zhyttia, ideolohia, tvorchist’, Kyiv: Vseukraïns’ka Akademiia Nauk, 1929; Yevhen Nakhlik,
Still, his “pro-Polish” publications proved to be much less influential than his novels and essays that praised the Cossacks and their alliances with Moscow.

In the same year, professor of history at St. Vladimir’s University in Kyiv, Volodymyr Antonovych, published his programmatic essay “My Confession” (*Moia ispoved’*). Being born and raised as a Polish nobleman Antonovych made a conscious choice in favor of Ukrainian identity and insisted that,

those noble Poles who live in the Southern-Russian land, have before the court of their own conscience only two options: to return to the nationality abandoned by their ancestors, or to resettle to the Polish lands inhabited by Polish people.35

Antonovych’s student, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a principal critic of the Russian imperial historical narrative, became a professor of Eastern European history at the Lviv University in Austria in 1894. While deconstructing the “traditional scheme of Russian history” by separating Ukrainian history from it,36 Hrushevsky


also severely criticized Polish claims to *Rzeczpospolita’s* historical borders and Polish paternalistic attitudes to the Ukrainians.\(^{37}\)

The Ukrainian national movement developed both in the Russian and the Austrian Empires. The movement in the Austrian Empire, with its less repressive language and religious politics, came to be considered as a Piedmont of the Ukrainian project until the end of the 19th century. This happened largely due to the Greek Catholic Church, who became the patron of Ukrainophile orientations. While the Uniate Church was outlawed in the Russian Empire, it developed freely in the Habsburg Empire. As John-Paul Himka has concluded, it was largely because of the Greek-Catholic Church that the Galician Ruthenians did not simply assimilate to Polish nationality, and “the crucial factor in the victory of Ukrainophilism in Galician Rus’ was the Austrian state”.\(^{38}\)

In 1883, leading Ukrainian writer in East Galicia, Ivan Franko, published his essay, “Our View on the Polish Question”, where he made the same points as Ukrainian intellectuals from Russia had made in 1860s. For Franko, the very idea of “historical Poland” was “politically naïve, ethnographically pointless, and pretty harmful for the Polish nationality itself”.\(^{39}\) Franko

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39 Ivan Franko, “Nash pohliad na pol’s’ke pytannia”, in: Ivan Franko, *Zibrannia*
rejected the ideas of a Poland-led federation of non-Russian people, stressing that “the Poles never wanted equality, but domination, not a free federation, but enslavement”. For him, the peasant character of the Ukrainian nation and literature was not an obstacle, but an advantage:

Our literature without lords (bez paniv) ought to become a people’s literature right away. . . . Precisely the lack of the lords could become a precondition for the quicker and more direct development of our people.40

A very different view on the elite issue was presented by another Pole by-birth who made a conscious choice in favor of Ukrainian identity – Viacheslav/Wacław Lypynsky. Unlike Antonovych, Lypynsky was proud of his noble origin and praised the szlachta for their “statehood value” (derzhavotvorcha vartist’).41 Still, he was no less convinced in the fundamental importance of “separating Ukraine from Poland”. For this conservative Christian thinker, the main challenge for the Ukrainian movement was “to separate itself from Poland, but in such a way that will not

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mean drowning in the Russian sea”.

The main challenge for the modern Polish national project was a bit different. Because of the fact that the area of the Polish szlachta settlement significantly outsized the area with predominantly Polish peasants, the acceptance of the ethnic concept of Polish nationhood would automatically mean the dramatic “reduction of Motherland”. In other words, Polish patriots had to choose between two radically different conceptions of the Polish nation: the old, historical conception of a multiethnic political nation and the new, narrowly ethnic “peasantist” view.

At the same time, as Roman Szporluk pointed out,

The making of a modern Ukraine was taking place not in “Austria” and “Russia” . . . but in a social world – the social space – where an overwhelming majority of would-be Ukrainians lived under Polish nobles. The modernizers of the Polish nation promised those serfs that they would become free and Polish at the same time.

That was the basic promise and assumption of two Polish uprisings against the Russian Empire in 1830 and 1863. After

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42 Viacheslav Lypyns’kyi, Lysty do brativ-khliborobiv pro ideiu i orhanizatsiiu ukraïns’koho monarkhizmu, Vienna: Carl Herrmann, 1926, XXV.
43 Walicki, Idea narodu w polskiej myśli, 121, 141.
the first uprising Russia abolished the Kingdom of Poland with its own liberal constitution, parliament and army. After the second uprising the imperial government turned into systematic anti-Polish politics which also included serious attempts to fight for the support of local non-Polish peasants.\footnote{Publications on the topic include: Darius Staliūnas, Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007; Mikhail Dolbilov, Russkij kraj, chuzhajavera: Etnokonfessional’naja politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II, Moscow: NLO, 2010.}

Throughout the 19th century, the majority of Polish writers and political thinkers believed in the possibility of preserving the borders of 1772 in a future Poland. They also insisted on cultural differences between the Ukrainians (usually called “Ruthenians”) and the Russians. At the same time, they also tended to convince themselves that, despite some ethnic peculiarities and religious differences, “the Ruthenians and the Liakhs [a pejorative name for the Poles in Ukrainian folk tradition – A. P.] ... always constituted one Polish people”\footnote{Stefan Buszczyński, Podole, Wołyń i Ukraina, Lwów: Korner Piller, 1862, 11. For more examples, see: Andrei (Andrii) Portnov, “Naselenie zapadnykh okrain Rossii i imperii v polskih memuarkh pervoy treti XIX veka”, Slavianovedenie 5, 2006, 60–67.}.

