# BEYOND THE COLONIAL EYE:

UKRAINIAN FEMALE PHOTOGRAPHER PARASKA PLYTKA-HORYTSVIT, 1954-1991

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines personal documents, including memoirs and letters, and a portion of the photographic collection left behind by Ukrainian-Hutsul woman photographer Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (1927-1998). It places her work in the context of her complex life and the broader political history of her time.

I incorporate the analytical framework of gender, as articulated by gender historian Joan Scott while considering its intersections with factors such as ethnicity, class, religion, and rurality. I also apply the lenses of decoloniality and inter-imperiality throughout two main analytical chapters.

My primary findings indicate that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit who remained single throughout her life, had a loving relationship with her mother and developed numerous close friendships, predominantly with women. Secondly, concerning Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photography, I observed that her pictures depict her intimate connection with and immersion within the community and the environment of her region, Hutsulshchyna.

Together, these findings challenge the dominant heteronormative narrative about or interpretation of her life as a woman who, because she remained single and childless, was therefore unhappy and unfulfilled. Furthermore, these findings provide a new perspective on her photographs. I argue that Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive is notable for its unique representation of the photographer's close relationships and connections with the community and the land.



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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference. I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 20,343 words

Entire manuscript: 23, 218 words

Signed: Yuliia Kishchuk

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# INTRODUCTION

This academic journey began in the summer of 2017 when I by chance visited a small local exhibition at the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Memorial Museum in Kryvorivnia, Ukraine. Oksana Rybaruk, a poet and, at that time, a museum worker, kindly introduced me to the photographs of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (1927-1998), which were displayed on the museum walls. I still vividly recall the affection I experienced towards those photographs. Oksana Rybaruk recounted several stories about locals who frequented the exhibition to gaze upon their departed relatives and reflect upon their youth's images. My brief exchange with Oksana Rybaruk significantly influenced my perspective on photography as a tool for representing the community and preserving people's memories of it for over three decades.

This thesis aims to analyze Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs and private materials, including memoirs and letters, through gender and decolonial perspectives. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit remained single throughout her life. It is crucial to underscore that this study does not endeavor to construct a biography but aims to problematize specific narratives surrounding the heteronormative understanding of love and relationships, which cast

unmarried women as lonely and unfulfilled. As I argue, Plytka-Horytsvit's materials serve as valuable sources for contemplating relationships in their diverse manifestations, encompassing human and more-than-human connections.

I incorporate the analytical framework of gender, formulated by gender historian Joan Scott, while considering its intersections with various factors such as ethnicity, class, religion, and rural context, especially in discussions related to specific photographs. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I argue that Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive stands out for its distinct representation of the photographer's profound relationships and connections with the community and the land.

### *1.1 Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (1927-1998): a Self-Taught Female Photographer*

This short biographic note for this thesis primarily focuses on Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's identity as a photographer. However, I also briefly discuss her main life events relevant to the thesis. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was born in 1927 in the East Carpathian village of Bystrets, modern-day Ukraine. When she was three, her parents moved to Kryvorivnia, where Plytka-Horytsvit lived for the rest of her life. She remained unmarried and did not have children.

Plytka-Horytsvit finished a four-year primary school and was home-schooled by her father, Stefan,[1] who taught her Polish and German languages. In 1943, when Galicia was under Nazi occupation, Plytka-Horytsvit was sent to Nazi Germany as an Ostarbeiter (Germ. Eastern worker; a forced laborer from Central and Eastern Europe who was working in Nazi Germany). She returned to Kryvorivnia in 1944, presumably working as a secretary for the Ukrainian Insurgent Army which fought against the Soviet Red Army.[2]

[1] Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography," 29.
[2] Ibid, 28.

On March 10th of 1945, the Soviet authorities arrested Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. According to the official documents, Plytka was accused of aiding the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armiia, UPA) using the alias "lastivka" (meaning "martlet"). Her NKVD case report alleges that "she provided the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army[3] with four sweaters, four pairs of socks, three pairs of gloves, 50 kg of potatoes, 2 kg of butter, 2 kg of wool, and 1 kg of bacon".[4] The file also notes that she had been employed as a secretary for the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN)[5] in Kryvorivnia since January 1945.

The trial for Plytka-Horytsvit's case took place in a closed room without witnesses.[6] Her detention started in 1946. Initially, she was sent to a detention camp in the Perm region in the Urals. Due to the inhumane conditions there, she got her legs frostbitten; she was relocated and spent the remaining period of her imprisonment (from 1950) in a camp for disabled people in Spassk (Kazakhstan). For five years after her release, she was walking with crutches.[7] Luckily, her health subsequently improved and there were no lasting effects on her physical health. In 1954, due to the politics of de-Stalinization, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was allowed to return to Kryvorivnia, even though she was rehabilitated only in 1992, after Ukraine had become an independent state.[8]



[3] Ukrainian Insurgent Army is a controversial military and political right-wing nationalistic formation which was active in Western Ukraine during 1942-1949. Source: Himka, John-Paul. "The organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army: unwelcome elements of an identity project." *Ab Imperio* (2010): 83-101.

[4] Archive of the Department of Security Service of Ukraine in Ivano-Frankivsk Region. Case 8717П, 75.

[5] The Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army were far-right political and military organisations. Their strategy of achieving Ukrainian Independence consisted of violence against external enemies, ethnic cleansing, establishing traditional family values, etc. The main goal of the OUN UPA was Ukrainian Independence and the building of a mono-ethnic national state. During World War II they were fighting against the Soviet army, Communist Poland, and Nazi Germany.

[6] Rohachuk, "Uv'aznena "Lastivka": jak MGB represuvav Parasku Plytku-Horytsvit", Lokalna Istoriia, 2021.

[7] Inga Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography". In *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv, 2019), 30.

[8] Ibid, 30.

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started photographing in 1955 when she bought her first camera, a Smena 2, popular in the early Khrushchev Thaw (1956-1962). Plytka-Horytsvit bought this camera with the money she earned from working at the Krasnoyilsk forestry enterprise, where she was employed from 1955 to 1974.[9] Plytka-Horytsvit was hired there as someone who could paint posters and was literate enough to write texts for the enterprise. In a short interview, Plytka-Horytsvit's relative Vasylyna Kharuk recalls that the job title was "an artist"; however, the responsibilities for this job were closer to what we might call designing. Kharuk also recalls that one of the main reasons why Plytka-Horytsvit wanted to buy a camera was to photograph local animals and plants, and so to be able to illustrate the forestry posters with realistic images.[10] Additionally, in her memoir (to which I will come back later), Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit mentions that while working in the Kryvopillia forestry, she did other types of labor associated with forestry, like planting trees and cutting wood.[11]

Plytka-Horytsvit did not take money in exchange for her photos. However, Ivan Zelenchuk, an ethnographer from Kryvorivnia who knew Plytka-Horytsvit during her lifetime, mentions that sometimes she was photographing people in exchange for photo materials such as photo paper and film. In my interview, he recalled that people in Kryvorivnia knew that Plytka-Horytsvit took good photographs, so they asked her to make them a portrait or photograph some of their significant life events.[12]

Describing the main developments in Soviet photography during the Thaw, historian of Soviet photography Jessica Warneke states that amateur photographers didn't have access to facilities to process their films. Thus, Soviet amateurs, like professional photographers,



[9] Kateryna Radchenko, "Kuratorskyy Pohliad Kateryny Radchenko. Znayty Parasky Plytku-Horytsvit," The Kyiv Review, May 2020, Retrieved from: https://rozmova.wordpress.com/2021/06/05/kateryna-radchenko-3/
[10] Ivano-Frankivsk Television, "Etnoskrynnia. Pro Takant Parasky Plytky-Horytsvit," Youtube Video, 16.31, September 2nd, 2019, Невичерпне джерело. Етноскриня. Про талант та долю Параски Плитки-Горицвіт
[11] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, "Memoir", unpublished, typed by Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk.
[12] Interview with Ivan Zelenchuk, conducted in Kryvorivnia 12/09/2021.

