

**Victims, Perpetrators and "Our Guys": Interethnic Relations and Mass
Violence in Eastern Galicia, 1939-1945**

by

Yulia Abibok

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Supervisor: Dr. Anastasia Felcher
Second Reader: Prof. Dr. Eva Kovacs

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This research is an initial product of my attempt to look at the history of World War II, the Nazi occupation of Poland, and the Holocaust from a very local and very private perspective. I conducted it in a Ukrainian-Polish borderland, in Eastern Galicia, one of the bloodiest scenes of the period of 1939-1944, in a rural area – the terrain usually overlooked by WWII and Holocaust historians. In this work, I am debating the common approach to analysing events and personal actions of that period according to the ethnicity of the actors. By looking closely at several cases of Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, and Jews, I am demonstrating that the ethnic categories were often either non-existent for the actors or fluid and were often forcefully imposed rather than willingly accepted. The evidence I provide here mainly consists of written testimonies, mostly from the late 1940s, Polish, Ukrainian, Soviet, and Western German investigation and court documents from the same period, and oral interviews I collected in Ukraine and Poland in 2017-2019.

To Halyna, Stefania, and Yosyp Budivsky, Leon Horodysky, Barbara Seidel, and Lilia-Olexandra Shurko without whose unconditional support this work would never happen.

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List of abbreviations

AŻIH – Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego im. Emanuela Ringelbluma
(Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Poland)

DATO - Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Ternopils'koi Oblasti (State Archive of the Ternopil Oblast,
Ukraine)

GARF - Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian
Federation)

IPN - Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Memory, Poland)

JuNSV - Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen
nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen seit 1945

Introduction. Unknown terrain

Not many people in the world have ever heard about the villages or a wider administrative area mentioned here, and it does not matter. This story is not original and had been recreated by different actors everywhere around the former Polish eastern borderland during the World War II years. The entire idea of this research was to dig into the history of the WWII years in a multiethnic community in an area as unknown and historically insignificant as possible to discover, using the words of Giovanni Levi, “many relevant things that take place when nothing seems to be happening.”¹

In this work, I question the way we usually approach local research about war and mass atrocities, and relations among people as representatives of certain groups: for example, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and Germans or victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Under a closer look, identity, or rather belonging, and role may become less definite, more obscure, and constantly changing under changing circumstances. It also appears that belonging and role are often defined by communities rather than persons themselves, and in a situation of mass violence, they may not be chosen but imposed. Some may share them willingly, others oblige, adjust, or rebel. I claim that I study interethnic relations of the World War II era in Eastern Galicia, but in reality, I study individual responses to different forms of collective violence, also those committed by allies one may never choose and enemies one may never define as such. I argue that there was no predefined behaviour based on someone's ethnicity like it is usually presented in academic literature about the Holocaust and Ukrainian-Polish massacres.

This research started from over a decade of occasional conversations in Lviv, the main city of Eastern Galicia when locals shared with me their family stories related to the

¹ Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (University Chicago Press, 1988), XVI.

World War II period, their relatives' participation in or encounters with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya, UPA), the OUN military wing, as well as from several deep interviews with former prominent OUN and UPA participants. What caught my attention was realising that those local civilian stories were more nuanced and sometimes contradictory to the dominant nationwide narrative in Ukraine about the WWII years and actors in the region. Additionally, it seemed that the people telling them to me wanted or needed to share those nuances and were more comfortable sharing them with an outsider like me than with someone local. This is how I started approaching people myself for collecting the oral accounts. The work in the area I chose for asking people led me to archives in Ukraine and Poland, as well as several digital archives. I have come back to the area asking people for additional information and searching local cemeteries, houses, public buildings, memorials, etc. to cross-check, develop, explain, analyze, or refute the information I got from the documents, and vice versa. Those documents included births, marriage, and death registers, testimonies given to investigators in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Germany in the first postwar years, later accounts recorded by researchers, various official registers, references, letters, etc., court decisions, unpublished memoirs and diaries (some of them I got also from private hands), etc. The idea was to collect these various pieces of evidence into a single comprehensive story of the World War II years in Eastern Galicia.

For ages, the Holocaust research, and rather the research on World War II in general, lacked this kind of nuanced multiperspective approach. There have been in particular strong prejudices about the reliability of oral testimonies and any accounts by people who witnessed the war and Holocaust events as children or teenagers.² As a result, until recently, Holocaust

² For further discussion of this issue see, for example, Omer Bartov, "Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, 1941–1944," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz

research still relied predominantly on documents by organizers and perpetrators³, and the certain shift in academia started when many – or rather the majority – of witnesses already passed away. In addition, while there has been a relatively earlier interest in testimonies of Holocaust survivors, non-Jewish witnesses have remained largely ignored: the previous lack of access to them because of the Soviet “iron” borders and widespread suspicion towards foreigners, apparent distrust to what they would testify, their own fear of retribution which is still present in that area are only a few of the reasons of this state of affairs. At the same time, with still numerous locals wanting to speak out⁴, there was usually no one or almost no one to listen and record, which also poses an ethical question to historians and other professionals in the field. This way, the Holocaust researchers unwillingly continued Nazi narratives and approaches, also by silencing their victims, and simply deprived the field of valuable information potentially viable for filling the existing gaps and offering answers to still unanswered questions.

In this work, I am analysing several personal stories of the powiat trembowelski locals which I am trying to compile from different sources like memoirs and diaries, investigation files and court decisions in the Communist Poland, Soviet Union and Western Germany, online databases like those by Yad Vashem or MyHeritage, church records, and oral interviews I collected. All the stories I provided here I cross-checked in different sources when possible; with the most of my interviewees, I met more than once, sometimes for requesting additional information in the light of new documents I found, sometimes for asking to repeat stories they had already told me, and sometimes only for demonstrating seriousness of my attempts to find out what happened in their places, hence, gaining more trust. The next encounters were usually more fruitful than initial conversations.

(Indiana University Press, 2013), 399–420 and Wendy Lower, *The Ravine: A Family, a Photograph, a Holocaust Massacre Revealed* (Mariner Books, 2021).

³ Lower, *The Ravine*.

⁴ Ibid.

I collected 20 oral accounts in the villages of the former Polish powiat trembowelski (former Terebovlya district in today's Ukraine), in the town of Terebovlya (Polish: Trembowla), as well as 7 interviews in several towns and villages and the city of Wroclaw in western Poland where the Trembowla Poles predominantly resettled in 1945 and 1946. Also, I recorded 2 interviews with former local Poles in Terebovlya which some of them as well as their children used to visit regularly until the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Some of them were also my guides in local villages and archives where they were able to tell their stories in connection to certain objects, the natural environment, and people or graves of people they knew. I conducted this part of my research in 2017-2019, mainly with the help of numerous locals and former locals and their descendants who told me their stories and shared the documents, facilitated access to other people and documents, pointed to significant places and objects, and guided me to them, provided me with accommodation and shared with me their food, knowledge, thoughts, and memories.

Eastern Galicia: A brief historical review

The region of Eastern Galicia was an area of contest between two large Slavic groups, western Slavic Catholic Poles and eastern Slavic Orthodox Ukrainians (Ruthenians) since the High Middle Ages. The oldest cities of the region, like Lviv (Lvov, Lwów), Terebovlya (Trembowla), or Galych (the later gave the name to the region), were founded by representatives of the dynasty ruling the medieval feudal state with the capital in Kiev (today: Kyiv), known historically as Kievan Rus or Ancient Rus.⁵ As the state ceased to exist as the result of the Tatar invasion of the XIII century, its most western edge, its principality of Galicia and Volhynia remained among the few able to continue – with limited success –

⁵ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 32-34.

resistance to the Golden Horde by making and breaking alliances with Poland and other western powers.⁶ In the XIV century, the principality was conquered and partitioned by the Great Principality of Lithuania and the Polish Kingdom. In 1569, the Great Principality of Lithuania and the Polish Kingdom united into a federal Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth incorporating the former western lands of Rus.⁷ In 1596, the local Orthodox parishes were subjected to the Pope under the legal act called Unia of Brest which allowed the parishes to preserve the Orthodox ritual and its own administrative structures.⁸ Despite the initial local resistance to the Unia, in the area of former Rus under the rule of the Commonwealth, the new Greek-Catholic church which was created as the result, for centuries since then, became the single legal body of a stateless religious and ethnic community later known as Ukrainians, nourishing their language, culture – and the sense of "otherness."⁹

The migration of Ashkenazi Jews eastward from to Rus and Poland was partly driven by European trade, partly became the result of expulsions from the western European lands where they primarily settled, and partly stimulated by privileges by Polish kings and nobility allowing or offering the Jews certain tasks and jobs like banking, tax collection or alcohol trade.¹⁰ As expulsions and entry bans for Jews in western and central Europe continued, as the Jewish population in Poland grew rapidly, forcing either further migration or impoverishment, and as the Polish Kingdom and then Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth consolidated its rule in its eastern edge in Galicia and Volhynia, also by providing land ownership to Polish nobility, Polish Jews followed eastward to perform jobs for the king or being invited to administer or lease the new manors and estates.¹¹ From the very beginning,

⁶ Subtelny, *Ukraine*, 55-65.

⁷ Subtelny, *Ukraine*, 69-80.

⁸ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 99-102.

⁹ John-Paul Himka, *Religion and Nationality in Western Ukraine: The Greek Catholic Church and the Ruthenian National Movement in Galicia, 1867-1900* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 5-13.

¹⁰ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia. Vol.1: 1350 to 1881* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 9-14, 96-99.

¹¹ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland*, 14-17, 35, 99-101.

this created tensions between them and the local population with Jews being obvious and easy targets of virtually any of the frequent dissents in the area.¹² The cultural and occupational differences, which partly survived the fall of the Commonwealth and remained under the Habsburg monarchy, but mostly stayed and were developed as stereotypes, preserved also the societal, economic, and political gaps between Jews and local Christians up until World War II.

In the late XVIII century, the weakened Commonwealth was partitioned by Prussia and the Habsburg and Romanov monarchies. This way, both the Austro-Hungarian and, especially, Russian empires got a big share of the Jewish population and took more or less successful steps of integrating or even assimilating it. In Eastern Galicia, however, one of the most distant – and most backward – provinces of the Habsburgs, the effort had a weaker impact, with many Jews – as well as Ukrainians and Poles – remaining poor, uneducated, and stuck in their local communities, with life conditions deteriorating amid rapid population growth in the XIX century. One of the results of this situation was a mass migration from the region. Another was the rise of tensions as the competition for resources and jobs had been increasingly high.¹³

Still peaceful coexistence in Eastern Galicia was interrupted by World War I and the resulting local clashes. Unlike the Russian empire where antisemitism was a part of state ideology, the Habsburg empire did not witness anti-Jewish pogroms. The first acts of mass violence against Jews in the region occurred in 1914 and 1915 when it was taken by the Russian forces which perpetrated and deliberately inspired and encouraged violent attacks against the local Jews and Jewish communities and looting of Jewish property.¹⁴ After World War I, the widespread perception of Jews as unreliable citizens and spies contributed to the

¹² Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland*, 29-30, 35-38.

¹³ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland*, 248-272.

¹⁴ Alexander V. Prusin, "A 'Zone of Violence': The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Eastern Galicia in 1914–1915 and 1941," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 367-370.

will of states which emerged after the fall of the Habsburg empire to get rid of them.

Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc., dissatisfied with their new borders and populations living within them, came up with similar policies of either assimilating or forcing to migrate the minorities which populated their border regions.¹⁵

In the Russian empire, two subsequent revolutions of 1917 preceded the end of World War I, followed by a civil war and a number of territorial conflicts with neighboring countries. In the area of today's Ukraine, in the part which previously belonged to the Russian empire, local intellectuals attempted to establish first an autonomous and then an independent state and to merge it with western territories, including Eastern Galicia, where another republic was proclaimed as a local successor of the late Austro-Hungarian empire. Neither Ukrainian socialists and national democrats, nor Bolsheviks, nor local political and military leaders and their formations, however, did not manage to recapture control of the westernmost territories populated by Ukrainians from the other Habsburgs' successors in Eastern Europe, so the Eastern Galicia, as well as Volhynia, ended up within the Second Polish Republic established in 1918.¹⁶

¹⁵ John Torpey: *The Invention of the Passport. Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 156-157.

¹⁶ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 356-370.



Polish section of a Christian cemetery, graves of 1918-1919 combatants, in the village of Strusiv, Ternopil region, Ukraine, 2018.

Not only the governments of the new Eastern European republics were unsatisfied with their borders and populations living there applying policies of forced assimilation of minorities or forcing them to emigrate. For some minorities, such as Ukrainians in Poland, which constituted the majority in Eastern Galicia, the outcome of World War I was humiliating. What differed these postwar tensions from any previous aftermath of the wars in Europe was a bigger share of the population being conscious of issues of ethnicity, class, and social justice, having knowledge and experience of political organization and participation, in addition to military experience and access to weapons. So, when the Polish state escalated its discriminatory minority policy and colonization moves in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, the radical part of local Ukrainians formed an organization of underground resistance (the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, OUN, was established in 1929) and resorted to

terrorism, against Polish officials but also local Ukrainians serving to the II Rzeczpospolita Polska. The governmental reaction was violent police raids on Ukrainian villages known as Pacification, in the early 1930s. Instead of pacifying, however, it only instigated anti-Polish sentiment among local Ukrainians.¹⁷

Like Ukrainians, in the interwar period, Jews in Galicia experienced hostility and discrimination from the Polish government, the Catholic Church, and – frequently – verbal and physical attacks and plots (like boycotts of Jewish businesses) from their Polish colleagues, competitors, and peers at schools and universities.¹⁸ World War I and the later developments accelerated also the emancipation and political and social wakeup of Galician Jews with Jewish political parties, organizations, especially youth organizations, and enterprises popping up and flourishing in the interwar Eastern Galicia.¹⁹ The realities of the Second Polish Republic made more Galician Jews supporters of either Zionist or Socialist and Communist ideas.²⁰

Not surprisingly, when Nazi Germany and then the Soviet Union attacked Poland in September 1939, there were not many in its eastern borderland willing to defend it or even feel sorry. Amid the chaos of those days, with Poles (first of all, from the military) being arrested and deported en masse in Eastern Galicia, Ukrainians and Jews mostly either celebrated the Soviet annexation of the region or watched it indifferently. Indeed, in the beginning, actions of new authorities like the confiscation of local property of Polish nobility and the Catholic Church on behalf of peasants and waiving the restricting for Ukrainians Jews from entering universities, justified this attitude.²¹ Later, however, when the new regime

¹⁷ John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941–1944* (ibidem Press, 2021), 122-138; Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 365-366.