In 1897, the leader of the nationalistic political camp Narodowa Demokracja (national democrats), Roman Dmowski, expressed his deep conviction that “Ruthenian culture could only become the foundation for a movement with an exclusively cultural character”. His supporter, Ludwik Poplawski, speculated that,

... the development of Polish colonization will convince the Ruthenian politicians more effectively that any arguments that the norm of relations between our two nationalities cannot be struggle, but must be peaceful cohabita-
Dmowski and his followers rejected the claims of Ukrainians’ right for self-determination and believed that Poles have “a right to lead” Ukraine “to progress” as “the only intellectual and economic power” in the region.\textsuperscript{50}

Willingly stressing the differences between Ruthenians and Russians, Polish intellectuals would barely question the “cultural inferiority” of Ukrainian peasants and their “natural longing” to the Polish culture. As Brian Porter put it,

This was tolerance of those who felt they could afford to be tolerant because time and history were on their side. . . . It was a model that worked only as long as the younger brothers were willing to accept their designed role. . . . Poles were perhaps unique in that they saw themselves as a European society engaged in a civilizing mission vis-à-vis a set of Eastern peoples, while simultaneously being subjected to imperial domination by one such “Oriental” land (Russia).\textsuperscript{51}

Similarly telling is how Polish discourse on the non-Polish population of the old eastern borderlands of \textit{Rzeczpospolita} resembled in many ways the German colonial discourse on Poles and

\textsuperscript{49} Both quotes are taken from Brian Porter, \textit{When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 225, 226.


\textsuperscript{51} Porter, \textit{When Nationalism Began to Hate}, 188.
the “wild East”\textsuperscript{52}

If national democrats believed in the political (if not cultural) assimilation of Ruthenians, their main opponents – Polish socialists, headed by Józef Piłsudski – developed a utopia of a Eastern European federation under Polish leadership and united against Russia.\textsuperscript{53} In 1911, one of the most prominent supporters of socialist federal plans, Leon Wasilewski, called for the acceptance of the national character of Ukrainians and for the support of their independence aspirations against Russia. He also rightly predicted the Ukrainian-Polish conflict over Lviv/Lwów because “such a conflict is inevitable if two nationalities – the one, socially and politically privileged, and the other, humiliated – populate certain areas together”.\textsuperscript{54}

At the same time, Lviv-based Ukrainian geographer, Stepan Rudnytsky, rhetorically asked: “How could the historico-geographical conception of Poland be made to harmonize with


the ethnographic conception of Ukraine?” Rudnytsky proposed no answers to his question. Wasilewski appealed to the people of good will of both nations to do everything to minimize the scale of future violence. His plea proved to be more than relevant within less than ten years.

**Inter-War Poland and its Ukrainians**

Independent Poland appeared on the political map of Europe after the First World War and the collapse of the Russian and Austrian Empires. It proudly called itself *Druga Rzeczpospolita* (The Second Republic) even though, unlike the early-modern Commonwealth, it considered itself to be a national state of the Poles. Independent Ukraine failed to survive the turmoil of revolutions and wars in 1917–1921. Still, the Soviet Ukrainian republic became one of the founding members of the semi-federal Soviet Union.

In interwar Europe, the territories inhabited predominantly by Ukrainian populations were divided between the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania. Volhynia (which belonged previously to the Romanov Empire) and East Galicia (which belonged previously to the Habsburg Empire) became part of a new Polish state. This happened after the Ukrainian-Polish war over Lviv/Lwów and Galicia.

On October 19, 1918, the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic (*Zakhidno-Ukraïns’ka Narodna Respublika*, ZUNR) was proclaimed on all ex-Austrian territories with a predominant Ukrainian population. On November 1, 1918, Lviv, the capital

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city of Austrian Galicia (with more than 200,000 inhabitants of whom ca. 62% were Poles, 28% Jews and less than 10% Ukrainians) was seized by Ukrainian military units. By November 7, this extended to the whole of East Galicia. The logic of the ZUNR proclamation was based on an ethnographic argument, according to which the territory had been Ukrainian until 1387 and “from an ethnographic standpoint it has remained so up until today”. In the main city, Lviv/Lwów, though, Ukrainians were the minority. Fighting in the streets between Ukrainian and Polish units (the Jews declared neutrality) involved thousands of participants, hundreds of which were killed. Finally, on November 22, 1918, the ZUNR forces left Lviv, and their retreat was followed by an anti-Jewish pogrom

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committed mostly by Polish soldiers.

On January, 22, 1919, ZUNR, having de-facto lost its territories, proclaimed a symbolical unification (Akt Zluky) with the Ukrainian Peoples Republic (UNR) in Kyiv, whose main enemy at that time were the Bolsheviks. On April 22, 1920, the head of the UNR government Symon Petliura signed an agreement with the chief of the Polish state Józef Piłsudski. In May 1920, Polish troops entered Kyiv, but quickly retreated. The price Petliura had to pay for Polish military assistance was his recognition of East Galicia belonging to Poland. This recognition was severely criticized by almost every Ukrainian political group as a fatal mistake or as an outright crime.\(^{57}\) Petliura himself was aware of the situation and apparently told his colleagues:

Don’t you know that with the Poles you could be either friends or enemies – there is no way of keeping neutrality with them. I have chosen the first option, because we had nothing for the second one.\(^{58}\)

The Petliura-Piłsudski agreement, clearly unequal, proved to be short-lived. On March 18, 1921, after an unsuccessful attack by the Red Army on Poland, official Warsaw signed a Riga peace treaty with Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine.\(^ {59}\) And on March