had to be skilled in developing and processing their films. This led to a culture of self-reliance and technical expertise among amateurs.[13] Warneke argues that compared to the US photographic sphere, Soviet boundaries between professional and amateur photographers were significantly blurred.[14] As in Plytka-Horytsvit's case, the geographical remoteness from urban centers played a crucial role in the accessibility of photographic materials such as photo chemicals, film, and photo paper. Ukrainian visual scholar Kateryna Radchenko states that for approximately twenty years before the mid-1970s, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit used her workplace in Kryvopillia to develop her film. Only in 1975, when Plytka-Horytsvit's house was connected to the Soviet electrification system, did she move film development facilities to her house.[15]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit pursued photography as a self-taught practitioner. Consequently, she did not have any formal photography training, nor did she involve herself in the amateur photo clubs that were widespread in urban centers across the Soviet Union.[16] Instead, she acquired her photographic skills by immersing herself in Soviet photographic publications like *Sovetskoye Photo* (Soviet Photo) and *Ogoniek* (Spark), which she received from friends and acquaintances, primarily photographers residing in larger cities.[17] A letter from a Kyiv-based photographer, Sergiy Marchenko (Figure 1.2), 1977 exemplifies that her colleagues from Kyiv sent her literature on Soviet photography, often also sending some of their pictures, photographic chemicals, and photo paper; discussing the photographic production and sharing artistic and technical tips.[18]



[13] Werneke, "The Boundaries of Art," 2015, 200.
[14] Werneke, "The Boundaries of Art," 2015, 201.
[15] Radchenko, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive. When a photograph tells a story",155.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Kateryna Radchenko, "Kuratorskyy Pohliad Kateryny Radchenko. Znayty Parasky Plytku-Horytsvit," https://rozmova.wordpress.com/2021/06/05/kateryna-radchenko-3/
[18] An excerpt of the letter: "P.S. I still remember my promise. I will send you chemicals for the photography very soon. I am also sending you four slides." (translation and emphasis – YK). I accessed and scanned these letters in Plytka-Horytsvit's private archive in Kryvorivnia in August 2021.

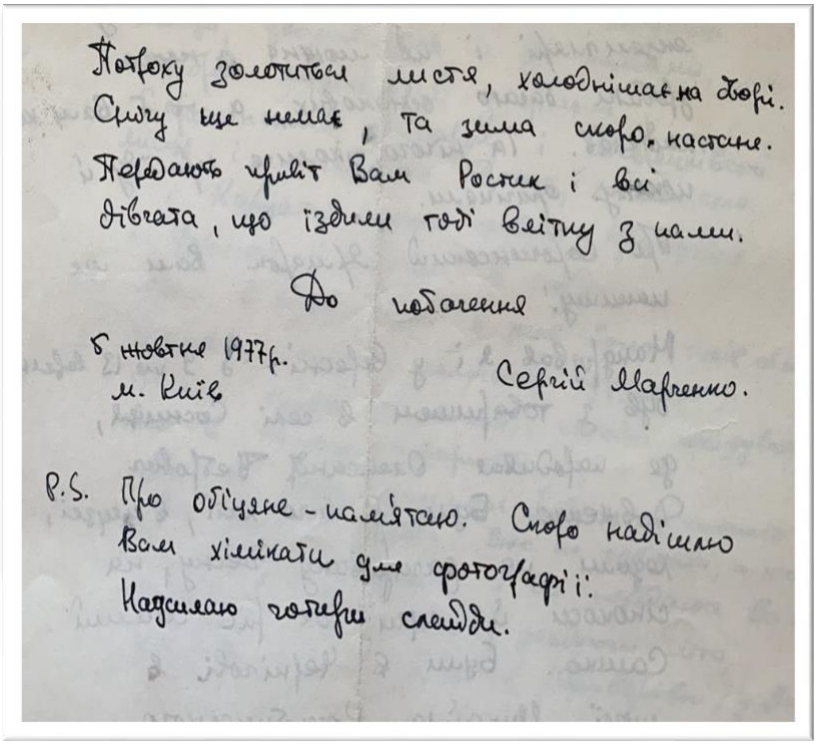
Потроху золотиться листя, холоднішає на дворі.
Снігу ще немає, та зима скоро настане.
Передають привіт Вам Росток і всі
дівчата, що їздили тоді влітку з нами.
До побачення
5 жовтня 1977р.
м. Київ
Сергій Марченко.
P.S. Про обіцяне - пам'ятаю. Скоро надішлю
Вам хімікати для фотографії.
Надсилаю поточні слайди.

Figure 1.2 A Letter from Kyiv-based photographer Serhii Marchenko (October the 5th, 1977)

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was not isolated from the Ukrainian Soviet photographic community. Kateryna Radchenko suggests that Plytka-Horytsvit actively tried various popular photo printing methods in the Ukrainian SSR from the 1950s to the 1970s. Radchenko emphasizes that Plytka-Horytsvit decorated her printed snapshots by adding color to the black-and-white photos. Such a technique was called "luriks"; it was popular in East Ukrainian SSR, particularly in Kharkiv. Furthermore, Plytka-Horytsvit actively crafted vignettes. This artistic process entailed creating collages by superimposing diverse layers of materials, ranging from personal texts to dried flora.[19] The vignetted photographs gained traction among Soviet photographers during the 1960s. However, as Radchenko mentions, the origin of the vignette itself can be traced back to the 19th century.[20]

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit lived most of her life in her native village of Kryvorivnia. There she was collecting the local folklore, photographing places and people, working. Plytka-Horytsvit passed away at the age of seventy-one. The prevailing account of her death attributes it to a severe cold, exacerbated by the lack of someone by her side to provide care.[21] She bequeathed her entire archive, including her photographs, to the community of Kryvorivnia.

### *1.2 Photography during the Khrushchev Thaw (1956-1962)*

This section briefly discusses the development of photography during the Khrushchev Thaw, and provides the context in which Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice emerged. The Thaw, often referred to as de-Stalinization, was the period between 1956 and 1962 during which Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev presided over the process of relative liberalization and reformation of Soviet society.[22] Khrushchev tried to revive aspects of the communist program of the 1920s, such as internationalism, egalitarianism, and the pursuit of modernity or "contemporaneity" (sovremennost).[23] According to Susan E. Reid, a renowned scholar of the visual and gender politics of the Thaw period, the Thaw also revived pre-Stalinist attitudes toward the photographic medium, with some additional developments in the post-war context.[24]

Khrushchev's version of communism was defined by scientific and technological progress, the production and importation of consumer goods, and the breaking down of the division between intellectual and manual work. The politics of aesthetics during the Khrushchev period were grounded in Karl Marx's idea of broadening access to cultural and aesthetic education and enlightening the "masses." People were not just consumers but also



[21] Interview with Ivan Kuzmovych, 09/01/2022.
[22] Susan E. Reid, "Masters of the Earth: Gender and Destalinisation in Soviet Reformist Painting of the Khrushchev Thaw," *Gender & History* 11, no. 2 (July 1999): 276, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00143.
[23] Susan E. Reid, "Destalinization and Taste, 1953-1963," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997): 177.
[24] Susan Emily Reid, "Photography in the Thaw," *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (June 1994): 33, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1994.10791623.

producers. Considering the relative availability of photography, it was presented as the most democratic medium, enabling working-class people to participate in visual production.[25] Similarly to the 1920s, in the 1950s and 1960s, photography was presented as a tool to propagate technological progress and modernization, especially space-related developments. It was part of the Thaw modernization's politics to ensure Soviet citizens gained "photographic" literacy. Additionally, Reid argues that photography was an essential tool of Soviet internationalism, "an international language, comprehensible even to illiterate peoples in the developing countries emerging under Soviet tutelage from beneath the yoke of imperialism."[26]