¹⁸ Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 366.

¹⁹ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia. Vol.2:1881 to 1914* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 131-140.

²⁰ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia. Vol.2*, 92-94.

²¹ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 174, 184-194; Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 370.

proceeded with confiscations, arrests, and deportations, targeting already Ukrainians and Jews besides Poles, the moods partly changed, with many Galician locals turning against the Soviets.²² These moods were instrumentalized and deliberately fuelled in 1941 when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and caught it unprepared for a big war, forcing the Soviet authorities and armed forces to flee the region already in June 1941, the first days after the invasion. While retreating, the Soviets left thousands of dead bodies of political prisoners, mostly Ukrainian (but also Polish and Jewish)²³, in local prisons: the act which the Nazis and their Ukrainian allies from the OUN used for anti-Communist and antisemitic propaganda pointing to Jews as Communists or sole local Communist supporters and collaborators.²⁴



Ruins of a synagogue in Strusiv, 2018. By the Nazi invasion in mid-1941, 435 Jews lived there together with 863 Ukrainians and 971 Poles.²⁵

²² Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 371.

²³ John-Paul Himka, Ethnicity and the Reporting of Mass Murder: *Krakivs'ki visti*, the NKVD Murders of 1941, and the Vinnytsia Exhumation, in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 385.

²⁴ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 194-197, 199-208; Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 372-373.

²⁵ DATO, 176-1-17, p. 17

The leadership of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists relied on Germans as guarantors of the establishment of a Ukrainian nation-state. On June 30, 1941, several days after the Nazi invasion of the USSR, they proclaimed in Lviv the Act of Restoration of Ukrainian Statehood. From their side, they offered the Nazis their military hand: the Nachtigal battalion (Battalion Ukrainische Gruppe Nachtigal) of OUN men created and trained in Germany in anticipation of the attack on the USSR, joined the fight against the Soviets in Ukraine also in late June.²⁶

Additionally, the Nazi-established Ukrainian militia units, dominated by the OUN, emerged throughout the region. The militia in the region, and then the Ukrainian auxiliary police which replaced them, became notorious for their participation in the extermination of Jews locally throughout the Nazi-occupied territories, as guards in ghettos and camps as well as perpetrators of mass shootings or separate killings which were often preceded by humiliation, robbing, beating, and raping the victims.²⁷ But the police also participated in actions against local Ukrainians and Poles like searching for prohibited items, controlling the peasants not butcher their own livestock to consume the meat as it was proclaimed the property of the German Reich, and ensuring that they delivered the assigned amount of the "contingent," a food tax introduced by the Nazis. They were also among those responsible for supplying forced laborers from the local population, young men and women, to Germany.²⁸ The difference between former and latter, however, was that the Nazis took efforts to purge people connected to the OUN, from the auxiliary police.²⁹

The independent Ukrainian state was not among the Nazi plans for this area. Soon after the proclamation in Lviv, the Nazis took actions against the prominent OUN members

²⁶ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 208.

²⁷ Gabriel Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, "Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian police and the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 2 (December 2004): 95–118.

²⁸ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 314–315.

²⁹ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 307–308.

like arresting the leaders, Stepan Bandera and Andriy Melnyk.³⁰ It did not stop, however, the OUN from pursuing their goals of establishing an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, meaning making it free from Jews and Poles. In 1943, they launched mass attacks against the Polish population in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia terrorizing Poles so they either left the area or were killed.³¹ In Volhynia, where the share of the Polish colonists from the interwar period was much bigger than in Eastern Galicia,³² where almost all the local Poles lived for centuries, the ethnic purges were especially big-scale and cruel, with entire villages eliminated and not even babies being spared. Like in the extermination of Jews, local peasants often participated in purges by killing Poles and looting Polish property.³³ In Eastern Galicia, the Polish men were primary targets, especially after they attempted to create their own units of self-defense and found allies among the Soviet partisans active in the area. Anti-Polish raids of Ukrainian nationalists in the Galician villages were followed by Polish actions of retaliation against Ukrainians suspected of being or cooperating with OUN members, and vice versa. At the same time, OUN targeted also those Ukrainians who they perceived as traitors: not cooperative enough, actively supportive to Jews, Poles, and Soviets.

The territory of the Nazi-occupied Eastern Galicia was covered by a thick network of Jewish ghettos and labor and concentration camps (the latter mostly for prisoners of war). Part of the Jews gathered in ghettos were usually sent to work in the labor camps nearby and killed or left to die from hunger and exhaustion there. There had also been frequent transportation to the Belzec death camp. The majority, however, were killed locally, by mass shootings in nearby ravines turned mass graves.³⁴ Those who initially managed to flee were haunted by the Nazis, their auxiliary police, the OUN, and local gentile townspeople and

³⁰ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 209.

³¹ Grzegorz Motyka, *From the Volhynian Massacre to Operation Vistula: The Polish-Ukrainian Conflict 1943-1947* (Brill Schöningh, 2022).

³² Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 125-126.

³³ Motyka, *From the Volhynian Massacre*.

³⁴ Lower, *The Ravine*.

peasants who either reported the hiding places or even killed hiding Jews themselves. It also happened that some Ukrainians and Poles were hiding Jews for reward and forced them out or killed as soon as they became unable to pay.³⁵ However, there were also numerous gentiles hiding Jews in their homes and yards or delivering them food in hiding places in forests, providing them with fake documents, transferring them to safer places, etc., no matter the grave danger to their entire families in case of being caught by Nazis, their auxiliary police, the OUN, or even their own neighbors or relatives who could report them.³⁶

In Eastern Galicia, like everywhere in occupied Ukraine, attacks by underground fighters on Germans, either from the occupying forces and occupational administration or local Volksdeutsche, by OUN, or by Soviet partisans led to Nazi retaliation on dozens of occasional local men. The situation of common distrust and widespread violence with peaceful civilians caught in between the various fighting forces, all demanding their loyalty, assistance, participation on their side, and non-participation on the side of other forces, left an enormous amount of Eastern Galician civilians, especially young Ukrainian men, totally compromised and endangered. Unwilling to be transferred for forced labor in Germany, many young locals went into hiding with Ukrainians sometimes preferring to join OUN fighters in forests instead. In the first days of the returning Soviet regime in Eastern Galicia, the Soviet authorities started arresting some of the locals who stayed or came back home from hiding as suspected Nazi collaborators, and mobilizing the others to the Soviet army to continue its march to Germany and then to Japan. In parallel, local Poles were able to join the Polish army created in the USSR in 1944. Facing this variety of terrible fate, by the time when the Soviet army approached Eastern Galicia, or soon after, many of those young men either left

³⁵ Omer Bartov, "Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, 1941–1944," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 399–420.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the area with retreating Germans or joined the Ukrainian nationalist underground, without necessarily ever sharing ideas of its leadership.

The targeted OUN attacks against Jews and Poles continued after the Soviet army recaptured Eastern Galicia in late 1944, even after the OUN leadership decided that the remaining Jewish population in the area was already too small to pose any threat to the idea of the future ethnically pure Ukrainian state.³⁷ The local Poles, who still tried to resist the attacks by joining the fighting detachments ("Istrebitelnyie bataliony"), called by locals "yastrubky" or "strybky", established by Soviets for locals willing to help them to restore the order in the area, soon realized that the new Soviet administration lacked either force or will to protect them from the OUN attacks.³⁸ The new Soviet officials as well as other representatives of the new regime, like school teachers, newcomers and locals alike, also became the targets of the Ukrainian underground fighters. By the end of 1945, taking the chance provided by the USSR and Soviet-controlled Poland to them as the former Polish citizens of non-Ukrainian origin to leave the Soviet-annexed Eastern Galicia for Poland, almost all local Jewish survivors and Poles left the region.

World War II and Holocaust research regarding the area

In his famous book *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, Timothy Snider positioned Poles and Ukrainians (among other eastern Europeans) of the 1930s and 1940s as almost entirely passive or defenseless victims of two similar totalitarian regimes. As he stressed in the introduction:

³⁷ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 413-420.

³⁸ Wojciech Pleszczak, "Ludzie Jednej Polskiej Wsi Podola" (a memoir, Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, Archiwum Wschodnie, PL_1001_AW_II_1906), Jerzy Beski, *Moje Podole, 1930-1945* (Opole: Wydawnictwo NOWIK Sp.j., 2010).

The bloodlands were where most of Europe's Jews lived, where Hitler and Stalin's imperial plans overlapped, where the Wehrmacht and the Red Army fought, and where the Soviet NKVD and the German SS concentrated their forces. Most killing sites were in the bloodlands: in the political geography of the 1930s and early 1940s, this meant Poland, the Baltic States, Soviet Belarus, Soviet Ukraine, and the western fringe of Soviet Russia. Stalin's crimes are often associated with Russia, and Hitler's with Germany. But the deadliest part of the Soviet Union was its non-Russian periphery, and Nazis generally killed beyond Germany. The horror of the twentieth century is thought to be located in the camps. But the concentration camps are not where most of the victims of National Socialism and Stalinism died. These misunderstandings regarding the sites and methods of mass killing prevent us from perceiving the horror of the twentieth century.³⁹

The idea gained popularity among political and intellectual elites as well as wider audiences of two countries still struggling to deal with the Soviet legacy and modern Russian attempts to mobilize the same legacy on behalf of the current regime in Moscow and against its rivals. At the same time, it caused criticism in academic circles for – among other issues – offering a rather too schematic and simplified view of "the horror of the twentieth century" in the "bloodlands," virtually denying their locals any agency.⁴⁰

I see, however, this criticism as not entirely just. Snyder's goal was to offer a wider panorama of more than a decade in a vast area of two continents: the very idea does not suggest a possibility to go into details. As Snyder's critics have also pinpointed, for lessening the scale, a smaller area is needed for analysis, like Eastern Galicia, which is usually researched separately, as a rule, within a concept of a borderland, due to its distinctive historical and cultural profile. The borderland means a mix of ethnicities and cultures, which suggest high volatility and inflammability, questionable loyalties, an area where freedom of those living far from the centers of power coexists with omnipresent symbolic and physical restrictions and violence. As Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz claim, in a borderland, "diverse

³⁹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010), XI-XIII.

⁴⁰ Omer Bartov, review of *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, by Timothy Snyder, *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (summer 2011): 424-428.

populations learn how to live with one another, but they may also come to perceive the other as essentially different and naturally hostile. In the borderlands, groups become both objects and generators of intense violence”⁴¹. But no one would deny that violence in Eastern Galicia was triggered by two world wars and specific policies and actions of the two biggest European dictators of the XX century about which Snyder wrote.

Bartov’s research does not lack its own core flaw. While he insisted on the senselessness of attempts to look at the people caught by the Nazi occupation and Holocaust as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders,⁴² he stopped short of recognising the same problem with categorisation based on ethnicities. Insisting on the agency of local populations of the Nazi-occupied territories, and on the possibility of choice of behavior even amid dictatorship, war, and genocide, Bartov stated, for example, that

Generalizing statements by witnesses on the conduct of entire ethnic groups tend to conform to conventional views, which are in part reflected in the overall course of events. Yet the same witnesses often cite specific cases of individual actions that belie the generalizations and, not least, were vital to the witnesses’ own survival. Such instances of untypical but crucial behavior provide a corrective to widespread prejudices and undermine deterministic views of the past by introducing an element of choice.⁴³

Pointing to “untypical” behavior, he made clear that he believed in typical behavior. Among the examples he provided were those from an account by Yitzhak Bauer, a Holocaust survivor from Buczacz (Buchach) whom Bartov interviewed. According to Bartov, Bauer told him that among those hiding Jews in the town was a Ukrainian priest who was also the father of “the chief of the local militia” (who did know about his father hiding Jews and did not take any measures against them) and Bauer’s Ukrainian friend who at one point had to

⁴¹ Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, “Introduction. Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 2.

⁴² Omer Bartov, “Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, 1941–1944,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 403.

⁴³ Bartov, “Communal Genocide,” 415.

join the Nazi-established police in the town in order to avoid transfer to Germany for forced labor and whose house was subsequently burned when it was discovered that the man was hiding Jews.⁴⁴ At the same time, Bartov continued to write about “Ukrainians” (which became largely synonymous to “perpetrators”) behaving in a way he apparently considered “typical.”

Bartov has been far from being alone in this respect. Researchers of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland have usually referred to the locals as “Ukrainians,” “Poles,” and “Jews.” Local Germans are rather a non-existent category in this respect though Bartov has mentioned them, as well as soldiers and officials from Nazi Germany, among those demonstrating “untypical” behavior by protecting and saving Jews.⁴⁵ According to Bartov,

compassion by Germans, perhaps precisely because of their local omnipotence, appears in such accounts as the strongest evidence for the possibility of choice and the potential for goodness even in the midst of genocide. Choice constitutes the moral core of any discussion of mass murder; it also retains an underlying psychological dimension for those directly impacted by such events and for later generations. Evidence of choice threatened to expose and shame those whose alibi for complicity was the alleged lack of an alternative.⁴⁶

In this case, Bartov referred mostly to the episodes of 1944 when it was already clear that Germany is losing the war, and he still wrote about the people who were in the dominant positions in the area, who had no reasons to fear retribution for saving Jews neither from OUN nor from their own neighbors unless someone wanted to cause mass and indiscriminate Nazi retribution against local Ukrainians for a violent death of a Volksdeutsch. In other words, the choice of a German in the Nazi-occupied area is barely comparable to options available to a Ukrainian, Pole, or anyone else.

⁴⁴ Bartov, “Communal Genocide,” 412.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bartov, “Communal Genocide,” 409.