15, 1923, the Allied Council of Ambassadors of Entente Countries recognized Poland’s sovereignty over East Galicia. On the one hand, it seemed that the principle of historical borders had triumphed even in the age of nation’s right for self-determination. On the other hand, the newly born Polish state faced a very serious challenge in its national politics. Almost 35% of the country’s population was non-Polish (the two biggest national groups were Ukrainians and Jews). Furthermore, the Ukrainian minority was actually a majority in Poland’s eastern regions, and constituted more than 68% in Volhynia and more than 50% in East Galicia. As Polish conservative thinker and supporter of a peaceful and pragmatic solution to the Ukrainian problem, Jan Stanisław Łoś, put it,

On the one hand, there are too many Ukrainians within the Polish state, and on the other, too few. Too many to treat them like some insignificant part of something destined to dissolve in the Polish environment. . . . Still, there are too few Ukrainians to think that in a few decades a dualistic state like Austria-Hungary will emerge.

Interwar Poland failed to resolve this challenge and to propose any constructive and systematic politics towards its Ukrainian

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60 The census of 1931 was designed to reduce the number of non-Poles, among others, by asking respondents about their “native language” and not “nationality”. According to official data in three East Galician voivodships the Poles constituted 47.1% and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) – 45.3%. Historian Jerzy Tomaszewski has verified and corrected this data, suggesting that in East Galicia there were 52.4% Ukrainians and 36.8% Poles. See Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów*, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1985, 78. These numbers are generally accepted as well-grounded in Polish historiography. I am grateful to Tomasz Stryjek for his helpful comments on this matter.

population. Despite promising it internationally, the Polish government refused to open the Ukrainian university in Lviv and initiated policies aimed at the decrease of Ukrainian language instruction at schools.\textsuperscript{62} At the same time, Poland had to respond to Soviet Ukraine’s claims to protect the rights of Ukrainians outside the USSR, and to the radical terrorist politics of the illegal Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) which treated Poland as an “occupying force”. On August 29, 1931, the OUN killed the prominent supporter of “Ukrainian anti-Soviet Piedmont in Poland”, Tadeusz Hołówko, and on June 15, 1934 assassinated the Minister of Interior, Bronisław Pieracki. In total, during 1920s and 1930s the radical Ukrainian

nationalists committed 63 assassinations, the victims of which were 25 Poles, 1 Russian, 1 Jew and 36 Ukrainians. So, the OUN considered Ukrainians of moderate views who advocated the peaceful resolution of Polish-Ukrainian problem the main enemy of the “national revolution”.

In interwar Poland, radical nationalists never became the leading political force among Ukrainians, but their violent deeds influenced governmental policies which became inclined to apply repressions against Ukrainian institutions and societal moods. Still, Polish politics regarding the Ukrainian question were not limited to repressions. In the Volhynian region, the government tried to create a local Polish-friendly Ukrainian project with very limited ties to Galicia – one could define it as a kind of alternative modernity, an attempt to hold back the tide of time, and to prevent the national development of Volhynian Ukrainians in a “Galician way”. Especially after the Piłsudski coup d’état in May 1926, Poland attempted to promote the politics of prometeizm – supporting the anti-Soviet national movement of the USSR’s nationalities in order to create a buffer zone between Poland and the USSR made up of independent Belarus.

and Ukraine (but, of course, without Eastern Galicia).\textsuperscript{66} Part of this process was the creation and financial support of the Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Warsaw (opened in 1930) and the periodical “The Polish-Ukrainian Bulletin” (Biuletyn Polsko-Ukraiński), devoted to discussing Ukrainian-Polish matters.\textsuperscript{67}

In general terms, the national politics of interwar Poland was, as Włodzimierz Mędrzecki formulated it, first and foremost, negative – it was an attempt to stop, or at least to slow down, the development of Ukrainian national movement. As a result, the Second Republic’s citizens of non-Polish ethnic origin largely viewed the Polish state as a repressive institution.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66} For more details, see: Marek Kornat (ed.), Ruch prometejski i walka o przebudowę Europy Wschodniej (1918–1940), Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2012.
\textsuperscript{67} For more details, see: Andrii Portnov, Nauka u vyhnanni. Naukova i osvitnia dial’nist’ ukraïns’koï emihratsii v mizhvoiennij Polshi (1919–1939), Kharkiv: KhIFT, 2008, 58.
The same point was openly made by a number of Polish intellectuals already in the late 1930s. For instance, in their essay published in 1938, three Polish authors confirmed the numerous mistakes of governmental policy and recognized the fact that, because of such politics, Ukrainians in Galicia “are simply hostile towards the Polish state”.\(^6^9\) They proposed to officially recognize the name “Ukrainians” (instead of the widely-used “Ruthenians”), to guarantee the equal rights for Ukrainian language teaching, to create a Ukrainian university and to allow the full cultural autonomy of Ukrainians in Poland.\(^7^0\)

Such measures were aimed to make Ukrainian citizens of the Second Republic loyal to the Polish state. For the majority of Ukrainian intellectuals, such a positive development seemed unrealistic. In 1923, Vasyl Bidnov, an émigré historian of the Orthodox Church, wrote to his colleague in Soviet Ukraine:

> Poles remained the historical Poles. Polish democrats and socialists appeared to be no better than old szlachta. The religious repressions against the Orthodox Church and Polonisation are the same as in the 16th–17th centuries. There is nothing new on Polish soil.\(^7^1\)

On December 1, 1936, one of the most prominent Ukrainian émigré poets, Yevhen Malanyuk, wrote in his diary: “With

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pathological, and perhaps masochistic stubbornness, the Polish nation seeks (objectively) to see a new Khmelnytsky uprising”\textsuperscript{72}.