Two main tools that enabled the wide spread of photography were professional and amateur photo clubs and special journals such as *Sovetskoje Photo* and *Ogoniek*. The mass production of Soviet photographic cameras and the rapid development of the photographic industry were also partially an outcome of World War II. The technological advancement was brought to the Soviet Union as part of Germany's war reparations. Initially, the Soviets took camera equipment and film from Germany. They then improved and developed this technology to make affordable, widely available cameras, film, and photographic chemicals for home use. As a result, coupled with a rise in the overall Soviet material standard of living, cameras became accessible to almost every Soviet household for the first time in their history.[27]

Reid notes that photography under Khrushchev's rule was merely seen as direct documentation of reality, providing "eyewitness authenticity."[28] In retrospect, the most prioritized genres during the Thaw were reportage and documentary photography. This



[25] Reid, 33.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Jessica Marie Werneke, "The Boundaries of Art : Soviet Photography from 1956 to 1970" (University of Texas, 2015), 167, https://doi.org/10.15781/T2C01V.
[28] Ibid.

conceptualization opposed Stalinist aesthetic policies[29], primarily the social realism in arts and photography, that was associated with the lack of individuality and "truth." As a result, conversations about the essence of realism started to prioritize the photographer's involvement and the personal, expressive, and persuasive utilization of the medium.[30]

### *1.3 Hutsulshchyna: A Very Brief Geographic and Historical Context*



Figure 1.3&1.4. Polish and Ukrainian maps of Hutsul Region[31]

Hutsulshchyna is an ethno-cultural region in contemporary Ukraine situated in the southeastern corner of the Galician Carpathians, positioned between the Prut and Czeremosz (Cheremosh) rivers. This geographical area encompasses the mountainous river valleys and settlements established along them. The mountain range itself acted as a boundary between

[29] During Stalin's rule, photography was considered too dangerous a form of artistic expression within the Soviet Union. This was evident when he expelled photographers from the Artist's Union in 1932, closed down several photography publications, and even imprisoned renowned photographers. Source: Werneke, "The Boundaries of Art," 2015, 168.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Map 1, by Daniel P. Huffman. Source: Patrice M. Dabrowski, "Discovering the Highlands of Poland and Ukraine", Cornell University Press, Northern Illinois University Press. (2021), 67.
Map 2, featuring Kryvorivnia, by Kateryna Kryhlyk, 2022. Source: Zaborona

Galicia and Hungary on the western side, whereas the swiftly flowing White Czeremosh served as the demarcation line between Galicia and the Habsburg province of Bukovyna to the south.[32] In my thesis, I primarily focus on the Galician side of Hutsulshchyna. Before WWII, Hutsulshchyna was a multiethnic region inhabited by Ukrainians (Ruthenians), Poles, Jews, and Armenians. However, the primary population of Hutsulshchyna consisted of Hutsuls, who strongly identified with the place they dwelled in. Historian Patrice Dabrowski writes that Hutsuls did not develop a distinct national identity until the end of the nineteenth century:

> If the identity of the Hutsuls was a quintessentially local one, tied to the unforgiving yet sublime terrain that over the centuries had shaped the life patterns of this pastoral people, the "discovery" of the Hutsuls raised (among others) the national question. It did so in a way not seen in the Pyrenees by offering membership in nations that were both stateless and still very much works (sic) in progress: the Polish and the Ruthenian/Ukrainian.[33]

Sheep herding and forestry were the traditional primary occupation for Hutsuls.[34] While traditional ways of life began diminishing during the Soviet era, a significant portion of the Hutsul population still reside in the high mountains. Additionally, the forest served as another crucial means of sustenance for the Hutsuls, who gathered berries and mushrooms for trade. In the late 19th century, narrow-gauge railroads were introduced across various mountain regions to facilitate the logging industry. During the Soviet era, logging in the Carpathians transformed into a major industry, contributing to sixty percent of all timber production in Soviet Ukraine, despite the region accounting for just twenty-two percent of the USSR's

[32] Patrice M. Dabrowski, *The Carpathians: Discovering the Highlands of Poland and Ukraine* (Cornell University Press, 2021), 66.
[33] Dabrowski, *The Carpathians*. 68.
[34] Kubijovyc, V. 1988a. “Carpathian Mountains,” in Encyclopedia of Ukraine, first edition edition, vol. I (A-F). Edited by V. Kubijovyc, pp. 366-374. Toronto University of Toronto Press. 371.

timber.[35] This Soviet logging industry triggered a substantial and alarming deforestation of the mountains. Although post-Soviet efforts toward conservation and reforestation have been initiated, they have been insufficient in scope.[36]

Hutsulshchyna was part of the Habsburg Empire from 1772 to 1918. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, it became part of the state of Poland. With World War II's outbreak and Poland's demolition, Galician Hutsulshchyna was annexed into the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.[37] From June 1941 to September 1944, Hutsulshchyna was occupied by Nazi Germany. In late 1944, the Soviet Red Army re-established its rule over Galician Hutsulshchyna, which remained part of USSR until the proclamation of the Ukrainian Independence in 1991.[38]

Canadian-Ukrainian historian John-Paul Himka claims that strong anti-Soviet sentiment in the West of Ukraine was triggered by the Holodomor (Human-made Famine of 1932-1933) and the mass murder of Ukrainian intellectuals, mainly known as Rozstriliane Vidrodzhennia (Executed Renaissance or Red Renaissance). The West Ukrainian intellectuals who had emigrated to Soviet Ukraine in the early 1920s were rounded up and condemned to death during the Great Terror (August 1937 – November 1938).[39] Additionally the man-made famine Holodomor (1932-1933), caused by the rapid collectivization of agriculture, took from five to four million lives in Soviet Ukraine. Ukrainians have lived under Soviet rule since 1919 in Great Ukraine (Velyka Ukraina) and were escaping the land



[35] Ibid, 373.
[36] Mariia Sonevytsky. "Wild Music: Ideologies of Exoticism in Two Ukrainian Borderlands - ProQuest," accessed August 25, 2023, https://www.proquest.com/docview/919007904, 59.
[37] C. M. Hann and Paul R. Magocsi, *Galicia: A Multicultured Land* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 6.
[38] Ibid.
[39] I. Honcharenko, "The Executed Renaissance" (Kharkiv National University, 2023), http://95.164.172.68:8080/khkdak-xmlui/handle/123456789/2235.

devastated by hunger searching for food in the West of Ukraine.[40] These events shaped strong anti-Soviet/anti-Russian sentiment among the population, which led to significant support for OUN UPA among the civilian population.

### *1.4 Primary Sources*

The archive I explored in Kryvorivnia has an informal and partially private character. The documents are accommodated within a local school, since their return from a 2020 exhibition about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's life and artistic practice held in Kyiv. A substantial portion of these documents underwent scrupulous categorization and was placed in folders and envelopes, making it easier to retrieve specific texts.

My primary focus was directed towards two memoirs: the first one Plytka Horytsvit crafted after her return from the Gulag, and the second one composed in 1992. The initial memoir, "Ostannij Reis" (The Last Journey), hand-written by Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit in 1962, reflects various events and experiences of her Gulag detention. In my analysis of this memoir, I focused on the themes of dehumanization within the Gulag camp and instances of gender-based solidarity.