Participation of local Poles in the Holocaust in Eastern Galicia, also mentioned by Bartov on a number of occasions, has never been in the spotlight, however,⁴⁷ neither separately nor as a “typical” behavior by non-Jews or “Christians” towards Jews as many Poles themselves fell victims of attacks by the OUN, no matter that it had happened in 1943–1945 when local Jewish communities were already destroyed with locals collaborating or restraining from any actions of protection of Jews. In general, research on Eastern Galicia under the Nazi occupation has mostly focused on Holocaust and Ukrainian collaboration, usually referencing the Ukrainian police and the OUN simply as “Ukrainians.” Finder and Prusin went in some respect even further claiming that

To be sure, the anti-Jewish violence performed by members of the Ukrainian auxiliary police force were the acts of individuals, whose motivations and emotional states are elusive if not irrecoverable, but these hateful acts were constitutive components of the architecture of Ukrainian collective identity in eastern Galicia. [...] Although the majority of Ukrainians passively acquiesced in the German occupation while a minority of Ukrainians helped Jews during the Holocaust, emerging Ukrainian society in eastern Galicia came to look increasingly like a simulacrum of Nazi society, for the cumulative dynamic of this emerging society, like that of Nazi society, was to divide the world unwaveringly into friends and enemies, to prey on these enemies, and to redistribute social capital through violence.⁴⁸

Local civilian dissent, also regarding the Holocaust, has never been properly researched because not only the already traditional emphasis on collaborators and direct perpetrators in academia but also because these actions were hidden and remained unreported with not many survivors to tell on them after all and the lack of evidence from non-Jews because of the fear of Soviet authorities and even their own neighbors as well as over 40 years of the Iron Curtain. But even putting aside problematic generalisations and statements about “majority” and “minority”, I suggest that Finder and Prusin either did not notice or

⁴⁷ Unlike in regard to the rest of Poland, after the pioneering book by Jan-Tomasz Gross, *Neighbours. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Penguin Books, 2002).

⁴⁸ Gabriel Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, “Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian police and the Holocaust,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 2 (December 2004): 112.

preferred to ignore another vivid parallel leading us somehow back to the Snyder's idea. An episode with a Jewish boy who fled from a camp and was sitting, lost and scared, in a park in Lviv, and whom local Ukrainians (one could wonder how the authors knew that those were Ukrainians but not Poles or Ukrainians and Poles) having rest there reported to a German officer,⁴⁹ is quite reminiscent to widespread actions of the Soviet population during Stalin's Great Terror of the 1930s with millions of denunciations on innocent people, usually those who the denouncers knew personally as, for example, colleagues, and even friends and relatives. Apparently, this is how a certain share of civilians under dictatorship and occupation, exposed to massive propaganda, behave towards proclaimed "enemies," no matter of ethnicity and very particular circumstances.

To make it clear: I am not going to deny numerous mass and individual crimes committed by Ukrainian police units and the OUN and by individual members of the Ukrainian police and OUN in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. Neither do I deny that these actions were followed by atrocities committed by common civilians as the violence, especially violence against Jews, had been promoted by the Nazi occupiers. That demonstrative violence, I suggest, led to widespread attempts at rationalization by onlookers searching for – and inventing – crimes that would explain such a severe punishment. If the victims of violence would be not people of a certain ethnicity but, for example, people of a certain class, as we saw from the example of the pre-WWII USSR, I believe, the result would be, in general, the same. For the majority of Ukrainians and Poles, belonging to these particular categories might play only the role of ensuring them the security of being non-Jews, as Prusin also suggested.⁵⁰ Later, however, this appeal to take sides for the sake of protection from violence – and remorse – might drag a Pole, but especially a Ukrainian in

⁴⁹ Gabriel Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, "Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian police and the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 2 (December 2004): 110-111.

⁵⁰ Alexander V. Prusin, "A 'Zone of Violence': The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Eastern Galicia in 1914–1915 and 1941," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013), 374.

Eastern Galicia into further conflicts and crimes of others, imposing on them dangerous and criminal obligations which led many to either more controversial enterprises, further moral degradation or violent death.

From the scholarly literature on the topic of Ukrainian collaboration and “interethnic violence” in Eastern Galicia, one could draw the conclusion that the single or primary reason for joining the local police units established by the Nazi administration was the ethnic hatred, the realization of Ukrainian nationalistic inspiration by committing the ethnic cleansing, and gaining a kind of military training. The facts that the police was notoriously corrupt or that, unlike OUN, it “included elements that would probably not have attained a position of power in Ukrainian society in normal times”⁵¹ and “was recruited mainly from among the rabble and criminals”⁵² have been usually omitted, as well as the fact that the police staff changed over time with its initial members being recruited from young villagers who found it more prestigious and romantic to wear uniform and weapon, and exercise power, instead of working as semi-slaves on the land.⁵³ Later, among those joining were also young men who saw this employment as a way to avoid forced labor in Germany. In addition, all time, the service in the police offered relatively high salaries, additional social benefits, and overall higher protection of policemen and their families; it was not an ethnic phenomenon in the District Galizien with its Polish and even Jewish police units, all sharing the same or similar reputation, as John Paul Himka, and also Bartov and Finder and Prusin showed (unlike Himka, without drawing further conclusions)⁵⁴. Right after the Soviets pushed the Nazis out of the region, numerous young local Poles recreated this pattern by joining the Soviet-established paramilitary fighting detachments, for getting weapons to protect themselves

⁵¹ John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941–1944* (ibidem Press, 2021), 320.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 221, 316.

⁵⁴ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 314–317; Bartov, “Communal Genocide,” 4124 Prusin, “A “Zone of Violence,” 374.

from attacks by the Ukrainian nationalist underground (and numerous local criminal gangs which emerged amid the chaos of the latest months of the Nazi occupation and activation of partisan warfare in the area), but also for getting salaries and rations.⁵⁵

In the literature connecting the Ukrainian collaboration and Holocaust in Eastern Galicia (and elsewhere in Ukraine), the Ukrainian police have been usually mentioned together with the OUN as similar or even generally the same force. But, apart from antisemitism being popular among people in both formations and the Nazi support both of them enjoyed at the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, there had little in common. The unauthorized proclamation of Ukrainian statehood by the OUN leaders on June 30, 1941, led not only to Nazi repressions against them but also to attempts to clean current or even past OUN members from the police and ban them to enter the police units.⁵⁶ The police actions, also against Jews, at certain point led to condemnation even from the Ukrainian nationalists, if not because of compassion than for the sake of the reputation of the Ukrainian independence movement, internally and, apparently most importantly to them, abroad.⁵⁷ When the Soviet forces were close to reconquering Eastern Galicia and some of the police members or former police members started to look for refuge in the forests in the ranks of UPA, some found themselves unwanted; there were also cases of the UPA killing members of the police.⁵⁸ However, as Himka concluded, in the same period of 1944–1945, as well as at the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the OUN, indeed, incited and participated in atrocities against Jews and committed individual killings of Jews in the region, even of those in their own ranks – for the reasons purely ideological.⁵⁹ The OUN was also killing Jews while committing massacres of Poles when the former and the latter joined forces to resist

⁵⁵ Jerzy Beski, *Moje Podole, 1930-1945* (Opole: Wydawnictwo NOWIK Sp.j., 2010).

⁵⁶ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 306-308.

⁵⁷ Gabriel Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, "Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian police and the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 2 (December 2004): 107.

⁵⁸ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 354.

⁵⁹ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*.

ethnic cleansing by the OUN.⁶⁰ But the picture of the 1941–1944 terror in Eastern Galicia would not be complete if not to mention that the OUN had killed or punished somehow else also numerous Ukrainians apart from those who belonged to the police: Communist sympathizers and collaborators or assumed sympathizers and collaborators, those hiding Jews and Poles, those not cooperative enough, etc.

Finally, the literature about the Holocaust and even World War II in specific localities is focused almost exclusively on cities and towns. A village is usually overlooked because only a few Jews were living in villages and all of them were taken to ghettos and camps somewhere soon after the beginning of the Nazi occupation. This may explain why in the scholarly literature about war, occupation, and the Holocaust, peasants have been mentioned only episodically, usually, as an additional category of perpetrators killing those who tried to flee executions, or as a source base of food or of forces for paramilitary groups. In my research, villages are, on the contrary, in the spotlight.

Trembowla/Terebovlya

There are significant scholarly research works on the places in the Ternopil region (województwo tarnopolskie) in Eastern Galicia, first of all, the works of Omer Bartov on Buczacz⁶¹ and Shimon Redlich on Brzezany⁶² (Ukrainian: Berezhany) but still nothing on Trembowla. There are, however, a number of published personal accounts and memoirs – which I use in this work – about life in the powiat trembowelski in the interwar and war periods, like the volume with stories Terebovlya Land in *Recollections of Emigrants*

⁶⁰ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 393.

⁶¹ Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (Simon & Schuster, 2018).

⁶² Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945* (Indiana University Press, 2002).

(Ukrainian: "Теребовлянщина в спогадах емігрантів")⁶³; several books of stories by Barbara Seidel, a daughter of a Trembowla Polish local, collected from other Poles from Trembowla and the powiat⁶⁴; the already cited memoir book by another Pole, Jerzy Bieski, who witnessed the World War II and Holocaust in Trembowla as a teenager⁶⁵; memoirs by Holocaust survivor Ludwika Steinfeld, also from Trembowla⁶⁶; Trembowla and Budzanów (another town in the district) Memory Books with stories by Holocaust survivors⁶⁷. The Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church Yosyf Slipy, possibly, the most famous Ukrainian born in that area, mentioned it in his memoirs⁶⁸ but did not touch the war period there as he himself left his village many years before the war (however, his numerous relatives were still living there and in neighbouring villages and towns during the war years). Soma (Solomon) Morgenshtern, a famous Jewish Austrian writer who grew up in Budzanów (Ukrainian: Budaniv), published memoirs about his childhood years⁶⁹, also touching on the issue of relations of local Jews with Poles and Ukrainians, but the period he described was before the World War I. Vasyl Kubiv, a former OUN member, wrote a fictionalised but quite critical account of his experiences of 1939-1945 in the area,⁷⁰ pointing and shedding some light also to several cases I encountered in oral accounts and documents. There have also been several books by local historians in Terebovlya touching on the war years in their district.

⁶³ *Terebovlianshchyna v Spohadakh Emihrantiv, kn. 1*, ed. B. Melnychuk, H. Mykolaichenko, H. Tsubera (Ternopil: Knyzhkovo-zhurnalne vydavnytstvo "Ternopil", 1993).

⁶⁴ Barbara Seidel, *Opowieści spod Trembowli* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Beta-Druk, 2017), and *Trembowla: Część II. Historie Ludzkie i Nieludzkie* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Beta-Druk, 2018).

⁶⁵ Jerzy Beski, *Moje Podole, 1930-1945* (Opole: Wydawnictwo NOWIK Sp.j., 2010).

⁶⁶ Ludwika Steinfeld, *Żydzi i Ludzie* (Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo Książkowe IBiS, 2001).

⁶⁷ *Jewish Communities of Trembowla, Strusów, Janów and Vicinity* (Bnai Brak, Trembowla Society, 1981), <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/terebovlya/Terebovlya.html>; *Sefer Budzanow*, ed. Yitshak Zigelman (The New York Public Library – National Yiddish Book Center. Yizkor Book Project, 1968).

⁶⁸ Yosyf Slipyi, *Spomyny*, ed. Ivan Datsko, Mariia Horiacha. (Lviv–Rome: Vydavnytstvo UKU, 2014).

⁶⁹ Soma Morgenstern, *V Inshi Chasy. Yuni Lita u Skhidnii Halychyni* (Chernivtsi: Knyhy – XXI, 2019).

⁷⁰ Vasyl Kubiv, *Dorohy i doli: Narys* (Lviv: Avtograf, 2008).

The area of the former Terebovlya district mostly overlaps with the borders of the Polish powiat trembowelski. (The borders of districts in Ukraine were changed in 2020 as the result of the administrative reforms under which united rural and urban communities and larger districts appeared instead of numerous depopulated towns and villages in the smaller districts created during Soviet rule.) The territory of the former powiat/district is close to the regional centre, Ternopil (Polish: Tarnopol) in the north. In the south, the biggest towns it neighbours are Buchach and Chortkiv (Polish: Czortków). It also neighbours Berezhany in the west and Husiatyn and Sataniv (Polish: Satanów) in the southeast and east. Husiatyn is divided by the Zbruch river which had served as a border between the Habsburg and Russian empires from the late XVIII century until 1918 and between Poland and the Soviet Union until 1939. Sataniv is right behind the river on the "Russian" side. Until 1942, all these towns used to have large shares of the Jewish population.

There were Polish, Ukrainian and traditional Jewish schools in the district. In the interwar period, each village or several neighbouring villages had primary schools where children studied for three years. Usually, in the villages, children studied for up to five years as their families needed them to work in the households. Those willing and able to continue their education went to gymnasiums in Trembowla or any closer powiat centres. For university education, children might move mostly to Lviv, Prague, or elsewhere. In the interwar period, there were strict quotas for non-Polish students so many Ukrainians and Jews studied abroad.⁷¹ The number of schools providing education in the Ukrainian language also decreased significantly in those years due to Polish state policy towards minorities.⁷²

In the powiat trembowelski, however, Ukrainians constituted a majority. In 1941, at the time of the German invasion, 77.260 people officially lived in the powiat and the town of Mikulińce (Ukrainian: Mykulyntsi) near Trembowla which did not belong to the powiat at

⁷¹ Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists*, 132.

⁷² Prusin, "A "Zone of Violence", 365-366.

that time.⁷³ Almost 45.000 of them were Ukrainian, about 25.500 were Polish, and over 5.500 were Jewish.⁷⁴ Jews constituted the majority in Mikulińce and a sizable share of the population of Budzanów, the neighbouring Janów (Janiv, today – Dolyna), Strusów (Strusiv), and Trembowla.⁷⁵ There were also 55 Germans in the powiat, mainly in a predominantly Polish village called Tyczyn Nowy (Ukrainian: Novyi Tychyn); besides other places, there were also nine Germans in a mostly Ukrainian village called Semenów (Ukrainian: Semeniv) near Trembowla.⁷⁶ We will talk about this exact place and family in another chapter.

Unlike the rest of Eastern Galicia, covered mostly by forests and mountains, part of the former powiat trembowelski is situated on a large steppe called Pantalicha (Ukrainian: Pantalykha). There are no mountains in the area but high hills and rocks, some of them steep, called "stinka" ("little wall"). The main economic profile in the powiat was agriculture and stone-pitting. The biggest landowners in the area for centuries were those from the Polish nobility. Forests also had predominantly Polish owners. There were, however, also Ukrainians and Jews owning forests and large pieces of land.⁷⁷ The common practice in the period from the late XIX century until the late 1930s was labour migration, predominantly to the United States or Canada, for earning enough to buy land or open enterprises in the towns. For example, Jerzy Biesky's father, who, like many, learned tailoring from a Jewish craftsman in the powiat, then travelled to Chicago to continue learning the craft and make money from it. He came back to Trembowla after several years in the US, built a house there, and opened a tailor's shop in the house where he sewed and sold men's suits.⁷⁸

⁷³ DATO, 176-1-17, p. 17; DATO, 176-1-17, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ DATO, 176-1-17, p. 17.