In 1939, Ukrainian émigré historian Dmytro Doroshenko wrote that, starting from the year 1918, “the Poles repeated – step by step – almost the same mistakes that, in the 18th century, caused the decline of the old Commonwealth”, and the worst of them was “the policies of reckless persecution of non-Polish people”.\textsuperscript{73}

**The Second World War and its Aftermath**

In September 1939, the Polish state was destroyed by aggressions of the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. West Ukraine and West Belarus were declared to be “re-unified” with Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Belarus respectfully. They experienced intensive Sovietization until summer 1941,\textsuperscript{74} when Germany started war against the Soviet Union and quickly occupied the


\textsuperscript{73} Dmytro Doroshenko, “Pol’s’ka polityka u vidnosynakh do natsionalnykh menshostej, golovno do ukraina’s’koï”, *Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyschykh orhaniv vladu Ukrainy* [Kyiv]. Fond 4186. Opys 1. Sprava 7. Arkush 1–49. I am grateful to Viktoriia Serhienko who shared this archival document with me. It should also be noted that Doroshenko prepared this text for publication in German immediately after the Third Reich’s invasion into Poland. Very similar arguments could be found in other publications by the prominent Ukrainian intellectuals of the time: Yuri Kosach, “Vidbudova Kodaka”, *Natsiia v pohodi*, 6, 1939, 3–5; Ivan Brusny [Ivan L. Rudnytsky], “Kinets’ Pol’shi”, Natsiia v pohodi, 3–4, 1940, 3–7; Homo politicus [Ivan Kedryn], *Przychyn upadku Pol’shchi*. Cracow: Ukraïns’ke vydavnytsvo, 1940.

whole of Ukraine. In the first days of the Nazi occupation, Lviv saw an attempt of Ukrainian nationalists to proclaim an independent Ukrainian state (which was not supported by German command) and an anti-Jewish pogrom. When the OUN realized that the Third Reich would not support the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state, it started an underground war in which the main enemy was neither the Germans nor Soviets but the Poles.

The main area of that conflict was Volhynia, located in the north-east agricultural region of prewar Poland, with a population of 2.1 million, of whom Ukrainians constituted 67.94%, Poles 16.5%, and Jews 9.78%. In 1939, the region was occupied by the Soviet troops, in 1941 by the German Wehrmacht. Soon afterwards, the Volhynian Jews became victims of the Nazi policy of the “Final Solution”. In the autumn of 1942, the Bandera wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (in 1940, the OUN had split into two sections headed by Bandera and Melnyk) established its armed forces, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). Already in 1942, the OUN Bandera (OUN-B) decided to “evict all the Poles”, and after the battle of Stalingrad in 1943, which signaled the Third Reich’s defeat and the reordering of borders in Europe, the “anti-Polish action” in Volhynia was aimed to guarantee that this region was not to remain part of Poland. It seems that the OUN-B leaders followed the experience of the First World War when postwar borders were mostly drawn according to the “national composition of the population”.

In other words, the “anti-Polish action” (a term used by the UPA itself) was based on the nationalistic logic to claim rights to land on the basis of ethnic purity, inspired by anti-Pol-
ish sentiments and the experience of discriminatory politics under the interwar Polish state. In order to portray their pre-planned actions of ethnic cleansing as a spontaneous peasant riot, the UPA units killed Polish civilians with axes, rather than machine guns, and tried to mobilize local Ukrainian peasants. The brutality of the killings, which made no exception for women or children, and involved torturing victims and the destruction of Roman Catholic churches, is usually stressed in the stories of survivors.

The German administration in Volhynia never seriously tried to stop the ethnic cleansing against its Polish residents. The underground Armia Krajowa (AK), which was subordinate to the Polish government in exile, only later started the so-called “revenge-preventive operations” directed against Ukrainian villagers. Historians estimate the total number of the Polish victims of the UPA at around 100,000 (this number also includes the victims of the “anti-Polish action” in East Galicia which caused fewer mortalities than in Volhynia) and Ukrainian victims at 10,000–15,000. 76

After the Second World War, Volhynia as well as East Galicia became part of Soviet Ukraine. The bitter historical irony is that it was Stalin, a man responsible for the bloody repressions against the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Great Famine of 1932–33, who “re-unified Ukrainian lands” and brought the century-old dream of “Ukrainian ethnographic lands’ unity” (sobornist’) into a political reality. This unification happened under the communist regime, and included the pitiless struggle against the anti-Soviet nationalistic underground\(^77\) and the ban of the Uniate Church.\(^78\)

The Polish government in exile, as well as its military force, Armia Krajowa, fought for the reestablishment of prewar Polish borders, but the Allies accepted Stalin’s territorial requests and decided to compensate them with the Polish People’s Republic (Polska Republika Ludowa, PRL), which incorporated the formerly East Prussian territories in the west – the “recovered lands” (ziemie odzyskane), as they were used to be called in postwar Poland.

Postwar Eastern Europe was also intended to become as nationally homogeneous as possible. From October 1944 to June 1946, the USSR and Poland organized population exchanges when 482,000 Ukrainians from Poland “returned” to Soviet Ukraine, and about 780,000 Poles and Jews from Ukraine resettled to Poland.\(^79\) From April 28 until August 28, 1947, the

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government of socialist Poland conducted the so-called *Operation Vistula* to relocate 140,000 Ukrainians from the border region with the USSR to the western and northern areas taken from Germany.  

As a result of all of these developments, including the consequences of the Holocaust and the postwar expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe, the entire region had lost its multicultural character. Postwar Poland did not just geographically move to the West, but, more importantly, for the very first time in its history, it became a de facto mono-national country with a population of more than 90% of Polish-speaking and Roman-Catholic citizens.