The second memoir, composed by Plytka-Horytsvit and later transcribed by Oksana Rybaruk, carries no formal appellation or official heading. This particular piece, dated 1992, was presented to me by Oksana Rybaruk during my inaugural fieldwork in Kryvorivnia, in the summer of 2021. A more comprehensive exploration of this memoir is undertaken in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, I examined an extensive collection of correspondence. Here, I focused on Plytka-Horytsvit's interactions with other Soviet photographers. To conduct a visual



[40] Almost every family in Ukraine has a Holodomor-related story. When I was a child, my great grandmother, who lived in the West of Ukraine, was telling me a story about a very thin and exhausted woman who came to her house and started to eat from a dog plate that was standing near the house. That was how my great grandma learned about what is happening in Soviet Ukraine.

analysis, I accessed already developed and scanned photographs, which Inga Levi, an artist and photographer, kindly sent to me on request. Unfortunately, I could not access the original film rolls, which are stored in Kyiv. This limitation restricted the depth of my visual analysis, as I could not provide comprehensive expertise on the photographs' conditions. These conditions may have worsened due to inappropriate physical storage, resulting in scars, mold, and other signs of deterioration over time.

### *1.5 Methods*

#### Semi-Structures Interviews

I carried out two fieldwork sessions in Kryvorivnia: the first during the summer and autumn of 2021, and the second in January 2022. My primary focus during the first visit was archival work, involving the scanning and thoroughly reading Plytka-Horytsvit's extensive collection of private materials, including letters, albums, postcards, and memoirs. Additionally, I conducted three interviews during my time in Kryvorivnia. The second fieldwork visit was centered around interviews. I also created an interview guide, which is available in Appendix 1. During this phase, I interviewed five people. I held repeat interviews with two respondents, Olena Bilak and Ivan Zelenchuk.

#### Visual Analysis

Given that my research pertains to photographs, visual analysis is one of the central methodologies within this thesis. I will employ semiotic analysis, a framework initially introduced by Roland Barthes and further elucidated by John Berger. In his influential work *Ways of Seeing*, the British art historian John Berger argues that every cultural artifact, whether it takes the form of a photograph, film, artwork, television program, or

advertisement, constitutes a textual entity comprising signs that warrant careful reading and interpretation. I further describe the analytical framework for this thesis in Chapter Four.[41]

### *1.6 Thesis Outline*

In Chapter One, I address the primary literature relevant to this thesis. I provide an overview and discussion of recent historiography concerning women photographers, particularly those from Ukraine and Eastern Europe. Additionally, I explore recent narratives concerning Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit.

Chapter Two, the theoretical framework, aims to position Ukraine in ongoing discussions surrounding decoloniality. This chapter also elucidates the key concepts and theoretical advancements relevant to the thesis, among them the historian Joan Scott's influential 1986 article "Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis."

Chapter Three presents a comprehensive analysis of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs and correspondence alongside the findings from interviews I conducted in a Ukrainian village of Kryvorivnia. The primary objective is to gain insights into the multifaceted life experiences of Plytka-Horytsvit, employing the analytical frameworks of intersectionality and decoloniality. The examination encompasses marginalized historical and personal narratives, communal bonds, familial relationships, and ecological awareness.

In Chapter Four, I engage in an examination and discussion of a selection of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs. This analysis is conducted through the lens of semiotics, serving as the primary analytical framework, additionally applying the lenses of gender and decoloniality. I also briefly delve into Plytka-Horytsvit's positionality, encompassing her gendered and local perspectives, which significantly shaped her interpretation of the land and the community.



[41] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, London, Harmondsworth: British Broadcasting Corp. : Penguin Books, British Broadcasting Corporation; Penguin, 1973).

Chapter Four is divided into two distinct segments: "Representing the Land" and "Representing the Community." The first segment centers on Plytka-Horytsvit's landscape photography, offering a focused exploration. The subsequent segment directs attention towards diverse portrayals of individuals, encompassing individual and collective portraits, religious occasions, and snapshots of everyday life.

In the Thesis conclusion, I reiterate my findings and reflect on possibilities for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review on several research topics relevant to my thesis. First, I overview the current historiography of Ukrainian Women's and Gender History (WGH) and identify the key researchers and approaches similar to what I plan to do in my work. In part two, I will review what has been written about women artists and photographers in Ukraine and worldwide. I will examine how these publications incorporate and approach Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice. In section 1.3, I will review the publication about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (1927-1998) from 1998 to 2015. Lastly, in section 1.4, I will focus my attention on the period from 2015 to 2022 since it was a period when Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive was found and popularized. In this respect, I will analyze contemporary (2015-2022) academic and non-academic publications about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, which conceptualize her as a photographer.

A Hutsul Ukrainian photographer, writer, and artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit deserves an important place in Ukrainian and Global Art History. As I analyzed many publications about her life and photography, I realized, however, that the critical and academic engagement with her biography and photographic heritage is very limited. More precisely, no scholarly work has examined her lived experiences and photographic heritage from intersectional and decolonial perspectives. My thesis aims to fill these gaps by adding my analysis to the recent publications about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit my analysis of her photography of her native village Kryvorivnia from 1955 to the early 1990s in the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.

I am conscious that there are myriad ways to approach Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's work, since she left a massive literary, artistic, iconographic, ethnographic, and photographic heritage. However, since my thesis mainly engages with her photographic heritage and

reconceptualizes her as a photographer, in this literature review, I will concentrate my attention on how she as a photographer and her photographic heritage were perceived.

### *2.1 The Current Historiography of Ukrainian Gender History*

In the first part of the Literature Review, I will overview the recent historiography of Ukrainian Women's and Gender History. This section is not a complete overview of the field but focuses on the main tendencies and developments that are also relevant to my thesis. One of the fullest overviews on the development of Ukrainian Gender History more broadly was presented by Ukrainian gender historian Oksana Kis in volume 6 of the *International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History Aspasia*, published in 2010. In the article "Restoring the Broken Continuity. Women's History in Post-Soviet Ukraine", Oksana Kis defines tendencies in Women's and Gender History in Ukraine.[42] She traces the main narratives, common for women's history in Ukraine:

- The narrative of Berehynia
- The narrative of a Great Woman
- The narrative of national feminism
- The narrative of women's devotion[43]

Oksana Kis asserts that present day mainstream historians tend to dissociate themselves from the Soviet academic legacy, pretending it never existed.[44] As for the more recent historiography, Soviet Era historiography remains ignored. The tendency to ignore soviet modernity often flattens the realities of people who lived through various stages of socialism in the Ukrainian SSR. I may assume that even when someone who lived during

[42] Oksana Kis, "Restoring the Broken Continuity. Women's History in Post-Soviet Ukraine", *Aspasia* vol. 6 (2012): 173, https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2012.060109
[43] Oksana Kis, "Restoring the Broken ContinuityWomen's History in Post-Soviet Ukraine," 172.
[44] Ibid.

socialism starts to be acknowledged, aspects that connect them to the Soviet period tend to be overlooked as backward and unworthy. However, as I argue in my thesis, it is essential to look how Soviet modernity impacted Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice.

In addition, it is essential to mention that narratives and tendencies, which Oksana Kis defines earlier, are still relevant. However, an alternative approach to Women's and Gender History and nationalism in Ukraine appeared in the recent decade. One example is a critical rethinking of the Ukrainian nationalist underground[45] through a gender lens, focusing on women's experiences in OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), as in the work of the Ukrainian gender historian Marta Havryshko, who uses testimonies of women who participated in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.[46] Havryshko focuses on gender-based violence in OUN UPA and the sexuality of women who actively participated in the guerilla.[47] Another Ukrainian historian, Olesya Khromeychuk, in her article "Militarizing Women in the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement from the 1930s to the 1950s", rethinks celebratory discourses on women's participation in nationalist organizations and claims that their mobilization was possible because there was no alternative Ukrainian nation-building project to the nationalist one at that time.[48]

Current-day Ukrainian Women's and Gender History predominantly focuses on the 20th century and engages with the impact of modernization on women's lived experiences. As an example, the recent book *Ukrainis'ki Zhinky v Hornyli Modernizatsii* (Ukrainian Women in the Crucible of Modernization, 2017), edited by Oksana Kis, contains articles by



[45] UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) is Ukrainian paramilitary organization, established in October 1942. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army, led by Stepan Bandera, resisted Soviet, Polish, and German occupation. However, some of the current historical reearches state that some branches of UPA collaborated with Nazi Germany. More information: John-Paul Himka, "The organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army: unwelcome elements of an identity project," *Ab Imperio* volume 4 (2010): 83-101.