⁷⁶ DATO, 176-1-17, p. 17

⁷⁷ Wojciech Pleszczak, "Ludzie Jednej Polskiej Wsi Podola" (a memoir, Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, Archiwum Wschodnie, PL_1001_AW_II_1906).

⁷⁸ Jerzy Beski, *Moje Podole, 1930-1945* (Opole: Wydawnictwo NOWIK Sp.j., 2010).

Число погреб. Nrus posit.	Мѣсяца Mensis	Nomen	Имя и прозвище NOMEN et CONDITIO	Имя и прозвище Nomen et conditio
			Отца Patris	Матери Matris
4	22 22 422	Agrippina	(Агнес) Joannes Gzicki Maria filia Lionis et Leonae Onufrii Psimistich Nowosad. et Annae Terkacz	Tecla Psimistich Joannis Theodorus Parake
Januarii	1917	Obstetrix: Parascevia Katyzyn	agricolae loci	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
5	23.23 333	Anna	Andreas Stachowicz Tecla filia Johannis Maximi et Anasta Pitekowicz et Mariae siae Koprits. Kopestynska.	Anastasia Urban Pauli uxor Theodorus Circa
Januarii		Obstetrix: Parascevia Katyzyn	agricolae loci	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
6.	24 24 258	Petrus	Nicolaus Hanczaryk Renia filia Basili Philipi et Elzbiety Lotocki et Parascevia rinae Jurkowska Zamowska	Alcarius Gzicki Anna Plei Gregorii uxor
Januarii		Obstetrix: Ignatia Pielich	agricolae loci	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
7.	20.20 200	Anna	Rosalba nata Jani- nowska vidua p. Sebastianum (ignata) filia Antonii Jani- nowski et Mariae Sewicka.	Adalbertus Jani- nowski Sophia Janinowa
Februarii		Obstetrix: Maria Janicka	latwiosa	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
8	8. 8 529	Martha	Josephus Gzysien Renia filia Josephi pl. Lemetrii et Marthae Gzysien Nowosad.	Joannes Dziuk Parascevia Lewot- nicowicz Maxim uxor.
Martii		Obstetrix: Ignatia Pielich	agricolae loci	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
9.	16 16 476	Basilius	Alcarius Gzysien Renia filia Josephi pl. Antonii et Mariae Gzysien Nowosad.	Ignatius Blaszk Mariora Blaszk Theodori uxor.
martii		Obstetrix: Ignatia Pielich	agricolae loci	
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	OTW Toparok	
10	17 17 342	Stephania	(Pater in America) Anna filia Jani- nis Gajko et Justinae Blaszk	Petrus Majboga Barbara uxor Theodori Gzysien
martii		Obstetrix: Anastasia Szapranowicz		
		Хресмубі і мупонамазат	O. Ehen Synruschui nozra t Copousky	

In early 1917, Yulian Borachok, a Greek-Catholic priest in the village of Hławcze (Ukrainian: Ilavche) in the powiat trembowelski, had a difficult time registering newborn babies. For example, Agrypina's father – apparently, a soldier – was listed as missing, so he decided to put minuses in both the latest narrow columns, "Legitimi" and "Illegitimi." Little Stephania's story was even more puzzling: Borachok left both columns blank, did not mention the girl's father by name, and only wrote, "Father is in America".

There were two railroad stations in the powiat from where the local production was transported, in the village of Dereniówka (Ukrainian: Derenivka) and the main one, in Trembowla. In 1942-1943, these were also the stations from which the Jews from the region were transported to ghettos and the Belżec concentration camp, and from where local Poles were leaving their homeland in 1945-1946, sometimes camping near the station for weeks with all the possessions they could take while waiting to a train to bring them out.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Wojciech Pleszczak, "Ludzie Jednej Polskiej Wsi Podola" (a memoir, Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, Archiwum Wschodnie, PL_1001_AW_II_1906).

Chapter 1. “He was a Ukrainian but changed his ethnicity to Polish ethnicity”

I. No good choice

For the communist Poland of the late 1940s, Bronisław Topolnicki⁸⁰ had an ideal biography. His father was a peasant living and working for his entire life on a piece of land he owned – before the Soviet regime came to these places and collectivized all the private property – in a tiny village of Pantalicha (Ukrainian: Pantalycha), powiat trembowelski, województwo tarnopolskie. After graduating from middle school, Bronisław, like his father, had been a peasant until 1944, when, at the age of 20, as an ethnic Pole, he joined a Polish army just created in the Soviet Union.

Topolnicki received initial military training in the northern Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr, then in the Russian city of Riazan, and in April 1945, he was sent to Germany to fight the Nazis. As an ethnic Pole, he remained in Poland while the Soviet Union and Poland conducted so-called population exchanges: Poles were let or forced to leave the former Polish eastern borderland which was newly annexed by the Soviet Union; Ukrainians had been forcefully deported from along the westward-moved eastern borderland of the reestablished Polish state.

In 1945 and 1946, for his military service, Topolnicki was decorated with several medals, including the *Virtuti Militari* (V), the second-highest Polish military order. He was promoted to the rank of *poruchik* (a junior officer rank in Poland) in 1946, at the age of 22, and in 1947, he had just completed another course for officers in Poland. He was well-off and had never had any career-related troubles. Until it was revealed that he falsified his most

⁸⁰ IPN GK 617/175.

significant – from the point of view of the early post-WWII Polish communist authorities – biographical details.⁸¹

The Ukrainian-Polish borderland had been historically inhabited by three large ethnicities: Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. In towns and cities, the majority were Jews and Poles, and villages were inhabited mostly by Ukrainians. In the powiat trembowelski, Pantalicha was one of a few villages with a Polish majority: according to 1941 data by local Nazi-appointed authorities, 134 of its 211 inhabitants were Polish, and 12 more were Jewish.⁸² The neighbouring village of Tyczyn Nowy emerged as a German colony, and until 1944, it still had 33 German inhabitants and only 11 Ukrainians in a population of 235.⁸³ According to Topolnicki, in Pantalicha, 42 of 52 families overall were Polish and all the local families were relatives.⁸⁴ Although it is unclear how he defined the Ukrainianness or Polishness of those families, the family ties among them are confirmed by available data from church registers.

In the II Polish Republic (1918-1939), ethnicity was still defined by faith. For mixed marriages, which had been the most frequent in Ukrainian and Polish communities in this territory, the rules of the Decree of Congregation of Faith Propaganda *Ad Graves et Diuturnas* of 1863, commonly known as Concordia between “Ukrainian” Greek-Catholic and “Polish” Roman-Catholic Churches had been applied. Concordia regulations have been modified by Habsburg and then Polish civil authorities allowing people of age over 14 to change the church, and simplifying this process. To reduce tensions between the two competing churches, it was agreed to baptize children in mixed families in each of the parents’ churches according to gender. It became a common practice even as the regulation had not been observed in all the cases of mixed marriages. As a result, Concordia produced

⁸¹ IPN GK 617/175.

⁸² DATO, 176-1-17, p. 17.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ IPN GK 617/175.


thousands of people without a certain ethnic identity: Ukrainian-speaking Poles, Polish-leaning Ukrainians.⁸⁵ It had never been a significant issue until the first half of the 20th century when people of two dominant ethnicities started to attack and kill each other en masse. Numerous people of mixed Polish-Ukrainian origin, especially young men, were caught in the crossfire, put under pressure, compromised, humiliated, and killed by both sides. Apparently, this is what also happened with Bronislaw Topolnicki.

In 1947, right after finishing his next military course and while on vacation, he went to his mother's brother – one of his relatives who emigrated to western Poland after Eastern Galicia was annexed by the USSR. There, he met also his uncle's acquaintance from the town of Strusów not far from their former village. The uncle revealed too much telling the man not only the nephew's full name and place of origin but also that he was a son of a Ukrainian father, meaning, officially, also a Ukrainian. The man recollected immediately another young Ukrainian from Pantalicha called Topolnicki – one from a Ukrainian nationalist “gang” in that area attacking Soviets and Poles, including his own village which was set on fire. Teodor Topolnicki was actually Bronislaw's cousin. In 1945, he was shot in a fight with one of the Soviet-established paramilitary fighting detachments consisting in that terrains predominantly of Poles and died in Strusów. Several days after visiting his uncle, Bronislaw Topolnicki was summoned to the Polish Security Council. There, he admitted to being a Ukrainian – thus, coming to Poland under faked identity – and knowing Teodor Topolnicki.⁸⁶ But, as it was revealed soon, it was not the single truth he was hiding.

⁸⁵ Oleh Pavlyshyn, “Dylema identychnosti, abo istoriia pro te, yak ‘latynnyky’ (ne) staly ukraintsiamy / poliakamy (Halychyna, seredyna KhIKh – persha polovyna KhKh st.),” *Ukraina moderna*, 179-218.

⁸⁶ IPN GK 617/175.

ARKUSZ EWIDENCJI PERSONALNEJ

1. Nazwisko i imię ojca		TOPOLNICKI Bronisław s. Józefa
2. Stopień wojskowy		Porucznik
3. Rok i miesiąc urodzenia		24.II.1924 r.
4. Miejsce urodzenia		Pełtalicha pow. Trembowla woj.Tarnopol
5. Narodowość		Polska
6. Zawód		Uczeń
7. Zajęcie rodziców miejsce pobytu rodziców		Rolnicy Pełtalicha pow.Trembowla woj.Tarnopol
8. Działalność «poł.-poist.»	do 1939 r. do 1939-44 r. od 1944 r.	Żadna
9. Wykształcenie: a) cywilne (co i gdzie ukończył) b) wojskowe (co i gdzie ukończył)	7 klas szkoły powszechnej w Złotnikach Szkoła Oficerska Riasań - Kraków	
10. Znajomość języków obcych	Ruski	
11. Stopień naukowy: czy posiada jakieś prace, wynalazki	Nie	
12. Czy był karany sądownie: kiedy, gdzie, przez kogo, na jak długo	Nie	
13. Kiedy (rok, miesiąc, dzień) gdzie drogą mobilizacji czy dobrowolnie wstąpił do Wojska Polskiego	Zmobilizowany 22.V.1944 R.K.U. Strusów	
14. Czy służył w wojsku (lub oddz. partyzanckim): gdzie, kiedy, na jakim stanowisku	Nie	
15. Udział w wojnie 1914 r.: 1918 r.: gdzie, kiedy, na jakim stanowisku	Nie	
16. Udział w wojnie z Niemcami od 1939 r.: gdzie, kiedy, na jakim stanowisku	Des plut. od 15.IV.44r.do końca Odra - Berlin	
17. Czy znajdował się na terenie okupowanym przez Niemców w r. 1939 - 44: gdzie, kiedy, prace w tym okresie	od 41 r. do 15.III.44r. Pracował na wsi Pełtalicha pow.Trembowla woj.Tarnopol	
18. Czy był ranny, kontuzjowany: gdzie, kiedy	Nie	
19. Jakże posiada ordery, odznaczenia: kiedy odznaczony	Jak na stronie 3-oiej.	
20. Stan cywilny (żonaty, kawaler) nazwisko panienskie i imię żony, imiona dzieci, ich wiek i miejsce pobytu	Kawaler.	

Topolnicki got a bizarre and risky task to prove that he was Polish no matter the church in which he was baptized. In a communist state which promoted atheism, he had, therefore, to insist that as a child and teenager, he was faithful and visited a kościół, the Roman-Catholic church. His mother was Polish, as well as his friends, he emphasized. From here, he went already too far by telling that in late 1937 he joined the local branch of Związek Stszelecki (Shooters Union), a Polish paramilitary youth organization, because of his Polish friends being there. He told that he had been a member for several months until the organization was disbanded in his village because of, as he said, bad leadership. But for Polish communist officials who called the Związek “protofascist” and claimed that it was involved in pogroms of Ukrainians and Jews in the interwar years, it was quite enough. Not to say that, meanwhile, Topolnicki also admitted to being a member of a branch of the Ukrainian Nazi-established militia in his village in 1941.⁸⁷

According to his documented confession, in July or August 1941, soon after the Nazis occupied the area, he visited his father's brother where he met another Ukrainian, a man from the neighbouring village which he never mentioned by name – most probably, from Tyczyn Nowy. He mentioned the names of the men but never went into details about how close he had been to any of them. He also did not focus on the fact that the uncle he visited was a father of Teodor Topolnicki, and admitted to serving in the Ukrainian militia with Teodor somehow occasionally in other confessions but not when trying to explain how in the age of 17 he ended up being a “fascist”. Topolnicki said that his uncle’s visitor from another village verbally attacked him, insisting he stopped keeping company with Poles. He also claimed that the man had insisted continuously, with threats, that he joined the militia, so, after some time, he surrendered to the demands, because of being scared, but also because he was pleased with an opportunity to have a weapon, a rifle. He claimed that he had never worn any insignia of

⁸⁷ IPN GK 617/175.

the Ukrainian militia because he was ashamed of his Polish relatives and friends in the village. He also said that he was in the unit only for two weeks and was given and accomplished only two tasks – to go to his distant relative’s house to search for a radio set as Nazis prohibited owning it and to another villager’s to take a horse-drawn cart on behalf of his father. The villager had two carts, he explained, while that of his father was taken by occupying German forces. Topolnicki insisted that to the first house, he was sent with a purpose

for me to fall out with that house owner, Winnicki Jan, who was the father of my sweetheart and at the same time my distant cousin. He [the Ukrainian commander who sent Topolnicki to that house] was also taking revenge for citizen Winnicki Jan was also a Ukrainian until 1935 or 1936 [...] but since those years he changed his ethnicity to Polish ethnicity,

namely, switched from the Greek-Catholic to Roman Catholic church allegiance. Two weeks after he joined the militia unit in his village, Topolnicki said, the militia was disbanded, and since then, the man who recruited him had never approached him again. The rest of the period of the Nazi occupation, according to his confession, Topolnicki spent in his father’s household working on the land and hiding from transfers of the local youth to forced labour in Germany.⁸⁸

In the spring of 1944, when the Soviet army pushed the Nazis out of the area, the new authorities mobilized the local men, including Teodor Topolnicki, who deserted later. Bronislaw was arrested for a week by the NKWD right after the Soviet “liberation,” but he did not go into details about the reasons and consequences of the arrest. Although there were Jews in Pantalicha at the time of the Nazi invasion, and later, since 1943, many local Poles in the entire region had been killed by Ukrainians, and vice versa, Topolnicki did not mention any atrocities in his area. In the available documents, there is also no information about him participating in any atrocities in his village or around.