Postwar Soviet Ukraine (or, to be more precise, the Soviet Union) was the very first state in the entire history of Ukraine which included Lviv and Donetsk within the same boundaries.

Those boundaries were not easily accepted by Polish society and Polish émigré intellectuals. And it was not just geographical boundaries that were at stake. It is telling that, in 1952, Józef Łobodowski wrote: “It is high time for Poles to understand that Ukraine is a separate nation with the same right to self-determination as any other nation”.

In Soviet-friendly socialist Poland, Ukrainian national-

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ists were portrayed as the worst incarnation of evil, but the topic of the Volhynian massacre (as a historical event that happened outside the borders of the PRL) was silenced. In the Soviet Union, the history of early modern Polish-Ukrainian relations was depicted as a glorious struggle of the Cossacks against “Polish invasion” and for the “re-unification with Russia”.

Searching for a New Model of Polish-Ukrainian Relations: Before and After 1989

Reflecting on past Ukrainian-Polish relations, Canadian-Ukrainian historian Ivan L. Rudnytsky, who was born and raised in interwar Poland, concluded that “the party mainly responsible for the past failures in Polish-Ukrainian relations are the Poles” was the stronger and more advanced side. Rudnytsky attributed Ukraine’s relative weakness in this bilateral relation to its exposure to the steppe frontier and to its proximity to the rising power of Russia. According to him, “the Poles, regrettably, have used their relative advantage over their Ukrainian neighbors with slight display of statesmanship or foresight”.

When Ivan L. Rudnytsky published his text, he already collaborated with the Paris-based Polish journal *Kultura*, edited by Jerzy Giedroyc, but probably did not imagine how successful

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86 Ibid, 5.
Kultura’s approach to the “Ukrainian problem” would become and how deeply it would change both Polish politics and the sentiments of Polish society.

Already in the 1960s and 70s, Kultura clearly postulated that Poles should accept and guarantee Ukrainian rights to Lviv, as well as the rights of Lithuanians to Vilnius and of Belarusians to Hrodna. Only the unconditional support for the full self-determination of the neighboring nations and the open rejection of any form of imperialism could, according to Kultura’s logic, secure Polish statehood against Russia. As Juliusz Mieroszewski put it:

In Eastern Europe, not just peace but also freedom should be established. There will be no place for any imperialism – neither Russian, nor Polish. We could not ask the Russians to return Kyiv to the Ukrainians while simultaneously demanding Lviv to return to Poland.\(^{87}\)

Kultura radically rejected the “ethnographic-civilizational” deadlock of thinking about the Polish-Ukrainian question and invited its readers to imagine something very different – a new Polish ULB (Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus) politics, which had strong pragmatic and moral dimensions.\(^{88}\)

When Giedroyc, Mieroszewski and others first formu-
lated their vision of the Polish ULB, there was no political body to take it up. But the situation changed dramatically following the Soviet perestroika, the Solidarność movement in Poland, the dissolution of the socialist camp, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In 1991, Poland was the first country to recognize the independence of Ukraine. Leading Polish politicians referred to Kultura and acknowledged their approval of Giedroyć’s vision. Already in early 1990s, Poland became to be perceived as “Ukraine’s advocate in Europe”, and the efforts of Polish elites in promoting dialogue and reconciliation with Ukraine were generally praised.

That does not mean, of course, that all historical controversies were just forgotten. The biggest issue for years was probably the opening of the Polish Eaglets Cemetery (Cmentarz Orłat Lwowskich) in Lviv. This necropolis of mostly young Poles killed

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during the Ukrainian-Polish war for Lviv in 1918 served as the main symbolic space of Polish victory in interwar Lwów, and remained a sensitive issue for many Ukrainians. Finally, in 2005, the cemetery was opened by the presidents of the two countries – Alexander Kwaśniewski and Viktor Yushchenko.90

A number of other important memorial places were opened soon thereafter. In 2006, Ukrainian President Yushchenko and Polish President Lech Kaczyński opened a memorial in Pawlokoma village, where, in March 1945, the unit of the Polish underground Home Army shot 365 local Ukrainians dead, and in February 2009, the two presidents visited a memorial in Huta Pieniacka (a village where ca. 1,000 Poles were murdered by the Ukrainian police detachment of the Waffen-SS Galizien-Division in late February 1944).91

Still, no memorial could cure the traumatic historical pain once and for all. The real challenge to Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation proved to be the topic of the Volhynian massacre: Wołyn-43. If, in the 1990s, Polish intellectuals and politicians, who clearly played a leading role in initiating and developing a dialogue with the Ukrainian side, tended not to stress too much the issue of the anti-Polish massacres committed by the UPA, in the second decade of the 21st century, Wołyn-43 moved to the very center of Polish memory discourse.

In 2013, the lower house of the Polish parliament (the


Fig. 8
One of the issues of the Paris-based Kultura journals edited by Jerzy Giedroyc (from the collection of A. Brusnyi).
Sejm), dominated at the time by the liberal PO (Platforma Obywatelska) party, adopted the political declaration on Wołyn-43 defining the UPA crime as “an ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide”. In July 2016, the newly elected Polish parliament with a constitutional majority of the conservative PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party adopted a new declaration on the Wołyn-43 that called it a “genocide” and established a commemoration day for its victims on 11 July, the day of the coordinated UPA attack on tens of Polish villages on Volhynia. The same declaration expressed gratitude to those Ukrainians who rescued their Polish neighbors and aimed for “solidarity with present-day Ukraine, which fights against foreign aggression for its territorial integrity”. None of the 442 MPs of the Sejm voted against the resolution.