[46] The Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists was a right-wing political and military organization, established in 1929 in Vienna by Ukrainian nationalist Yevhen Konovalets.

[47] Marta Havryshko, "Love and Sex in Wartime," *Aspasia*, vol. 12 (2018): 35, https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2018.120103

[48] Olesya Khromeychuk, "Militarizing Women in the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement from the 1930s to the 1950s", *Aspasia*, vol. 12 (2018): 1, https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2018.120102

such Ukrainian gender historians as Mariana Bajdak, Olha Bezhuk, Maryna Voronina, Marta Havryshko, Olena Stiazhkina, and others, and mainly focuses on the experiences of Ukrainian women who lived through the major events of the 20th century (WWI and WWII, the Human-made Famine Holodomor 1932-1933).[49] In my research, I also engage with the impact of modernity, in my case the Soviet version, and analyze how it impacted Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's life.

Besides that, current-day Ukrainian WGH historiography is marked by an anthropological approach with attention to everyday practices and the lived experiences of women who survived major tragic events of the 20th century, such as the Holodomor, WWI, and WWII, or of women who were imprisoned in Gulag labor camps. The best-known representative of that field is the already mentioned Ukrainian gender historian and anthropologist Oksana Kis. Her 2012 book *Zhinka v Tradytsiinij Ukrainskij Kulturi* (Woman in Traditional Ukrainian Culture) is a combination of oral history and archival investigation aimed to challenge false assumptions about Ukrainian traditional culture as inherently matriarchal.[50] As I also will explain in Chapter 3 by analyzing Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's materials through a gendered lens, such an attitude toward women's role traditional communities often overlook existing gender inequalities. Another publication by Oksana Kis worth mentioning is the recent article "Women's Experience of the Holodomor: Challenges and Ambiguities of Motherhood". This article explores women's experiences in Holodomor focusing on mothering and survival strategies of women who survived the human-made famine in Ukraine.[51]



[49] Oksana Kis, "Introduction," *Ukrainis'ki Zhinky v Hornyli Modernizatsii* (Klub Simejnoho Dozvillia, 2017), 6.
[50] Oksana Kis, "Introduction," in *Zhinka v Tradytsiinij Ukrainskij Kulturi* (Instytut Narodoznavstva Ukrainy, 2012), 8.
[51] Oksana Kis, Women's Experience of the Holodomor: Challenges and Ambiguities of Motherhood, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 23 (2021):527, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1834713

Oksana Kis' 2017 book *Ukrains'ki Zhinky v Gulagu: Vyzhyty Znachyt' Peremohty* (recently translated by Lidia Volyansyj as *Survival as Victory: Ukrainian Women in the Gulag,* 2020) presents the most detailed investigation about Ukrainian women in the Gulag labor camps. It is oral historical research on women's everyday experiences and practices, survival strategies, and artistic expressions. Instead of picturing Ukrainian women in Gulag as passive victims, Kis proposes to look at everyday resilience and resistance to the constant dehumanization. This book is particularly important for my thesis since my research is about Ukrainian photographer, artist, and writer Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, who spent nine and a half years in the Gulag Labor Camps – from 1946 to 1950 in a village near Perm in Urals and in the village Spassk in Kazakhstan from 1950 to 1954.[52] In line with Oksana Kis, I will analyze Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's artistic expression as a strategy to overcome her traumatic past. In my research I attempt to look at the Gulag not only as a concrete place or institution but also as one of the symptoms of Soviet coloniality. However, unlike the research conducted by Oksana Kis, my thesis will not analyze private materials Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit wrote during the imprisonment but rather diaries and correspondence written after she returned back to Kryvorivnia and started to photograph.

Even though WGH in Ukraine significantly developed in the recent ten years, Ukrainian Women's and Gender history is often missing or limitedly represented in the global historiography on gender and women from former state socialist countries. Despite the fact that there is more attention to Soviet gender history, the central focus remains on Russia as the main symbolic heir of the Soviet Union and also a dominant power in the region. Therefore, Ukrainian, Belorusian, Central Asian, Caucasian, and non-Russian women from the Russian Federation are less represented in the Western historiography. For example, in

[52] Inga Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography". In *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv: NACM Mystetskyi Arsenal, 2019), 30.

the recent *Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, the vast majority of chapters are dedicated to Soviet-Russia and post-Soviet Russia.[53] Such a limited focus causes an oversimplified and homogeneous understanding of the so-called Soviet Union which leads to overlooking existing imperial power hierarchies within the region.[54] This scholarship also predominantly focuses on the marginalized position of the Russian Federation and of Russian women in relation to the West, often ignoring how Russia is subalternazing its ex-colonies or internally colonized non-Slavic ethnic groups.[55] I assume that one of the main reasons for such lack of attention to Ukrainian, Belorussian, Caucasian and non-ethnically Russian women in Russia is the transformation of Sovietology departments into Russian Studies in the Northern American context from 1991 to the current days. Another reason is the significant lack of recent scholarship that problematizes the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation as imperial projects. However, such attitudes are beginning to shift.

As an example, in the recent Routledge collection *Borderlands in European Gender Studies: Beyond the East-West Frontier* (2019), gender historian Yulia Gradskova addresses the importance of including voices and experiences of non-Russian women in the history of the Soviet Union. By applying decolonial theory to Russian and Soviet Gender History, Gradskova proposes to refocus the scholarship from the central policies and women's organizations to inner-Soviet power dynamics and hierarchies. Gradskova claims that besides the gendered lens applied to the historical analysis of the research, one should also use a decolonial lens to unpack further layers of marginalization and imperial differences. Gradskova argues that the research agenda on gender-related topics of Soviet history, created



[53] Melanie Ilic, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[54] Yulia Gradskova, "A Decolonial Perspective: Writing the "Other" Women into Soviet Gender History" in *Borderlands in European Gender Studies* (Routledge, 2019), 108.
[55] Ibid.

by such researchers as Richard Stites (1978), Mary Buckley (1989), or Wendy Goldman (1993), provided a significant base for future research but did not investigate colonial differences.[56] My research intends to place Ukraine into further debates on decolonial historical research by closely inspecting Ukrainian/Soviet relations and placing Ukraine into current decolonial debates, which I aim to address in the second chapter of this thesis.

### *2.2 Recent Publication about Women's Art History and Photography Globally and in Ukraine*

This part of the literature review addresses the major recent scholarly publications about women artists and photographers in Ukraine and western academia. The first issue I will address in this section is the lack of gendered perspective on the Soviet-period visual arts, including photography. For example, the book *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-Conformist Photography and Photo-Related Art,* published in 2004, features essays of Western/Northern and Eastern European scholars dealing with both professional and amateur photography and photographic practice in the Soviet Union. However, none of these articles contains a gender analysis or presents works of women photographers. Another book is a publication by Ukrainian-French art historian Nadiia Bernard-Kovalchuk *Kharkivska Shkola Photographiï: Gra Proty Aparatu, 2020* (Kharkiv School of Photography: a Game Against Apparatus) represents a similar tendency. Nadia Bernard-Kovalchuk extensively explains the Soviet context in which the Kharkiv School appeared in 1971 in Kharkiv, Ukrainian SSR. She describes Soviet Ukrainian politics on visuality and photography as part of the Soviet modernization. She marks the connections between Kharkiv and other Soviet centers through Soviet journals about photography, professional groups, amateur photo clubs, et cetera.[57] Most importantly, she presents interviews with members of the Kharkiv School of

[56] Ibid, p. 112
[57] Nadia Bernard-Kovalchuk, "Preface", *Kharkivska Shkola Photographii: Gra Proty Aparatu* (MOKSOP, Kharkiv 2020), 6.