⁸⁸ IPN GK 617/175.

In 1944, the Ukrainian nationalistic insurgency went into the most desperate stage of its fight, attacking the Soviets as well as the remaining Poles – which tried to defend themselves by cooperating with the Soviets – and compromising and terrorising local Ukrainians. Around the Topolnicki's village area, the Ukrainian insurgency units had been among the most active in the district. He did not reflect this in his confessions, but it was clear that as a young man, he would not be able to avoid joining any side of those battles. Without waiting to be mobilized, arrested, or attacked, 20-years old Topolnicki joined the newly established Soviet-Polish army instead, pretending to be a Pole. It was a quick choice: he left his village in May 1944. Explaining the decision to join the Polish army instead of the Soviet army, he claimed that he wanted to be with his Polish friends from Pantalicha. At the same time, answering the question about who of his friends were in the Polish army, he managed to provide only two names.⁸⁹

This story, at least, looks coherent and sincere, but there was something else striking among the documents of Topolnitski's case. Apparently the earliest of them, the record of performance from late 1947, listed mostly different personal details, all of them wrong. It mentioned the family address in Pantalykha – and this was all about the real Bronislaw Topolnicki. His date of birth there, instead, was March 1919, which made the owner of that record five years older than he really was. Correspondingly, it stated the year of the beginning of his military service as not 1944 but 1941, the first year of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, meaning that he had never lived under the Nazi occupation and thus was absolutely clean in this sense in the eyes of the Soviet security apparatus (in the USSR, there was a separate question in official questionnaires about whether a person had lived under the Nazis), and the place of birth – Dominopol in Volhynia, the Polish village where the entire

⁸⁹ IPN GK 617/175.

population was killed by Ukrainian underground fighters in 1943.⁹⁰ If the incorrect personal data of Topolnicki in the record was not a bureaucratic mistake, it may mean that he deliberately pointed to a place from where no one could confirm that he was lying.

It was also written in the record that Topolnicki fought in 1943 in Lenino, Belarus – the first battle of the 1 Polish Infantry Division named after Tadeusz Kościuszko, which fought within the Soviet Army initially, until the Polish People’s Army was created in the USSR in 1944. In Lenino, the Division sustained big losses; it was stationed then near Smolensk and later near Zhytomyr where the real Bronisław Topolnicki joined the Polish army. As we know from his confession, he was not sent to fight in its ranks immediately, but had military training first, but, according to the record of performance, not in Zhytomyr and Ryazan as he said in his confession, but in “Political Educational School in Moscow” (Szkoła Polityczno-Wychowawcza w Moskwie) that year: I did not manage to find which exact institution it was. There is no explanation of this false personal data in the available documents from Topolnicki’s case but someone underlined the respective points of the record in thick pencil and put question marks at the end of each line.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Grzegorz Motyka, *From the Volhynian Massacre to Operation Vistula: The Polish-Ukrainian Conflict 1943-1947* (Brill Schöningh, 2022), 87-97.

⁹¹ IPN GK 617/175.

CENTRUM WYSZKOLENIA PIRCHOTY

CHARAKTERYSTYKA SŁUŻBOWA

za okres od dn. 3.III.47 r. do dn. 30.XI.47 r.

TOPOLNICKI Bronisław s. Józefa - porucznik. Uchw. K.R.N.
Nr. 7. z dn. 12.III.46 r.

Słuchacz Kursu D-ców Baonów G.W.Piech. od dn. 3.III.47 r.

1. Data i miejsce urodzenia: 15.III.1919 r. w Dominopol woj. Włodzimierski.
Wolynski.

2. Wykształcenie cywilne: 7 klas szk. powsz.

3. Wykształcenie polit. i wojsk: Szk. Pol.-Wych. w Moskwie 1944 r.

4. Narodowość: Polska.

5. Stan cywilny i adres rodziny: kawaler - Topolnicka Pantalicha pow. Trembowla woj. Tarnopol.

6. Udział w wojnie: Biała Cerkiew 1941 r. Lenino - Łaba.

7. Rany i kontuzje: nie posiada.

8. Odniesienia: Virtuti Militari. Roz. N.D.W.P. Nr. 799 z dn. 8.IX.45 r.
Srebrny Medal "Na Pol. Chw." Roz. 1 BP 0187 z dn. 14.VI.45 r. Srebrny
Krzyż Zasługi. Roz. N.D.W.P. Nr. 583 z dn. 18.VI.46 r.

9. Kary i pochwały: 15.IV.47 r. D-ca Kursu ukarał 5-dniowym aresztem
domowym z potr. 50% z poborów, za spóźnienie się z urlopu o 26 godzin.

10. Pozasłużbowe warunki życia:

Kawaler - warunki materialne dobre. Zadanych obowiązków pieniężnych - gaza
ofic. wystarczająca na swoje potrzeby. Towarzyski - skłonny do mizywanja
alkoholu - dość koleżeński jakkolwiek raczej zamknięty w sobie.

11. Cechy i zdolności indywidualne:

Uczciwy posiada poczucie moralności. Inteligencja przeciętna, zdolności
średnie. Charakter mało wyrobiony brak doświadczenia życiowego, dość
próżny i płytki - dba o wygląd zewnętrzny przesadnie. Posiada zadatki na
rozwój w kierunku dodatnim. Daje na siebie wpływ. Autorytet wśród otc-
czenia niewielki, oszabiony niepoważnymi skłonnościami. W służbie dość
wymagający - za mało energiczny. Przeność dobra.

12. Wywiązywanie się ze swych obowiązków:

W pracy mało samodzielny - nie daje ze siebie maksimum wysiłku, pracując
okresami. Ogólne wiadomości raczej słabe. Wyniki ogólne przeszkolenia
wojskowego średnie. Doszkadza się, przerabiając 1 klasę gimn. z wynikami
dobrymi.

13. Oblicze polityczne: Uświadomiony powierzchownie - bez zbytniego wglębie-
nia się w podstawy teoretyczne w kierunku marksistowskim. Mało aktywny
w pracy K.P.S. raczej bierny - głos zabiera rzadko co wynika raczej
z ogólnego usposobienia mrukliwego - milczącego. Bez specjalnej wartości
lojalny, posłuszny.

In 1945 or 1947 (there are two different dates in the documents of Topolnicki's case), while already in Poland, Topolniski joined the Communist Polish Workers' Party – the necessary step for one willing to pursue a career in a Communist state. By 1952, he was expelled from the party and from the army as “He served in the Ukrainian police and took part in murders of Poles and Jews” and “For affiliation with the fascist Ukrainian militia at the time of the occupation and hiding this fact from the Party, as well as for nationalism.”⁹²

Faking the identity or some personal details was a frequent practice in the World War II period, maybe, especially in the Nazi-occupied territories. For those who had reasons to hide from occupational officials and their collaborators, mostly Jews, the practises varied from just using invented names to living with fake documents and entirely fake biographies, sometimes right among the people who represented the immediate danger.⁹³ Maybe, in view of this, and also in order not to create a precedent, the Polish investigators did not raise the issue of Topolnitski lying about his ethnicity and, as it seems, his birth date, etc. At the same time, the issue of his service in the Ukrainian militia was not detailed enough to understand the fairness of the accusations. The Nazis' decision to disband the Ukrainian militia, indeed, came in August 1941, as Topolnicki said, after, as a blow to Ukrainian nationalist aspirations, Eastern Galicia was incorporated into the General Government of Nazi-occupied Poland as the District of Galicia (Distrikt Galizien).⁹⁴ But because the Nazis tried to remove the OUN people from the militia, the process took time, so in the Tarnopol area, for example, the dissolution occurred not in August but in September and October 1941.⁹⁵ Additionally, Ukrainian militia participants, if they were not connected to the OUN, were encouraged to join the auxiliary police which was created instead.⁹⁶ But, as far as we do not have any

⁹² IPN GK 617/175.

⁹³ Robert Melson, *False Papers. Deception and Survival in the Holocaust* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁹⁴ John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941–1944* (ibidem Press, 2021), 306-308.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

information contradicting Topolnicki's claims about non-joining any formations after August 1941 until May 1944, it looks like he was either not motivated or not able to continue serving the Nazis. But it does not mean that he was not somehow involved in the OUN.



A Nazi leaflet warning of the death penalty to locals who provide any assistance to “bandits” and “other enemies,” GARF, 7021-75-105.

Apparently, what made the OUN especially active in the area where Pantalicha was situated was its remoteness from any big town or city with the respective security apparatus. It played an even bigger role from late 1943 when the Nazi administration in the powiat became weak and OUN forces, respectively, more confident to fight them or ignore them while beginning their widespread campaign of terrifying the Polish population and occasionally, everyone else who seemed not loyal enough, including those who sheltered Poles and remaining Jews. Numerous accounts confirm that in 1943, possibly, more than earlier, local youth was hiding en masse from the transfers to Germany for slavery. On one side, it might be an acceptable alibi later before the suspicious Soviets questioning young

people's whereabouts during the Nazi occupation, on the other, it might create a good recruiting environment for the OUN. This is an additional consideration for questioning Topolnicki's account because from 1943, willingly or unwillingly, everyone in that steppe area might be somehow involved in the raising clashes by different sides of this drama.

II. Strangled by the communal knot

The tiny village of Brykula Nowa (Ukrainian: Nova Brykulia) also, like Pantalicha, stays in the middle of the Pantalicha steppe. In 1941, 770 Ukrainians lived there with a population of 828. The list compiled by the Nazi administration of the powiat pointed also to 58 Poles and 5 Jews,⁹⁷ the latter with almost no traces in the memory of the remaining locals who believe that all the Jews from the village "left before the war." Apparently, they were either deported by the Soviets around 1940 or were taken to one of the neighbouring ghettos by the Nazis and their collaborators. We do not have also any documents about the Brykula Jews, neither I found anything about the Nazi-established militia and auxiliary police there. The village was not an independent administrative unit: together with the closely connected Brykula Stara (Ukrainian: Stara Brykulia), it was administered either from the neighbouring Chmielówka (Ukrainian: Khmelivka, known also by its older Polish name Winiawka) or from more distant Darachow (Ukrainian: Darakhiv).⁹⁸ In the interwar period, the lands in the area, apart from richer or poorer local peasants, had several bigger landowners: the locals called them *didychs* (Polish, plural: *dziedzicy*). In Brykula Nowa, it was Zygmunt Waniewicz, a Pole, in Brykula Stara – Alfred Sommerstein, a Jew, who also owned lands on

⁹⁷ "Trembowla," "Woj. Tarnopolskie," Europa z Rodzinie: Zemianstwo Polskie w XX Wiek, accessed May 19, 2023, <http://ziemianie.pamiec.pl/index.html>.

⁹⁸ Podział powiatu trembowelskiego w województwie tarnopolskim na gminy wiejskie, 30 lipca 1934 r., accessed May 27, 2023, <https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzu-dziennik-ustaw/podzial-powiatu-trembowelskiego-w-województwie-tarnopolskim-na-16837062/par-1>.

other places of the powiat, in Chmelowka, one of two bigger landowners, both Ukrainians, was Mykola Dyczkowski, the uncle of Yosyf Slipy.⁹⁹

Zygmunt Waniewicz was not local. He came to the powiat from a village Podkościele near Kraków in the 1920s.¹⁰⁰ There is almost no information about how he ended up in the Trembowla area, the logical version retold by the locals was that he went to Brykula to manage the farm and later married the owner, a Polish woman.¹⁰¹ Not only was he not a local, he did not have children, and as someone much higher in the local hierarchy, also had no close friends among the villagers.¹⁰² This is why almost all the information about Waniewicz died with him when he was murdered in 1943 at the age of 56. The single more or less detailed and reliable account of the circumstances was left by Franciszek Gałoński, a Pole from the village Ostrowczyk (Ukrainian: Ostrivets) near Trembowla whose 16 years old niece was killed together with Waniewicz.¹⁰³

Since the late 1940s, already in Poland, Gałoński wrote five volumes of what he called *Kronika* (Chronicle), a story of his life events seemingly based on his earlier diary entries, carefully edited by his children but never published. In the second volume, he started the section on 1943 by describing the changing atmosphere in the area: transfers of young people, especially, as he felt, Poles, for forced labour in Germany resulting to many going into hiding, which caused “repressions – windows were broken, heating stoves in houses destroyed, all the repressions the Germans could invent used.” And, he continued,

I have noticed that Ukrainians started to avoid meeting the Polish people. [...] It occurred once when I met a Ukrainian acquaintance on the road, I talked a couple of words to him, but he answered that we would talk somehow on another occasion, that he cannot chat with me now because he is afraid of his

⁹⁹ Yosyf Slipyi, *Spomyny*, ed. Ivan Datsko, Mariia Horiacha. (Lviv–Rome: Vydavnytstvo UKU, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Zygmunt Waniewicz, FamilySearch Family Tree, accessed 21.05.2023, <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-40001-2148580108/zygmunt-waniewicz-in-familysearch-family-tree>.

¹⁰¹ Y., woman, 92 (retired collective farm worker), oral interview, Nova Brykula, 2018; Iryna Demianova, 62 (writer), oral interview, Ternopil, 2018.

¹⁰² Y., oral interview.