In 1993, a monument of a military symbol (a giant sword) was erected in the Polish capital of Warsaw to honor the Polish soldiers of the 27th Volhynian Armia Krajowa Infantry Division. In 2003, this monument was supplemented with new elements, – Volhynian stone candles –, which were meant to symbolize the twelve administrative units of the Volhynian region where the killings happened. In 2013, a new memorial was added: a seven-meter-high cross with an armless Christ. Zuzanna Bogumił argues that the sculpture of the armless Christ clearly places the entire memorial in the tradition of Polish religious messianism and martyrdom. Through experiencing Christ-like suffering,

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the Poles of Volhynia are transformed into innocent martyrs who died in the name of highest national values. Their moral purity and physical suffering are connected to the old Romantic notion of the Poles as “a Christ among nations”.

In such a mythological framework, Wołyn-43 became much more than just an exceptionally tragic historical event, but a collective experience that bares eternal truth about the Polish nation. Reenactments of the Volhynian massacre (like the one organized in 2013 by some Polish far-right activists in the village of Radymno who proudly claimed that they reject the “outdated and deeply discredited Giedroyc myth”), the widely-advertised “Wołyn” movie (2016) by Wojtek Smarzowski, and numerous publications helped to promote Wołyn-43 as a “newly discovered” and “repressed” proof of exceptional Polish martyrdom and sacrifice. For some critics of the ongoing memorial efforts, they also proved “the lack of readiness for a true dialogue with Ukrainians”.

The Volhynian topic also helped to reinstate and support the Kresy narrative. The very term kresy was invented in 19th-century Polish literature, and gained popularity largely due to Henryk Sienkiewicz’s very influential novel “With Fire and Sword” (1884) set during Khmelnytsky’s uprising. Sienkiewicz romanticized kresy and the szlachta, and depicted the Cossack


revolt as a purely destructive war. During interwar Poland, the word *Kresy* started to be written with a capital K. The notion of *Kresy*, like the notion of *Wołyn-43*, was not welcome in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL). After 1989, an additional, anti-communist dimension was brought to its promotion. In 19th- and 20th-century Polish literature, *Kresy* was portrayed as both an idyllic and tragic experience, in which the Poles had first “brought civilization” and then were brutally murdered and expelled. Some historians see the entire *Kresy* narrative as built on cultural inequality and the dominant position of the Poles towards other, “less developed” cultures. Other historians believe that, in Poland, the “*Kresy* tradition” “resulted mainly in positives” and it is not purely about the revindication of borders, but about an “openness towards the East” that helped to orient Polish foreign policy to Ukraine and other eastern neighbors and could even be used to promote the “further unification of Europe”.

Literary scholar Bogusław Bakuła summarized the main features of Polish publications about *Kresy* after 1989 as the following:

The idealization of multiculturalism with Poland at the centre,

The rejection of languages recognized as “*Kresy*” or minority ones,

The demonizing, exoticizing, and idealizing of the Other, the non-Pole,

The treatment of the phenomenon of “Borderlands-ness”

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97 Daniel Beauvois, “Oni i inni: pamiętnikarze polscy na Kresach Wschodnich w XX wieku”, *Przegląd Wschodni* 7/1, 2000, 185–204.

as a component of the Polish historical and civilizational mission,
Paternalism,
The Polonisation of cultural diversity,
The imposing on Others of one’s own perspective, terminology and “Borderlands” culture."

As another author put it, “that is exactly how the Poles hated to be treated by the Germans”.100

And what about Ukraine? The Volhynian topic as well as the entire set of memory issues related to Poland seem to play a much lesser role in Ukrainian public debates when compared to topics related to Russia and the Soviet Union. This asymmetry of interest is often neglected in Polish perceptions of Ukrainian debates. Moreover, post-Soviet Ukraine faced the coexistence, competition and, sometimes, coercion of two narratives of the Second World War: the Soviet and the nationalistic.101 The first

one stresses Ukraine’s role in the Soviet Union’s struggle against fascism and portrays OUN and UPA exclusively as Nazi collaborators. The second one emphasizes the anti-Soviet struggle of the UPA that lasted until the early 1950s and caused serious Soviet repressions in Western Ukraine.

Neither of the two narratives pays special attention to the Volhynian massacre. Wołyn-43 was not present in Soviet history textbooks, and even though the leader of the OUN-B Stepan Bandera was one of the main anti-Soviet heroes, the biggest crime of the political movement that he was in charge of – the ethnic cleansing of the Polish population of Volhynia – was barely mentioned. As a result, the Volhynian massacre remains rather unknown to a lot of Ukrainians, especially those without family stories from Western Ukraine.

In the Ukrainian nationalistic narrative, the Volhynian massacre was ignored, neglected or at least downplayed. Writers allied with the OUN-B agenda invented the main strategies of neglect during the 1950s and 1960s. They described “anti-Polish actions” as a spontaneous peasant revolution against Polish rule, referring to the “right of the oppressed to protect themselves”. They claimed that violent clashes were provoked by the Germans and/or Soviet partisans. They alleged that the Polish civilians in Volhynia were the victims of the “irresponsible policies of the Polish government in exile which adhered to the prewar borders of Poland”. Additional arguments include the systematic attempt to equate the UPA anti-Polish and the AK anti-Ukrainian operations under the umbrella of “The Volhynian

tragedy”, and to downplay the responsibility of individual OUN-B and UPA commanders.\footnote{All these points are summarized and developed in the publications of (in)famous Ukrainian public historian and director of the Institute for National Remembrance during Petro Poroshenko’s presidency, Volodymyr Viatrovych. See: Volodymyr Viatrovych, 
*Druha pol’s’ko-ukraïnska vijna 1942–1947*, Kyiv: Kyjevo-Mohylians’ka Akademiia, 2011; Volodymyr Viatrovych, 
*Za lashtunkamy “Volyni-43”: Nevidoma pol’s’ko-ukraïns’ka vijna*, Kharkiv: Klub simejnoho dozvillia, 2016. The last publication could be compared with a popular book by Motyka: Grzegorz Motyka, 
*Wołyń 43: Ludobójcza czystka – fakty, analogie, polityka historyczna*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2016.} The main goal behind all of these maneuvers was to preserve the UPA as a pure national symbol of Ukraine’s struggle for independence.