Photography[58] and publishes photographic materials that were not published before. This book is important because, in the example of the Kharkiv School of Photography, it shows that the Soviet Ukrainian photographic sphere was overly male-dominated. Thus, rediscovering such names as Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and Iryna Pap challenges the stigma that women could not master photography, a presumably male hobby or profession.

The gender turn in global art history started with the 1971 seminal essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" by US American art historian Linda Nochlin. In her text, Nochlin revisits global art history from feminist and gendered perspectives by explaining which institutional and social circumstances led to the erasure of women from the white, male-dominated art world and its history.[59] This essay started a significant shift in national art histories, which aimed to recover the names of forgotten, misinterpreted, or neglected women artists. The Ukrainian version of such research, a book named *Why There Are Great Women Artists in Ukrainian Art?*, appeared in 2019 after the extensive exhibition "A Space of One's Own" with the support of the PinchukArtCentre Research Platform. As an editor of the book, Ukrainian art historian Kateryna Iakovlenko emphasizes in the introduction that this book contains a selection of essays that shed light on unknown pages of Ukrainian women artists' biographies from the 20th century till the current days.[60] This book features critical articles about such Ukrainian artists as Alla Horska, Tetiana Yablonska, Maria Prymachenko, Alexandra Ekster, and others by working with questions of physicality and sexuality. It also features archival photographs of Ukrainian Soviet photographers Iryna Pap and Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. However, these photos are not supported by critical

[58] Kharkiv School of Photography is an artistic group that emerged in the 1970s in Kharkiv, Ukrainian SSR. This school never had an official status within the USSR. Thus, most of the studying was happening in cafes and clubs. The members of the group have developed distinctive visual language over time. Kharkiv School of Photography is the most recognized photographic group from the Ukrainian SSR.
More information: https://ksp.ui.org.ua/
[59] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews,* 1971.
[60] Kateryna Yakovlenko, "A Critical Perspective," *Why There Are Great Women Artists in Ukrainian Art?* (The PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv, 2019), 10.

analysis. Photography as an artistic genre, as noticed by Ukrainian art historian Halyna Hleba, was unintentionally ignored by the authors of the book.[61]

The number of publications on women photographers from the former state socialist countries, including Ukraine, is very limited. I may assume that such a lack resulted from an often dismissive perception of visual arts practiced under the Iron Curtain. The tradition of re-reading the history of photography from gendered and feminist perspectives started in 1973 with Anne Tucker's book *The Women's Eye,* where the author explained how gender shaped both photographic production and the representation of ten US American women photographers.[62] Later on, in 1975 the exhibition Women of Photography: An Historical Survey curated by Anna Noggle and Margery Mann, was held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.[63]

The main academic research on this topic is predominantly focused on Western European and North American contexts and covers the 19th and 20th centuries. A key work on this topic is the 2010 *A World History of Women Photographers,* written by the US American historian Naomi Rosenblum (born 1952), which presents the history of women photographers from the first daguerreotype to contemporary photography.[64] This study is important because it revisits the history of photography from the women's perspective and shows that women photographers played a crucial role in the historical development of the photographic medium. However, the book lacks an intersectional analysis and a proper representation of black and/or indigenous photographers. Additionally, this book does not



[61] Halyna Hleba, "Poza Kadrom: Ukrainski Photographky u XX stolitti", in SupportYourArt: https://supportyourart.com/specialprojects/researchplatform/photo-women/
[62] Anna Tucker, The Women's EYE (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).
[63] Luce Lebart and Mary Robert, Toward a World History of Women Photographers (Thames & Hudson, 2022), 9.
[64] Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010).

include women photographers from other parts of the world besides Northern America and Western Europe and, as a result, lacks non-western perspectives.

Another book about women photographers worldwide is *Une Histoire Mondiale des Femmes Photographes*, 2020 (Toward a World History of Women Photographers, 2022), edited by art historians Luce Lebart and Marie Robert. This collection contains three hundred articles about women photographers from around the globe, including four Ukrainian women photographers: Sophia Yablonska, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, Iryna Pap and Ryta Ostrovska. The articles about them were written by four Ukrainians: writer Oksana Zabuzhko, art historians Kateryna Radchenko and Natalya Guzenko-Boudier, and curator Kateryna Filiuk. As the editors state in the introduction: "The 'desire to discover' the role of women in the history of photography has long been of secondary importance, even absent… Even when they (women photographers) succeeded in gaining true recognition by their peers in their lifetime, women have tended systematically to disappear from the broader narrative of creativity." The editors of this collaborative study try to question the western-centered nature of the field by also critically assessing possible ethnocentricity.[65]

Most critical publications about visual studies in Ukraine, both scholarly and publicist, are accumulated around online media platforms such as Bird in Flight, Support Your Art, and Korydor. The critical center for contemporary research that combines gender and visual studies is Doslidnytska Platforma (A Research Platform), which appeared as a project of the private Kyiv-based Museum of Contemporary Art PinchukArtCenter, founded and owned by Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk.[66] Additionally, in close collaboration with PinchukArt Center, there is a research center for visual art and culture, which appears around the state-owned and sponsored art institution Mystetskyi Arsenal (Art Arsenal). The main

[65] Luce Lebart and Mary Robert, Toward a World History of Women Photographers, 12.
[66] The link for the website in English: https://new.pinchukartcentre.org/

book about my protagonist, *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Podolannia Gravitacjii* (Overcoming Gravity, 2020), which I will discuss in more detail in the next part of this literature review, is a product of collective research efforts made by independent researchers who curated the exhibition Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Podolannia Gravitacjii (October 2019 to February 2020).

### *2.3 Soviet-time Historiography about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit*

The number of Soviet publications about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit is minimal. I found only one article about her, which appeared in the famous Soviet Ukrainian journal Radians'ka Zhinka in 1968. It is a short article titled "Spivy Sercia" (Songs of the Heart) written by Viktor Babij. Despite a short size, this article shows that during her lifetime Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was mainly known as an amateur ethnographer and folk poet (narodna poetesa).[67] In Inga Levi's biographical sketch of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, Soviet Ukrainian students and intelligence visited her primarily to learn more about Hutsulshchyna. Paraska was helping them with collecting ethnographic materials such as the local songs, fairy tales, customs, et cetera.[68]

Soviet publications did not address Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice. The reason for that was probably that Paraska did not treat her photographic skills as worthy enough. Kateryna Radchenko, primary researcher of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic heritage, in the last sentence of the article for the book *Toward a World History of Women Photographers*, states that "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit never treated photography as her main artistic medium." Paradoxically, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started to be widely known in Ukraine and other countries such as Poland, the USA, and France due to the rediscovery of her extensive photographic archive.

[67] Viktor Babij, "Spivy Sercia" in Radianska Zhinka, vol. 9 (Kyiv 1968), 21.
[68] Inga Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography," in *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv: NACM Mystetskyi Arsenal, 2019), 28.

### *2.4 Current-day Historiography about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit*

From the beginning, I want to emphasize that no monograph or extensive academic work has yet been published about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Hence, there is a catalog that contains entries that deal with the various aspects of her artistic and literary practice. I will divide the historiography about Paraska Plytka Horytsvit into two parts – the one that started after 1998, when Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit passed away, till 2015, and the more recent one which began in 2015 when the group of Kyiv-based researchers found the extensive Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit photographic archive in the Memorial Museum of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit in Kryvorivnia in 2015. In my literature review, I will concentrate on the second one; after 2015, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started to be recognized and conceptualized as a photographer.