¹⁰³ Franciszek Gałoński, *Kronika* tom II po II korekcje, Gałoński family archive.

own people (meaning, the Ukrainians). At that time, I found that revenge hung over the Polish people and that further coexistence was becoming impossible.¹⁰⁴

Gałoński wrote that that time, it was already known about mass murders of Poles in Volhynia; there were still, however, no cases of murders of Poles in Gałoński's area. Irena Gałońska and Zygmunt Waniewicz became, according to him, the first Polish victims there.¹⁰⁵

There was a significant shortage of specialists the Nazis needed in the occupied areas. Waniewicz managed to come as a manager to the farm he owned just several years ago. Felix Gałoński, Franciszek Gałoński's brother, asked him to employ his teenage daughter as his impoverished family in Trembowla was not able to manage anymore otherwise. Waniewicz was the type of person who would never refuse to help, the Brykula locals testified.¹⁰⁶ While being the *didych*, he paid generous salaries and even pensions to those disabled, he had never applied violence against his workers, and never allowed anyone else to abuse them; later, he rescued villagers from forced transfers to Germany by employing them at his former farm,¹⁰⁷ and he employed Irena as well, as an accountant.¹⁰⁸ The exact circumstances of the murder and the people who did it are not known; these crimes against Poles and Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia in the early 1940s have been investigated even less than the crimes against Jews. According to Gałoński, his brother, who got a job as an accountant in Darachow, was also attacked there that night but managed to escape. His daughter and Waniewicz, however, were taken from the house of Waniewicz's former farm in Brykula where they stayed; their mutilated bodies were found in the fields near Ostrowczyk.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Gałoński, *Kronika*.

¹⁰⁶ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

¹⁰⁷ Y., oral interview.

¹⁰⁸ Gałoński, *Kronika*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

In Trembowla, Irena's burial turned into a mass demonstration of local Poles shocked and infuriated by the murder of a child of their own.¹¹⁰ This was already after three waves of mass executions of Jews from the powiat and beyond in the village of Plebanówka (Ukrainian: Plebanivka) right after Trembowla in April–June 1943¹¹¹ but Irena's death was apparently seen as something very different because the Nazi administration was not involved. In Brukula, where the remaining locals still believe that Waniewicz was a Ukrainian because he spoke Ukrainian to the villagers,¹¹² Y., one of my interviewees, who was a teenager in 1943 and whose house was the closest to Waniewicz's, said that the killers were Ukrainians from Brykula Nowa who wanted to take the farm property¹¹³ – the version somehow inconsistent because of the parallel attack to Felix Gałoński in another village and the exceptional cruelty of the murder of Waniewicz and Irena Gałońska.¹¹⁴ The single firm fact from this story apart from the murder was that for part of the stunned population of the powiat, this was an act of ethnically driven violence; for the other part, it was not.

Locals claimed to me that in Brukula Nowa, Ukrainians and Poles lived peacefully, no matter that there were several OUN people in Brukula, and many more used to come there for getting some services or for hiding. Also, there were several hiding places of the OUN in the fields around Nova Brykulia¹¹⁵; for them, the locals, including the local Poles, were trustful. Because of this, the village had a bad reputation in the Soviet security apparatus¹¹⁶ and, apparently, among Polish partisans and self-defence units from neighbouring villages. I

¹¹⁰ Anna Tarka (retired doctor), oral interview, Opole, 2018.

¹¹¹ Ludwika Steinfeld, *Żydzi i Ludzie* (Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo Książkowe IBiS, 2001); Jerzy Beski, *Moje Podole, 1930-1945* (Opole: Wydawnictwo NOWIK Sp.j., 2010); Gałoński, Kronika.

¹¹² Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

¹¹³ Y., oral interview.

¹¹⁴ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

¹¹⁵ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview; K., woman, 84 (retired collective farm worker), oral interview, Nova Brykula, 2017; S., woman, 84 (retired collective farm worker), oral interview, Nova Brykula, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Evheniy Zhyrnov, "Rabota v Cheka chasto razvrashchaet," *Zhurnal "Kommersant Vlast,"* December 15, 2008, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1087387>.

attribute this to the reasons for what happened in Brykulia in late March 1944, when the Soviet-Nazi frontline crossed the area.

In a way the local witnesses tell it these days, the story looks somehow cinematographic. It was the early morning when strangers started to knock on the locals' doors asking men to come out to help push a car stuck in a famous Brykula mud.¹¹⁷ The time was extremely chaotic, with a lot of attacks by different groups on each other and common civilians – besides those fighting for ideological reasons or for following orders, also by numerous criminal gangs. The locals were suspicious, so the information about the strangers quickly spread to the small village, especially given that some men were executed immediately in their homes and yards; houses started to burn.¹¹⁸

Everyone in Nova Brykulia telling or retelling this story claimed that some men wore hoods covering their faces.¹¹⁹ It was claimed that two young Poles from the village were recognized among them.¹²⁰ There were different accounts about which language the unwanted visitors spoke: some said that it was Russian, others, that Ukrainian. “They came to my dad and told him to stand up and come out [to push a car]. The second man said – we cried a lot, we were two sisters – he asked our names. I answered, and my sister answered,” Y. told me. According to her, there were three men in her father’s house, two of them hooded. The girls’ names sounded Polish to the hooded man; he asked whether they are Poles. In the end, this man said to the first one pointing to Y.’s father: “The old man is sick, you should not take him.” According to Y., “He (the second hooded man. – Y.A.) took him (the first hooded man. – Y.A.) by the shoulders, and forced him out of the house, so they left.

¹¹⁷ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

¹¹⁸ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

¹¹⁹ Y., oral interview; K., oral interview; S., oral interview.

¹²⁰ Y., oral interview; Demianova, oral interview.

They said to dad: “Don’t stand up.” But dad was afraid anyway and fled, he hid in a stack owned by Poles.”¹²¹

Several families reacted in a similar way by hiding their men.¹²² About 70 or 80 men, however, were either forced out or followed the order and left their houses. According to some testimonies, the armed men demanded locals they dragged out to reveal the hiding place of a prominent local OUN member but no one obliged.¹²³ They forced the locals further, out of the village, and shot everyone who tried to flee. Iryna Demianova, a former Brykula local who wrote down the story by Mykhaylo Khamuliak, one of the men who ended up in the column, in the 1990s, read me her notes in 2018:

From the upper pasture, there were two roads: one to Zolotnyky, the other, on the right, to Sosniv. They said: Ukrainians go ahead, Poles – to the right. But about a half went to the right, no matter that there were [only] five Poles [in the column]. They shot those who left. [...] We continued across the fields, closer to Sosniv. They put people on the ground again. They talked among themselves and commanded: Ukrainians stand still, Poles go forward. 18 Ukrainians and three Poles went forward. Near Sokoliv, there was a moat. They put the people who went forward on the ground. But there was another patrol after that. They whistled for a commander. They stopped the shooting, discussed it with each other and drove people to a conscription office. For the night, they forced us into some village library. In the morning, they gave us thin broth and drew up a list. Everyone registered himself with “-ski” (the most common suffix of Polish family names. – Y.A.). “Fuck you, write down correctly, otherwise, you will be with the rest.” We registered as we should.¹²⁴

It is evident from the accounts that in the chaos of 1944, proclaiming oneself Polish in front of Soviet soldiers or officials meant a guarantee of a relatively high degree of safety. K., another woman from Brykula, who was a child in 1944, told a later story about her mother, an entirely assimilated Pole, manipulating her ethnicity:

¹²¹ Y., oral interview.

¹²² K., oral interview.

¹²³ Demianova, oral interview; S., oral interview.

¹²⁴ Demianova, oral interview.

They (OUN men. – Y.A.) came once. They came and were cleaning their guns. A neighbour suddenly came running in to say: “Look, there is rubakha (Soviet police patrol. – Y.A.), already near the school.” My mum just cooked pierogi for them (the OUN men in their house. – Y.A.), and said that there was rubakha. [...] They (the police. – Y.A.) were approaching. Mum went out to the yard, they (the OUN men. – Y.A.) to the well, and they told me to sit down near the well and sit still. But I didn’t sit because I heard everything. I took my scarf, my trench, and my dresses and went to a neighbour and hid them behind a barrage, sat down to the barrage, and that’s it. Because if they burned the house, I understood, they would burn my stuff – so, what would I wear? Mum came out, and they (the police. – Y.A.) asked her: “Don’t you have banderas (Banderites, OUN members, commonly called as banderovtsy, in Russian, or banderivtsi, in Ukrainian. – Y.A.)? Mum said: “No, only old people left here, and no one comes to me because I am Polish.” She was afraid that they would search. They went to the village [instead], and those (the OUN members. – Y.A.) started to shout at mum. Mum said: “Would it be better for you if they burned my house and left my children [homeless]? And now, they left: you are alive, and they are alive.”¹²⁵

All the accounts about the war years in Brykula present the local community as a tight knot. S., another interviewee, told that a local female OUN member used to visit the village even while in hiding as the Soviets were constantly searching for her but it was the time when the local Poles already left for Poland.¹²⁶ However, when the Poles were still there, the situation was not different. Demianova cited Khamuliak answering her question about why the Soviets searched for the Banderites in a village in the middle of the fields instead of forests: “There was a transit point in Brykula [...]. No one was hiding, they did not fear the treason.”¹²⁷

Y.’s father was a shoemaker. Because of this, the OUN people and Polish neighbours used to visit his house, Y. testified: the former for repairing their shoes, the latter for working or reading under his lamp as it was generally too expensive for the villagers back then to burn kerosene on their own unless they benefited from it financially. Y. said:

¹²⁵ K., oral interview.

¹²⁶ S., oral interview.

¹²⁷ Demianova, oral interview.

The Polish neighbours (immediate neighbours in whose household her father hid from the Soviet execution in 1944. - Y.A.), they were faithful people – not like, you know... He (the neighbour. – Y.A.) celebrated our holidays and Polish holidays. He celebrated the Polish Christmas Eve but he never worked on our holiday. [...] They had a Ukrainian daughter-in-law [...] – maybe, this was the reason.¹²⁸

Right after the Soviets retook Nova Brykulia, the village got a local mayor. K. said that the mayor was in love with her mother so he reported K.'s father as a former member of the Nazi-established police. The father was arrested, and while fighting for his release, K.'s mother was told that the local Poles should testify that her husband was not a Nazi policeman. According to K., the Brykula Poles signed testimony that K.'s father was not serving the Nazis but a Ukrainian official in the village kept refusing to verify the signatures. One of the local Poles went to him urging him to let the document proceed, and the official finally conceded.¹²⁹

The rumour about the participation of two young Poles from Brykula in the 1944 massacre spread throughout the village, however, and the locals believed that the men's Ukrainian stepmother was aware of the planned attack on the village and supported them taking part in it.¹³⁰ She was murdered in an act of retaliation with sadistic cruelty¹³¹ apparently intended to demonstrate to everyone what would happen to those who break the communal solidarity.

In the village of Stara Brykulia, attacks on local Poles followed the Soviet reconquest. L.'s father was killed together with three other Poles who were spending nights in one house for safety reasons, separately from their families.¹³² L. told that, as he learned from accounts of witnesses, the killers visited the house twice that night with the list of names, to make sure

¹²⁸ Y., oral interview.

¹²⁹ K., oral interview.

¹³⁰ Demianova, oral interview.

¹³¹ Demianova, oral interview; K., oral interview; S., oral interview.

¹³² L., man, 73 (retired school teacher), oral interview, Terebovlya, 2017.

that all the targets were correct¹³³ because usually, especially in villages, numerous Ukrainians and Poles shared the same family names. Apparently, the killers were not locals but had someone local pointing them to the exact people to kill. L.'s family was among those who decided to stay, however, when almost all the Poles from the region were leaving for Communist Poland. L. told that even in the 1970s, there was someone approaching him on the streets of Trembowla and whispering threats to kill him like his father.¹³⁴

L.'s mother stayed in Soviet Ukraine because her own mother had a second marriage to a Ukrainian man, and Ukrainians were not allowed to emigrate.¹³⁵ 1945–1946 saw a lot of family dramas with the closest relatives being separated. In Khmelivka, Roman Dychkovski (Polish: Dyczkowski), the only son of the decedent former didych and a Polish woman, mentally disabled since approximately the late 1920s, was left alone on the ruins of his former house turned into Soviet collective property¹³⁶ as his Polish sisters left for Poland. Until the 1970s, when he died, he wandered, homeless, on the streets of Khmelivka and neighbouring villages, with a posture of a nobleman, still behaving as if he was a didych, attracting teasing from the local children.¹³⁷ A., a distant relative of Dychkovski who met him as a nurse back then for the first time, soon after returning to her hometown of Strusiv from northern Russia, where she was deported as a small child with her mother while her father was arrested for participation in the OUN, recollected him proudly giving her a reward for treatment with a banknote of some already nonexistent state. "Take it," she recollected a colleague whispering to her. "I will explain to you later."¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ L., oral interview.

¹³⁶ E., woman, 85 (retired collective farm worker), oral interview, Khmelivka, 2019.

¹³⁷ L., oral interview; E., oral interview, B., woman, 69, oral interview, Ternopil, 2019.

¹³⁸ A., woman, 74 (retired nurse), oral interview, Ternopil, 2018.

Chapter 2. The extremes

Zygmunt Krämer was cautious while describing the circumstances of his father's, Anton Krämer's, life and death¹³⁹. He shortly mentioned his ethnic German family whose trace somehow disappeared as both of Anton Krämer's parents died when he was a child. The older sister who took care of him, he mentioned only once, as well as his mother's parents, also ethnic Germans, who had other children. There is no information about his brothers in the story Zygmunt Krämer wrote apart from a brief mention that there were two of them¹⁴⁰. We do not know where exactly they were and what they did during the Nazi occupation of Eastern Galicia where they lived. Maybe, Anton Krämer's life was much less resonating than his violent death on New Year's Eve of 1944 which shook several villages and led to several dozens more killed.

In its wording, it is probably the most balanced account of what happened in the powiat from the late 1930s till the mid-1940s. Zygmunt Krämer did not try to accuse someone of his father's death: the text, which he wrote in 1985, is somewhat apologetic as if its author felt that his father was somehow guilty only for being a German – or if there was something else he was careful not to reveal.

Anton Krämer was a miller. According to the account, he worked in Skala, a town at the river of Zbruch which served as a border between Poland and the Soviet Union back then, and then in Lwow – both in Eastern Galicia – until taking a job in the village of Semenów (Ukrainian: Semeniv) near Trembowla in 1937¹⁴¹. Zygmunt Krämer emphasised several

¹³⁹ AŽIH, 301/7097.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

times that he did not move there with his parents so he knew the last part of the story he told only from his frequent visits to the village as he worked nearby¹⁴².