School textbooks probably display the best depictions of the rhetorical efforts mentioned above. In a 1994 textbook, the Volhynian massacre was mentioned only euphemistically with no clear definition of the ethnicity of the victims:

The relations of the UPA with Polish armed detachments from different political orientations in Western Ukraine turned out to be tragic. The UPA declared the necessity to liquidate secondary fronts, except for anti-Bolshevik and anti-Nazi fronts. But to reach an agreement with the Polish national forces proved to be impossible. Ukrainians accused the Poles of seeking the restoration of Poland’s prewar borders. Poles saw the reason for their hostility in the Ukrainians’ incompliance. Unarmed peasants were the victims of this political antagonism.\footnote{F. H. Turchenko, 

In the updated version of the same textbook (published in 2011), the “Volhynian Tragedy” was included, but the description of it remained very short and obscure, especially when it came to the issue of perpetrators:
The relations of the UPA with Polish armed detachments from different political orientations in Western Ukraine turned out to be tragic. Ukrainians accused the Poles of seeking the restoration of Poland’s prewar borders. Poles saw the reason for their hostility in the Ukrainians’ incompliance. The victims of this political antagonism were mostly peaceful people. The Volhynian Tragedy - the mass killing of the Polish and partly Ukrainian population of the region - cast a shadow on Ukrainian-Polish relations during the Second World War.104

The lack of adequate self-critical assessment of the war crimes committed by the nationalistic underground in mainstream Ukrainian media and educational publications could be explained by arguments relating to the ongoing and undeclared war with Russia and the need for patriotic symbols, and could be attributed to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance of the topic for Polish society, as well as to the ongoing impact of Soviet images of war. In any case, Ukraine’s stance on the “Volhynian Tragedy” - both the official position and the one presented by public intellectuals - remained one of reaction to the initiatives of their neighbor Poland. In this respect, Ivan L. Rudnytsky’s description of Poland as the “stronger and more advanced side” remains relevant.

Constructions of the Past, Imaginations of the Future

In modern history, the Polish and Ukrainian national projects represented two competing political legitimacies: one based on historical borders and civilization, and the other based on the ethnographic composition of the population. The Polish national project was considered to be “noble” (szlachecki) and Ukrainian to be “peasant” (muzhyts’ky). The Polish project referred to the territorial boundaries and political achievements of the early-modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (often equated with Poland). The Ukrainian project celebrated the Cossack tradition as an embodiment of personal freedom and anti-Polish resistance. In the era of nationalism, it seemed that all historical attempts of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, like the Union of Hadiach in 1658, were simply unrealistic dreams. In the first half of the 20th century, the unequal and short-lived Petliura-Piłsudski agreement of 1920 appeared to many as a puzzling confirmation of an easy-to-believe “historical truth”: Poles and Ukrainians could never be equal partners and brothers. The violent clashes and ethnic cleansings during the Second World War and the first postwar years were seen as the ultimate proof of such an attitude.

This context is very important to understand the unprecedented intellectual success of Jerzy Giedroyc and his Kultura vision of pro-ULB Polish foreign policy and its radical rejection of the “historical borders” discourse. The political triumph of the Kultura approach in the 1990s and the image of post-socialist Poland as “Ukraine’s advocate” in the EU were intellectually projected from the past, turning the story of the early-modern Rzeczpospolita into a common Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian-Ukrainian experience of success in democracy and tolerance.
The events of the Second World War and the immediate postwar years dramatically changed the borders and the population structure of both Poland and Ukraine. Poland territorially moved to the West, losing East Galicia and Volhynia, but obtaining a large part of former Eastern Prussia, and, for the first time in its history, it became a nationally and religiously homogeneous country. Postwar Soviet Ukraine, for the first time in Ukrainian history, united practically all “ethnic Ukrainian lands” and fulfilled the old nationalistic dream of “sobornist”’. Such a unification, made by Stalin’s regime and accompanied by severe repressions, had an unintended historical consequence – it increased the Ukrainian-speaking population in the USSR and turned East Galicia once again into a Piedmont, but this time, a Piedmont of anti-Soviet sentiment.

In 1989, the economic condition of Ukraine could be seen as comparable to Poland or other ex-socialist countries. However, over the next few decades, the gap between them deepened. Unlike privatization in Poland, a country with clear prospects of EU integration, Ukrainian privatization neither welcomed nor interested investors from Western Europe. Instead, it legitimized the transfer of the most attractive segments of the economy into the hands of local and Russian oligarchs. Additionally, the myth, promoted by the national-democrats, of immediate economic prosperity allegedly going hand-in-hand with independence appeared to be one of the principal traps of early post-Soviet Ukrainian development.