A key researcher of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's heritage for the period from 1998 to 2014 is Kryvorivnia-based researcher, poet, and cultural worker Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk.[69] Since 1998, when Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit passed away, Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk did incredibly important voluntary work to preserve Plytka-Horytsvit's literary, artistic, and photographic heritage. It is without a single doubt that without her dedicated work, we would know very little or even nothing about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit.

In my interview with Oksana Rybaruk in September 2020, Oksana Rybaruk shared that she started to visit Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's house almost every day after Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit passed away.[70] While her small kids were playing in the yard nearby, Oksana Rybaruk was selecting Plytka-Horytsvit's hand-written materials (diaries, letters, poetry, and prose books); then digitized them and published some of them in the local

[69] She was also Paraska Plytka Horytsvit's student and one of her closest friends. She started to visit her when she was only five years old and was close to her right until Paraska Plytka Horytsvit passed away on the 16th of April 1998.

[70] Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk, "Pro Parasku Plytku-Horytsvit" in Living by Art (Kosiv 2020). Retrieved from: https://livingbyart.online/istorii/literatura/oksana-rybaruk-zelenchuk-pro-parasku-plytku-horyczvit/

publishing houses in Verkhovyna, the regional center of Kryvorivnia and Kosiv, a small-town thirty kilometers away from there. As a result of Oksana Rybaruk's immense voluntary work, two Plytka-Horytsvit's books were published: an autobiography *Myla Knyzhechka: Z Najmolodshykh Rokiv Moich*, 2005 (A Lovely Book: From My Youngest Years), where Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit described her childhood in Kryvorivnia; and secondly, *Starovitski Povistorke*, 2009 (An Ancient Stories), an ethnographic investigation about customs and tradition of Hutsulshchyna.

Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk also selected and typed Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's diaries; those are not published yet. Besides publishing and preserving Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's literary legacy, together with her husband, local priest and writer Ivan Rybaruk, she published a collection of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Christian icons with the introductory article *Zabuta Icona Parasky Plytky-Horytsvit* (A Forgotten Icon of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's), where she expressed the frustration that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was not appreciated and studied enough by Oksana Rybaruk's contemporary.[71] It took more than ten years after this article was published that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit became widely known.

Oksana Rybaruk and her husband Ivan Rybaruk were trying to introduce Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit to a broader audience. Thus, thanks to their efforts, people from different parts of Ukraine visiting Kryvorivnia also visited Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memorial museums. One of such people was a group of Kyiv-based researchers: art historians Inga Levi and Kateryna Buchatska, film director Max Rudenko, who later produced a film Portret na Tli Hir (A Portrait on the Background of Mountain), which introduces Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive.[72]



[71] Oksana Rybaruk, "Zabuta Ikona Parasky Horytsvit", in Obrazy Parasky Plytky-Horytsvit (Lviv 2009), 4.
[72] Diana Horban, "Portret na Tli Hir: Koly ty Dusheyu Vilnyi to i Tilom Mozhesh Litaty", in Livyj Bereh (Kyiv, 1st of May 2019). Retrieved from: https://lb.ua/culture/2019/05/01/425558_portret_tli_gir_koli_ti_dusheyu_ie.html

Before 2015, a publication about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, containing her poetry and sometimes drawings, did not exceed the local level of Kryvorivnia or Verkhovyna, and Kosiv regions. Her photographic legacy was not perceived as worthy enough. Thus, the mildew significantly damaged both film negatives and printed pictures.[73] In the next section, I will focus on publications that conceptualize Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit as a photographer and explain how my research might enrich the historiography of the photographic aspect of her artistic expression.

### *2.5 Current day (2015-2022) Narratives about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit as a Photographer*

This section will address leading contemporary publications that conceptualize Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit as a photographer and engage with her photographic heritage. Since Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit used various artistic mediums, she is often represented as a writer and an artist in a broader sense. As I am aware that I cannot grasp every side of Plytka-Horytsvit, I will concentrate my attention on her activity/representation as a photographer.

In 2015 a group of Kyiv-based art historians Kateryna Buchatska and Inga Levi and film director Max Rudenko visited Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memorial museum, where they first encountered the collection of photos, which contains more than four thousand snapshots.[74] After that, from 2015 to 2020, they started renovating and digitizing Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive, organizing exhibitions in Ukrainian and Polish cities. In a short while, Kateryna Radchenko, a visual researcher and curator, joined their cohort.[75] In October 2019, Kateryna Buchatska, Inga Levi, Kateryna Radchenko, and Max Rudenko

[73] Kateryna Radchenko, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Photographic Archive. When a Photograph Tells a Story". In *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv: NACM Mystetskyi Arsenal, 2019), 155.
[74] Radchenko, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Photographic Archive. When a Photograph Tells a Story", 147.
[75] Oleksandra Vagner. *Three people from Kyiv have found 4 thousand unique photographs of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit.* Radio "Free Europe"/Liberty. 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28448803.html

curated and opened an extensive exhibition *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Podolannia Hravitacii* (Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming the gravity), which presented various aspects of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's life and artistic activities. In cooperation with the art curator Yuliia Vaganova and an artist Serhii Petliuk, they held an exhibition in Mytsetskyy Arsenal, the biggest Ukrainian cultural institution. The working group (Inga Levi, Kateryna Radchenko, Max Rudenko, Kateryna Buchatska, Yuliia Vaganova, and Serhii Petliuk) exhibited Plytka-Horytvit's artworks in four halls; one of those was entirely dedicated to her photographic archive.[76]

The exhibition about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, and especially its photographic part, triggered lively discussions in Ukrainian online media related to photography and art. One of such texts was an article by art historian Kateryna Yakovlenko *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Ukrainian Vivienne Maier*.[77] I have selected this article since it was published in Bird in Flight, the biggest Ukrainian media about photography. Kateryna Yakolvenko provides a context of why Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started to photograph. By citing Kateryna Radchenko's interview, Yakovlenko assumes that the reason for that could be: 1) that she was in contact with photographers and film directors from big cities who inspired her to photograph; 2) the pre-war (namely World War II) period in Hutsulshchyna, when "that area was part of Austria-Hungary and was popular among photographers — there were more photo studios in the Carpathians than in Odesa region."[78] Whereas these two versions are correct, Kateryna Yakovlenko did not acknowledge the Soviet politics of modernization and visuality as an essential trigger for Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's desire to photograph. As part of my visual analysis, I will look at how Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice



[76]Ibid.
[77] Kateryna Yakovlenko. *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Ukrainian Vivian Maier*. Bird in Flight. 2020. Retrieved from: https://birdinflight.com/why_its_masterpiece/20200515-paraska-plytka-horytsvit.html
[78] Ibid.

partially resulted from the Soviet modernization, when literature about photography, such as the journal *Sovetskoye Photo*, were published and widely distributed and the amateur and professional photo clubs were established.[79]

Another problematic point of Yakovlenko's article is that she compares Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit to the famous US amateur photographer Viviene Maier. I may assume that such a comparison (also in the article's title) is meant as a hook to attract as many foreign readers as possible (since the article is also written in English). But, in fact, such a narrative flattens the rural socialist reality Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit represented in her photos. As part of the discussion Kateryna Yakovlenko's article triggered, Ukrainian art historian Olena Chervonik argues that such a comparison does not work since Viviene Maier is a representative of street photography, which has a "completely different modus of the gaze" – street photographers photograph someone's random life scenes, often without the permission of the subjects they represent. That is why the photographed people mostly do not look back at the camera, and when they do — they are annoyed. On the contrary, Plytka-Horytsvit takes her photos in her village among people who knew her, so the modus of their gaze is more soft and friendly.[80]