In Eastern Galicia, Germans were largely polonised. Krämer mentioned somehow proudly that his father spoke German with a Polish aristocrat who owned the mill in Semenów – still the language of the nobility in that part of the word in the 1930s¹⁴³. Unlike their Catholic father, however, Zygmunt Krämer and his younger brothers were Evangelical like their mother, a pastor's daughter. But Zygmunt Krämer attended Polish schools and before that – something rather unusual – a Jewish pre-school, as he explained, because there was no Polish one in his area in Skala and a Ukrainian one was only seasonal and not of the proper pedagogic level. He also emphasised that his father who had a lot of Jewish friends and acquaintances considered it normal to send his children to a Jewish institution¹⁴⁴.

Krämer's narrative about the early 1930s in Eastern Galicia is very similar to the Polish idealised and nostalgic view of kresy as a place of harmonic multicultural coexistence while for many local Ukrainians, it was an era of Polish oppression. He shortly mentioned widespread antisemitism, however, while briefly explaining why his father had fewer Jewish friends in Lwow where the family moved in 1934 compared to Skala, with no further details¹⁴⁵. Still, Krämer continued to particularise his and his family's encounters with Jews as if it was the main purpose of his written account.

In 1939, according to the account, Anton Krämer refused to resettle in Germany or Nazi-occupied territories as an ethnic German in the Soviet-annexed part of Poland. He continued working at the same mill under the Soviets and then under the Nazis. Krämer made clear that he believed that his father was killed by Ukrainian underground fighters who turned their dissatisfaction with the Germans into “political resistance which over time, grew into

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ AŽIH, 301/7097.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

blind terror.”¹⁴⁶ He suggested that Ukrainian insurgents wanted to take over the local entities like the Semenów mill, but also that they were dissatisfied by Anton Krämer’s choice of who would work there, hence, would avoid forced labour in Germany, and by his continuing contacts with Jews to whom Krämer, according to his son, smuggled food to the ghetto in Trembowla and who used to visit his house for eating, washing, and resting, as Zygmunt Krämer put it, meaning, that the miller illegally shared the scarce bread when almost all the locals in the region were at the brink of hunger. Krämer also claimed that his father supplied Rada Główna Opiekuncza, or RGO, a Polish charity which was tolerated by the Nazi administration of the General Governorate and which briefly cooperated with a similar Jewish charity¹⁴⁷.

Krämer also wrote that by late 1943, the situation in the region became dangerous with numerous partisan units and criminal gangs wandering around. Even German soldiers and gendarmes barricaded themselves in the town, and the Krämers’ house was attacked and robbed twice so, like many others, Krämers relocated to Trembowla but the miller continued to travel to work at the same time by the same road every day¹⁴⁸. By paying attention to this habit by his father, Krämer made clear that he was certain that Anton Krämer was not an occasional victim but the deliberate target of his killers no matter that the miller believed that he did not have enemies.

What was the end of the story for Zygmunt Krämer, was only the beginning for the villagers in Humnyska near Semenów. On January 2, 1944, two days after Anton Krämer was killed, the Germans took several dozens of men there – all considered Ukrainians – to a building of a Ukrainian school in the village and after some time, started taking them out in small groups and shooting right outside¹⁴⁹. It was claimed later that 32 men were killed this

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ AŻIH, 301/7097.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ DATO, 274-2-97b.

way although not all of them were Humnyska locals and not all of them have been identified¹⁵⁰. About 20 more were taken to a prison in Tarnopol and then to a ruined Soviet airfield in a powiat, for forced labour, from where all of them fled. According to testimonies, some of the men were hiding until the Soviet takeover, but the others immediately came back to Humnyska and no one was searching for them there: the weakening of the Nazi hold in the area was already evident¹⁵¹. The same day, on January 2, 1944, the Nazis also committed a mass massacre in more distant Strusow, most probably in connection to the Semenów murder as well¹⁵².

Not only the Ukrainian witnesses who survived the massacre in Humnyska but also Franciszek Galonski shared details about the apparent German actions of retaliation which he partly witnessed himself as the searches started early that day in his village of Osrtowczyk as well¹⁵³. He did not see the scenes in neighbouring Humnyska and Strusow and described them, as he wrote, from witness' accounts. Unlike the Ukrainian survivors, Galonski, according to him, did not know the reason for the massacre, and he stressed that he did not know the details as "it was my custom not to inquire closely"¹⁵⁴ – the common motto of those days in the region. Still, it was surprising that Galonski never mentioned either Anton Krämer's presence in Semenów or his death in a forest between the village and Trembowla even as he described what he saw and heard about the massacre in Humnyska and Strusow. It is impossible that Galonski did not know Anton Krämer as at some point, the Semenów mill became the single one where the Galonski family was allowed by the Nazi authorities to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ DATO, 274-2-97b.

¹⁵² Franciszek Gałoński, KRONIKA tom II po II korekcie, Gałoński family archive.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

grind flour in accordance with a certain quota¹⁵⁵. He could also know Zygmunt Krämer as they both were employed in road building in the same region¹⁵⁶.

In Eastern Galicia under the Nazi occupation, local Germans and Jews became two extremes, no matter how assimilated, no matter how they treated their ethnic origin, community allegiance, the warring parties, and each other. While it was usually easy for a Ukrainian to reveal some Polishness and vice versa, both the local Jews – mostly Germanised in Germany and big former Habsburg cities but not in the deep Galician province – and local Germans sometimes felt themselves rather Poles or Ukrainians than what the Nazis expected them to feel. The collaboration by the local Germans might be high – although I do not have the numbers to confirm or deny this – but there was also the resistance, and if Anton Krämer's story is true, it was not unique, according to one of the local Jewish accounts I have. At the same time, according to one of the Ukrainian accounts from Humnyska, one of the Krämer's younger sons was among the Nazis who committed the massacre¹⁵⁷. But I have no other documents to check this claim.

Yosyp Reich was the other extreme of the extreme. He was born in 1890 in the village of Hlyboczok Wielki (Ukrainian: Velyky Hlybochok) near Tarnopol¹⁵⁸ – the place became notorious in the former województwo because of the labour camp for Jews and prisoners of war there. In Ukraine, however, the village is known, first of all, as the place where Yaroslav Stetsko grew up, one of the OUN leaders, Stepan Bandera's deputy who proclaimed "the restoration of Ukrainian statehood" in Lwow on June 30, 1941. In some Polish and Ukrainian publications mentioning Reich, it was claimed that he was married to Stetsko's sister which is not true, and Reich might not even know Stetsko personally as he was over 20 years older and left the village probably before Stetsko was born. But Reich definitely knew Stetsko's

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ AŽIH, 301/7097; Gałoński, KRONIKA.

¹⁵⁷ DATO, 274-2-97b.

¹⁵⁸ Misiia Postuliatsiinyi Tsentr beatyfikatsii UGCC.

father and uncle, who, like him, were Ukrainian Greek-Catholic priests, the latter – in Hlybochok. In the village where Reich ended up as a priest in the 1920s, called Ilawcze (Ukrainian: Ilavche), it was believed that he was tightly connected to the OUN, and his older son, a teacher in the local school, was one of the OUN members¹⁵⁹. Both were active in promoting Ukrainian culture and education in Ilawcze¹⁶⁰. According to locals' testimonies in Ilavche and the neighbouring Borychivka (Polish: Boryczowka), the priest was sadistically killed by a local Polish paramilitary group which sided with Soviet troops in April 1944 exactly because of his allegiance to the OUN¹⁶¹. What was still unusual in Reich's biography was that apart from being a Ukrainian nationalist and Christian priest, he was a son of a baptised Jewish man¹⁶². In 1941, there were 58 Jews in Ilawcze with a total population of over 3,000, predominantly Ukrainian¹⁶³. Locals whom I interviewed in Ilavche pointed to some of the villagers who provided shelter to Jews during the Holocaust¹⁶⁴ but they did not know anything about Reich's role and position regarding the persecution of his Jewish neighbours.

Collecting pieces of evidence for a somehow coherent Holocaust story is very different in a rural area compared to a city with a large share of rich and educated who were able to leave more numerous and detailed – and more reliable – testimonies. In the powiat trembowelski, even compared to its immediate neighbours, the Jewish communities were smaller, apparently poorer and more conservative, meaning, that fewer Jews survived and fewer testimonies were written and recorded as a result. In villages, the majority of Christians in the 1940s were still either illiterate or nearly illiterate to keep diaries or write memoirs. In

¹⁵⁹ J., man, 86 (retired agriculturist), oral interview, Ilavche, 2017; O., woman, 87 (retired farmer), oral interview, Ilavche, 2017; M., woman, 84 (retired farmer), oral interview, Borychivka, 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ J., man, 86 (retired agriculturist), oral interview, Ilavche, 2017; O., woman, 87 (retired farmer), oral interview, Ilavche, 2017; M., woman, 84 (retired farmer), oral interview, Borychivka, 2018.

¹⁶² J., man, 86 (retired agriculturist), oral interview, Ilavche, 2017.

¹⁶³ DATO, 176-1-17.

¹⁶⁴ J., 2017; J., man, 86 (retired agriculturist), oral interview, Ilavche, 2018; O., 2017.

addition, those able to express what they did, saw and experienced preferred to stay silent for decades because even years after the war, locals were targeted by other locals apparently also for saving the Jews. Many of those few educated, self-confident, and socially active left in 1944 with Germans and a certain Holocaust burden they would rather not share. For over 40 years, the area remained under an oppressive regime which did not recognise the Nazi genocide of the Jews and behind the iron curtain which also barely allowed the Holocaust stories out and in. As a result, there is only a couple of Ukrainians from the powiat locals in the Yad Vashem base of the Righteous among the Nations, and all of them got recognition after 2000 – to be precise, in 2000, 2011, 2014, 2019, 2021 – when almost no one remained to testify. The depth of this silence gap is enormous: in 1945, the Soviets investigated the places of execution in and near Terebovlya and reported 3097 dead bodies¹⁶⁵. Not all of the killed were Jewish, but together with hundreds transferred from the Trembowla ghetto and hundreds killed in labour camps, forests, and fields, this is clearly almost the entire pre-war Jewish population of 5,682 in Trembowla, Mykulince, Budzanow, Janow, and the villages¹⁶⁶. From the number of documents and accounts left, however, it seems, that the Holocaust in this area went almost unnoticed.

¹⁶⁵ GARF, 7021-75-13.

¹⁶⁶ DATO, 176-1-17.



Exhumation works at the place of the mass shooting of Jews between Terebovlya and Plebanivka, 1945. GARF, 7021-75-13.

Klara Szrenzel's account is one of the most detailed and in many respects the most striking local stories of survival. Striking was not only the survival story itself but the fact that Szrenzel repeated her account at least three times over the years, with details disappearing and emerging which made the narrative in some parts confusing and might force a reader to question the scale of reliability of any testimony.

Klara Szrenzel was 19 when the Nazis entered Miculince where she lived with her parents and sister. She was forced to heavy labour and endured humiliation and beating; in the autumn of 1942, her father was taken with other Jews apparently to Belzec death camp, and all the Jews were ordered to leave the town¹⁶⁷. Szrenzel described a scene when her mother, she, and her sister were sitting in their home without any idea what to do next while Ukrainian villagers entered their place claiming that they would like to buy something

¹⁶⁷ AŽIH, 301/1423.

because the Szrenzels were leaving. Then an old woman came, looked at the uninvited guests wandering the house and stealing and the hosts watching this halfheartedly thinking only about how to survive and save the loved ones¹⁶⁸. The woman offered Klara's mother to take the girl with her and left with Klara and some items from the house the mother gave her¹⁶⁹. The woman's son took the items to their cart and left while they walked to the woman's house in a village because they were afraid to attract attention by travelling by cart. Anyway, it happened that on the road, someone recognised the Jewish girl and threatened her with denunciation so she had to pay him to let her go¹⁷⁰.

Klara found a warm welcome in the house and got shelter in a barn; she cried, however, and ask the woman and her son to hide also her mother and sister but they were afraid that neighbours would notice three more persons in the courtyard; after all, the woman went back to Miculince to take the rest of the family but returned only with a note where Klara's mother informed her that they found another hiding place¹⁷¹. The girl was later offered a place in an attic, and then in the house. But she worried about her family and asked the hosts to bring her back so the son agreed to bring her back to Trembowla. It appeared that people who offered shelter to Klara's mother and sister only took their possessions and forced them out. Still, some villagers hid Klara's sister while she and her mother ended up in a square in the ghetto encircled by the Gestapo and Ukrainian police. One of the police members offered Klara to take out his mother pretending it was his mother so Klara would be free to flee – from the text, she did not seem to know the man but she offered no explanation for his proposition. The mother refused to leave the ghetto until Klara flee so she fled and

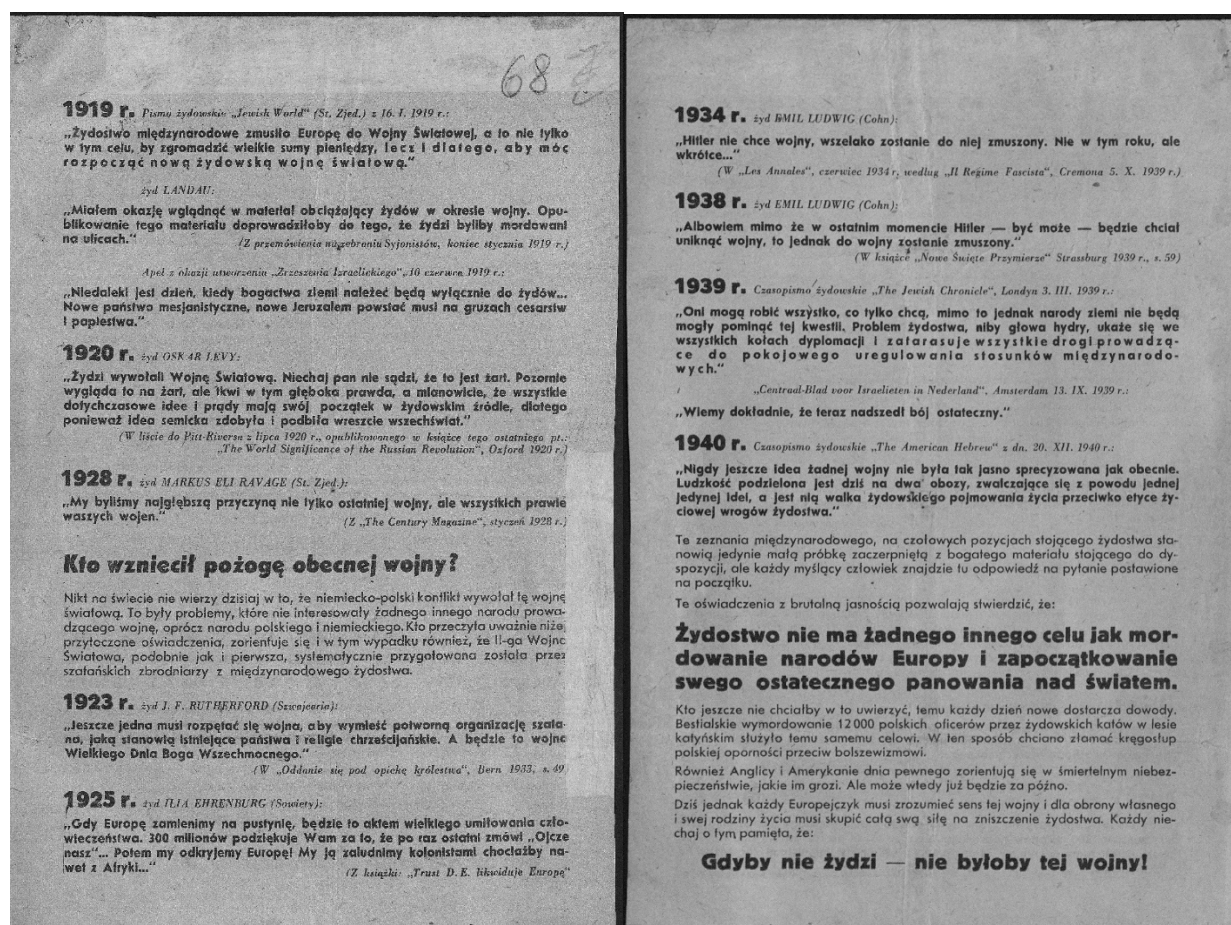
¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ AŽIH, 301/1423.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

manage to hide but when she went back to find her mother, the same police member told her that the Germans took her mother¹⁷².