It should also be noted that the asymmetries between Poland and Ukraine are not just economic. Ukrainian society is much more diverse than the Polish in its language and religious structure. This diversity in Ukraine is not necessarily regionally defined, and being Russian-speaking, for instance, does not automatically mean that one is ethnically Russian or politically pro-Russian. How can we define this post-Soviet pluralism in
Ukraine and how do we cope with it? Is national homogeneity once again supposed to be a desirable precondition for economic and geopolitical successes?

Furthermore, Russia certainly remains present as a ‘third angle’ in Polish-Ukrainian relations. As Antony Polonsky once put it,

Polish views of the country’s immediate Eastern neighbors – Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and even Belarusians – are conditioned by Polish attitudes to Russia. . . . The relationship between them is conditioned by the Poles’ feeling of inferiority towards the West, which finds some compensation in the fact that Russia is considered even more backward and peripheral than Poland.\textsuperscript{105}

The point of “inferiority towards the West” is of special interest here. In an interview published by the Polish emigré journal \textit{Zeszyty Historyczne} in 1983, Ukrainian-American historian and founder of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, Omeljan Pritsak, being asked on the responsibility for the past failures in Ukrainian-Polish relations, said that both sides were responsible for it, and that both sides were often guided by their “inferiority complex towards the West”.\textsuperscript{106}

For many Ukrainians, post-socialist Poland is their closest \textit{part of the West}, for many Poles, their country is – at best – a \textit{window to the West}. This delicate but crucial difference can be observed in many debates over both countries’ place in new Europe.


\textsuperscript{106} Bohdan Strumiński, “Rozmowa z prof. O. Pricakiem”, \textit{Zeszyty Historyczne} 65, 1983, 3-19, here 12.
On May 1, 2004, the countries of the former ‘Socialist Bloc’ – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as the former Soviet republics Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, joined the European Union. These countries had already become NATO members as well. Right before the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in the autumn of 2004, the EU’s eastern border was redrawn further east. The enlargement of the European Union to the East – sometimes too optimistically called the ‘reunification of Europe’ – left Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine outside of the EU. At the same time, as Tony Judt noted in 1996, the idea of EU expansion on equal terms was promoted during a situation in which the Union was incapable of realistically promising, even to its existing members, a future as secure and as prosperous as its past.\textsuperscript{107} This promise would considerably influence the public mood decade later, when the EU faced a series of challenges.

The economic crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015 contributed profoundly to an anti-liberal, populist-conservative turn in Central Europe. This phenomenon could be conceptualized as a reaction to their humiliating subordination to the Brussels bureaucracy, as a failure of the collective conversion of Poland to Western liberal “normality”, and was deeply rooted in the outflow of people from the region and the resulting fears of losing cultural identity, manifested in a focus on national tradition and victimhood.\textsuperscript{108}

All of these tendencies coincided with the rapidly increasing economic asymmetries between Poland and Ukraine, the mass migration of Ukrainians workers to Poland and the decrease in positive attitudes towards Ukraine and Ukrainians in

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item For the elaboration of this argument, see: Ivan Krastev, Stephen Holmes, \textit{The Light That Failed: A Reckoning}, London: Allen Lane, 2019.
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\end{footnotesize}
Poland and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Asymmetric Memories

Polish society. Still, both in 2004 and in 2014, Polish society showed support to the Ukrainian Orange Revolution (probably seen as process of Ukraine catching-up with the peaceful revolutions of 1989) and to the Ukrainian Euromaidan.

If present-day Poland remains one of the pillars of the anti-liberal turn in Central Europe, the presidential and parliamentary elections of Ukraine in 2019 showed an unprecedented success of political forces that were hardly ideologically defined. President Volodymyr Zelensky and his collaborators consciously avoided historical topics and controversial memory issues in their campaign. Still, the newly appointed Director of the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance willingly speaks about his devotion to liberal values and to dialogue with Poland (but still rejects the definition of the Volhynian massacre as a genocide).

Could this bring reconciliation or, at least, cool down the emotional dimension of victimhood clashes? Could it give us hope for an equal and responsible historical dialogue, keeping in mind that Ukraine is still a country at war and Polish ruling elites still rely on national martyrdom tropes for their political purposes? How will bilateral Polish-Ukrainian relations de-


velop, keeping in mind the context of Russia’s ambitions in its “closest neighborhood”, and the ongoing contest over the meaning of Europe and its future. What could history teach us in this respect? Hans Kohn once put it this way:

History, if studied properly, can help people to sharpen critical insight into human relationships and the nature of personality; it helps people recognize their limits better and therefore makes them humbler; but it also teaches them to see the future as open, full of new development opportunities.111

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**Figures**

Cover image: НИК памятник братска могила 09.

Fig. 1: The territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on the present-day map of Europe. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth_at_its_maximum_extent.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth_at_its_maximum_extent.svg)

Fig. 2: The Ukrainian Five Hryvnias Banknote with Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky (from A. Brusnyi collection).

Fig. 3: Taras Shevchenko on the Ukrainian People’s Republic Stamp (from A. Brusnyi collection).

Fig 4: The Polish Eaglets Cemetery in Lviv. Photo by Tetiana Kabakova.

Fig 5: Map of Poland in 1933. Source: [http://info-poland.icm.edu.pl/classroom/maps/task7.html](http://info-poland.icm.edu.pl/classroom/maps/task7.html)

Fig. 6: The Ukrainian emigrants’ graves on the Warsaw Wola Orthodox Cemetery. Photo by Viktoriia Serhiienko.

Fig. 7: The Volhynian Monument in Warsaw. Photo by Miloš Řezník.

Fig. 8. One of the issues of the Paris based *Kultura* journals edited by Jerzy Giedroyc (from A. Brusnyi collection).
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