Fragments of a Nazi leaflet (in Polish) blaming Jews on the war and specifical on the Nazi attack on Poland. GARF, 7021-75-105.

Briefly, without any explanations and details, she wrote that she spent the night at the policeman's place, and the next day, a Pole acquaintance whom she met in a city sheltered her for several days and then checked in the ghetto regularly after she came back there; he also sheltered her sister but the sister suddenly died of a heart attack¹⁷³. The Pole, Karol Sygnatowicz, who lived in a forest in a village near Trembowla built a bunker there and hid 28 Jews, Klara testified. The locals found a bunker and reported it to the Germans; Sygnatowicz informed the Jews in advance so the majority left but several people, including Klara, stayed and were caught. She managed again to flee, was caught by a Ukrainian

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ AŻIH, 301/1423.

civilian, fled again, and went to the old woman who sheltered her initially – she never mentioned either the woman’s or the village’s name¹⁷⁴.

From the woman, Klara learned that Sygnatowicz was arrested for sheltering Jews and his property was confiscated. The next day, she went back to Trembowla and was caught and brought to the same square in the ghetto. She spotted the same Ukrainian police member and let him know that she had money and would pay if he helped her out but the Germans noticed this, took everything and hit her. She managed to flee again and ended up in a forest with several other Jews. “Banderites” found the group but Klara escaped them and joined another group which was also attacked by “Ukrainians,” fled, joined another group, which was also attacked, she fled again. She claimed that in the forest, she managed to flee eight times while all the rest of her groups were killed. One day, she learned that Sygnatowicz was released from prison “for a big bribe” – local testimonies reveal that corruption was an additional big actor of the local drama of the 1940s, – she contacted him but did not dare to ask to shelter her. He offered it himself after bringing her food several times and took Klara and a man who was hiding with her to his courtyard. They stayed at his place until the Soviet Army recaptured the area¹⁷⁵.

This was the testimony Klara Szrenzel gave in 1946 in Poland; she did not write it – the story was protocolled in Polish by another person. The next testimony was recorded and written down in English from her words by yet another person in 1955 when Szrenzel was living in the US, and printed in the Miculince memory book¹⁷⁶. This time, she briefly touched on the period of the first Soviet occupation of 1939–1941 and told that when the Soviets retreated and the Nazis did not enter the town yet, the local Ukrainians did a pogrom in Miculince looting the Jewish property and killing several Jews; later, they also pointed the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ “The Life of Horrors of Mrs. Klara Reich-Schrenzel: Recorded and written down by Mr. Schmulevic on January 19, 1955,” in Mikulince Yizkor Book.

Nazis to several local Jews who were active as Communists under the Soviets. In this text, the ethnicity of the actors was usually emphasised so Klara told that the old woman who took her to her house initially was a Ukrainian. She called her just the Goya and mentioned the woman's and her son's name, Jamnik, only once but never mentioned the name of the village. In this version of her story, when a local man – this time, Klara told that it was a Ukrainian policeman – approached Klara and the old woman while they were walking from Miculince and suggested that the girl was a Jew, it was the old woman who urged him to let them go; she did not mention anyone bribing the man. It was also not the old woman but her son who brought to Klara a note from her mother¹⁷⁷.

Describing again the scene from the ghetto square, Klara did not mention the member of the Ukrainian police who offered to hide her mother etc.; she told that she learned about her mother's fate only after visiting the Judenrat that night and that she spent the night in some Goys' house where her sister had already stayed¹⁷⁸. After her sister's death, Klara was sent to a labour camp where she spent three months before fleeing with seven more people – the episode which was absent in the 1946 story. In the 1955 story, Klara met Sygnatowicz for the first time since the Nazi occupation only after fleeing the camp; they knew each other because “during the war, he had been doing business” with Klara's father although she also told that Sygnatowicz was only a little older than she¹⁷⁹. Together with his mother and sister he hosted her in his house but she stayed there only shortly because she wanted to be with Jews. Back in Trembowla, the Jews she met asked her to ask Sygnatowicz to shelter all of them, about 20 persons, and Sygnatowicz agreed. They built two bunkers not far from his house themselves, Klara insisted in 1955. In the newer account, when Germans and Ukrainian police discovered the bunker and she escaped the massacre, the scene with a Ukrainian who tried to capture her got more detail:

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

I ran through the fields hoping to reach the village, that I saw far away. A peasant woman called after me "Run quicker, there is a peasant who catches run-away Jews." And, indeed, I ran into a peasant who caught me by the hand and wanted to deliver me to the Germans. Peasants and their wives came out from their huts, shouting that he should leave me be. The man released my hand, and I ran into the forest where I stayed till nightfall.¹⁸⁰

Also, this time a new saviour appeared: a Ukrainian Sygnatowicz's aunt whom Klara never mentioned either before or after. Klara told that they met near the forest, and the woman recognised her and brought her to her stable for a night¹⁸¹. Describing the next episode at the ghetto square after she came back to Trembowla and was caught, Klara mentioned for the first time a Ukrainian policeman whom she attempted to bribe but in this version of the story, not with money but with jewels hanging on her neck; the man, Klara told this time, called a German officer instead and reported her. She also did not mention Sygnatowicz's arrest, and at the end, there were not two but six of them hiding in the forest and then in Sygnatowicz's attic until the Soviet troops came¹⁸².

Finally, approximately in the late 1980s, Klara Szrenzel-Reich submitted a short testimony to Yad Vashem for recognition of the brother and sister Sygnatowicz, Karol and Franciszka, Righteous among the Nations¹⁸³. In this story, she met Karol first in 1942 when he came to Szrenzel to exchange some food for clothes he needed – maybe, this was the business with her father which Klara mentioned in the second testimony. Also, he was, again, sheltering Klara's sister before she died, and there were seven of them hiding in the forest and then at the Sygnatowicz's attic in late 1943 – early 1944. Klara also mentioned Sygnatowicz's forest bunker with about two dozen Jews but is not that the Pole was ever arrested by the Nazis for sheltering Jews after the hideout was revealed¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁰ "The Life of Horrors of Mrs. Klara Reich-Schrenzel."

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Sygnatowicz Karol; Sister: Franciszka, The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem.

¹⁸⁴ Sygnatowicz Karol; Sister: Franciszka.

Inconsistencies and contradictions like these may be mostly attributed to the writers' mistakes rather than the changing attitudes and memory tricks of those who testified. They may be also disregarded as serious by the majority of researchers, however, they did matter for microhistorical research, for example, in this case, when I try to analyse issues of ethnicity and behavioural patterns it dictated as it is usually claimed in the scholarly literature. After all, according to her testimony, Klara Szrenzel met a number of rescuers and saviours but almost all of them remained nameless; the same with denunciators, collaborators, and perpetrators.

The advantage of working with still living people is that inconsistencies and contradictions in their accounts can be immediately addressed and cross-checked; but the long-time inaccessibility of Ukrainian – and, to a lesser extent, Polish – sources in the Communist period and partly also in chaotic early post-communists years resulted in numerous possibilities to enrich the Holocaust databases being gone. In the village of Plebanivka near Terebovlya, for example, I tried to find any information about a local old Ukrainian woman about whom I learned from Polish oral accounts and who reportedly saved local Jews fleeing the Nazi massacres but there was already no one remembering her. The same is partly true about the other underresearched massacres: the story repeated, for example, in Ostrivets with my unsuccessful attempts to find Zygmunt Waniewicz's burial place or any relatives of a Ukrainian man at whose gravestone in the local cemetery it was written that he was killed by "a Polish gang" in 1945.

Inconsistencies and contradictions in the Jewish testimonies together with such a tiny number of survivors who could testify apparently led also to failures to find justice. When in 1946, the court in Munich was hearing the case of Volodymyr Vavryshyn (Polish: Wawryszyn), a Ukrainian Trembowla mayor under the Nazi occupation, accused by several Holocaust survivors of murders of Jews he committed personally, as the survivors insisted,

the judges dismissed one account after another because some of the witnesses already emigrated leaving only written testimonies which the court found unreliable based on contradicting accounts of German and Ukrainian witnesses who, as it was clear from the short remarks in the court decision, were themselves somehow connected with the local Nazi administration in the town¹⁸⁵. The remaining Jewish witnesses were proclaimed unreliable because they repeated what they heard from others but did not see themselves¹⁸⁶. Although there are no names in the court documents, it is clear from biographic details they provided that one of the witnesses was Stepan Mochnatsky, a Ukrainian Greek-Catholic priest in Trembowla from the late 1900s until 1944 when he, like Vavryshyn and many others, fled the approaching Soviets with the retreating Germans¹⁸⁷. In several sources, his son Bohdan was mentioned as the head of the Ukrainian police in the town. In the Yad Vashem database, a picture of him was placed in an album of Nazi war criminals¹⁸⁸ but testimonies against him were signed apparently by the same people who testified against Vavryshyn¹⁸⁹, meaning, that there was probably no sense bringing Mochnatsky's case to the court as well.

¹⁸⁵ Lfd.Nr.099 JuNSV Bd.III S.429.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Bohdan Mochnackyj, Commander of the Ukrainian militia in Trembowla, in An album prepared after the war by the Jewish History Committee in Muenchen for the purpose of documenting the activity of German war criminals, Yad Vashem.

¹⁸⁹ Testimony of the Jewish Historical Documentation Center in Linz against Bodham Mochnacky, commander of the Ukrainian Militia and editor of the Ukrainian newspaper in Trembowla, "Trembowla Vista," Yad Vashem.

Conclusions

The existing scholarly literature about the Holocaust and mass massacres in Eastern Galicia operates mainly with the category of the ethnicity of actors which is considered a main driving force for their “typical” behaviour as Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. It leads to a certain bias of assigning roles to actors according to their ethnic origin instead of analysing their actions before putting a person in a certain category, if possible – and if needed. In this work, I tried to show that with the microhistorical approach, the categorisation accepted in academia does not seem so obvious and solid and that it leads to serious fallacies, omissions, and unforgivable oversimplifications that inspire dubious conclusions and deprive the research field of valuable insights into mass atrocities committed by civilians and paramilitary groups under various – strong and weak – occupational regimes. I showed that often, ethnic identity in the borderland was either absent or vague and changing under changing circumstances and could be rather imposed by a community or violent forces from outside than chosen. I also showed that the exact identity – and loyalty – of a person in the borderland might contradict his or her assigned place in a specific community and that this contradiction itself might cause personal tragedies in an extreme situation when one is often forced to take sides. I also showed that accounts by non-Jewish witnesses – largely ignored by scholars especially when it comes to the Holocaust – about Nazi and other connected atrocities – not only enrich but also correct the narrative about the 1939-1945 terrors.

Barbara Seidel, a Polish daughter and a granddaughter of former Trembowla locals, called one of the collections of Trembowla accounts she compiled and published *Human and Unhuman Stories*, and I would not find a better name for the 1939-1945 period in that borderland. My job here was to look for humanity when and where the majority of professional historians, as it seems, failed to see a human. Not ethnic groups but separate people were acting in the cases I described. Almost all of those whom I mentioned, except

Klara Szrenzel and Franciszek Galonski who expressed themselves as highly devoted to their “imagined” ethnic communities, defined themselves mostly in accordance with circumstances, available opportunities, and possible benefits or losses and dangers than a certain religious institution they used to visit. In any case, these were specific situations which forced people to be sometimes more Polish, Ukrainian, or Jewish than they wanted, like in the case when Galonski’s Ukrainian colleague refused to talk with him out of fear of other Ukrainians. In villages, civilians – it happened, that in Galicia those were mostly Ukrainians – were common victims of what Zygmunt Krämer called “blind terror” by all the parties involved: the Soviets, the Nazis, and “ours” no matter who they were, either their Ukrainian or Polish neighbours committing mutual massacres, OUN and UPA people from somewhere, or non-aligned criminal gangs. It created an atmosphere of fear which outlasted the Nazi occupation, World War II, the Soviet OUN hunt of the late 1940s and early 1950s, as well as the hunt of Soviets by the OUN, and even the entire Soviet Union. When I interviewed the last witnesses of those events in the late 2010s, they automatically switched to a whisper while talking about the OUN no matter that some continued calling them “our guys.” They switched to a whisper but they talked because, finally, there was someone from the world outside in those dying villages to ask and to listen.

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