The only article that problematizes the issue of the absence of women photographers from the Soviet Ukrainian canon is Halyna Hleba's research, conducted for the Research Platform of Pinchuk Art Center and published in 2020 on the online platform SupportYourArt, *Poza Kadrom: Ukrainiski Photographky XX stolittia* (Behind the Frame: Ukrainian Women Photographers in 20th century). This research questions why 20th-century



[79] Erika Wolf, *The Soviet Union: From Worker to Proletarian Photography,* na 2011, 33.
[80] Olena Chervonik, "V Ukraini Duzhe Kruta Vizualna Kultura, ale dosi Zbidnilyy i Neadekvatnyy Opys Tsijeji Kultury", in LB (Kyiv 2019). Retrieved from: https://lb.ua/culture/2019/12/10/444416_olena_chervonik_v_ukraini_duzhe_kruta.html

Ukrainian photographers were missing from Ukrainian Art history.[81] Gender plays an essential role in the way women were able to advance in photography since most of them were not taken seriously by their male colleagues. However, Hleba's publication overlooks class and rurality as possibly intersecting analytic categories that may provide additional layers of social marginalization. As an example, Hleba does not consider that the Ukrainian Soviet photographer Iryna Pap (1917-1985), as a Kyiv-based reporter, had more resources (film, books, and journal on photography, social and cultural capital, et cetera) than Kryvorivnia-based Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Such material conditions should not be neglected since they directly influence how people practice photography and from where they get information about the medium. In Chapter 4, where I will write about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit as a photographer and analyze her photographs, I aim to provide an analysis that will take into account such categories gender, rurality, class, and the fact that she was an ex-political prisoner.

Lastly, there is the book *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity*, published on the occasion of the exhibition in January 2020, which includes the most extensive research so far; it discusses different sides of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's artistic activities and provides biographic information about her. This book contains seven sections that conceptualize Horytsvit's biography and her myriad artistic mediums: pictorial art, vytynankas (paper cut-outs), literary work, and photography.[82]

*Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity* is essential because it is the first attempt to systematize Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's biography, a complex task since many official documents (for example, records from Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's first job in Krasnoillia

[81] Halyna Hleba, "Behind the Frame: Ukrainian Photographers in 20th century," *Support Your Art*, February 7, 2020. Retrieved from: https://supportyourart.com/specialprojects/researchplatform/photo-women/

[82] Inga Levi, "Introduction," in *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv: NACM Mystetskyi Arsenal, 2019), 8.

forestry) are missing. As a result, the book's authors mainly relied on oral testimonies by Kryvorivnia locals. This book is of a specific genre — a catalog for an exhibition. Therefore, the articles in the collection are rather descriptive, they lack criticall academic angle, a potential theory through which Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's life trajectory and photographic heritage could be analyzed. As for my research, in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I will apply a gendered intersectional lens and decolonial theory in relation to the Soviet Ukrainian context to understand how 1) how Soviet modernity, both its darker and brighter sides, influenced Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's lived experiences and photographic practice; 2) how the fact that she was a working-class rural Ukrainian woman from the mountain region, and an ex-political prisoner, led to her not being published and recognised as a photographer during her lifetime.

### *2.6 Conclusions*

In this chapter, I briefly reviewed literature relevant for my thesis. Part 1.1 overviewed the current historiography of Ukrainian Women's and Gender History (WGH). I indicated various approaches to Women's and Gender History that are present now. In line with the anthropological approach Ukrainian historian Oksana Kis uses in her book *Survival as a Victory: Ukrainian Women in Gulag*, I will analyze how photography as an artistic practice was a survival and revival practice to overcome the traumatic past.

Part two reviewed what has been written about women artists and photographers in Ukraine and worldwide. Although the historiography about women artists in Ukraine is vast, women photographers are often missing from these publications. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit is almost absent from Soviet Historiography. Before 2015, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was known as a naïve artist and writer at the local level. Only after 2015, when her photographic archive was first rediscovered, was she recognized as a photographer in Ukraine and abroad. Even though Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive's rediscovery triggered a lively

discussion on social media and Ukrainian online media platforms, its nature is somewhat fragmented.

There is no extensive academic work about Paraska Plytka Horytsvit's life trajectory and photographic practice. The recent book *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity* is instead a first step in analyzing Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. As a result, it is more descriptive than analytic. My thesis will explore Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's lived experiences and photographic archive from gender intersectional and decolonial perspectives.

# CHAPTER TWO: **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is interdisciplinary and equally divided into two textual and visual parts. However, the theories and concepts I use for analyzing written materials are discussed separately in this chapter. I do not include the visual analytical framework here; it is reserved for Chapter Four. In this chapter, I briefly map the main theories and concepts I use, explaining their practical implementation in my analytical chapters.

## *3.1 Gender History and Decoloniality*

In this thesis, I apply a decolonial perspective to the field of Soviet Gender History. In my exploration of the intersections between decoloniality and gender, I draw inspiration from Yuliia Gradskova's call to investigate Soviet history through the lens of decoloniality. Gradskova contends that despite the existence of an extensive body of feminist and gender-related scholarship on the Russian/Soviet context, this research often neglects the experiences of non-Russian women living in the peripheries and semi-peripheries.[83] My thesis delves into the life of a Ukrainian woman photographer who resided and worked in the Soviet periphery. As suggested by Gradskova, my research seeks to "explore the internal hierarchies and various modernity projects"[84] that shaped Plytka-Horytsvit's lived experiences.

The gender component of my thesis is built upon the groundbreaking essay by the gender and feminist historian Joan Scott. In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Scott formulates a definition of gender around two propositions. Scott defines gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" that serves as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power."[85] In

[83]Yuliia Gradskova, "Writing the "Other" Woman into the Soviet Gender History," in *Borderlands in European Gender Studies*, 108.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75, https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376.

my analysis, I will deploy this category in the following ways. First, I will explore how gender shaped Plytka-Horytsvit's ability to engage in photography. I argue that her status as an unmarried and childless woman granted her the necessary amount of free time to pursue her photographic practice. Since photography was Plytka-Horytsvit's hobby, I will also briefly address the gendering of hobbies during the Khrushchev Thaw era.

Then, by intersecting gender with other categories, notably rurality and class,[86] I will further analyze the accessibility of hobbies. Additionally, I will employ the category of gender in my visual analysis to examine how space and work were gendered in Hutsulshchyna during the period of 1954-1990. Moreover, I will observe how gender both enabled and disabled access to certain events in Kryvorivnia.

### *3.2 Decoloniality and Inter-imperiality*

I deploy decolonial theory primarily because it considers multiple (capitalist, socialist, and global) colonialities and modernities. Uzbek-Circassian decolonial thinker Madina Tlostanova emphasizes that the concept of coloniality allows adding the Russian Tsarist/Soviet Empires and the Ottoman Empire and Habsburg Empire to the global coloniality debates.[87]

While my primary historical focus is on Soviet history, particularly the Khrushchev Thaw and beyond, I argue that to gain a comprehensive understanding of the visual landscape from which Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice emerged, it is essential to also consider the influence of the Habsburg Empire and the emerging national projects of Poland and Ukraine. Therefore, historian Laura Doyle's concept of "inter-imperiality"[88] serves as a valuable framework for navigating the complex interplay between modern colonialism,

[86] Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis."
[87] Tlostanova, "Can the Post-Soviet Think?," 47.
[88] Doyle, "Inter-Imperiality: An Introduction," 395.

empires, and emerging nation-states that characterized the historical region of Galician Hutsulshchyna during the late 19th and throughout the 20th century.

The concept of inter-imperiality aligns with my research for several reasons, as outlined by Doyle: 1) it encompasses the intricate interactions among various empires, and 2) it places a strong emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions of the intersecting imperial and anti-imperial/colonial dynamics.[89] I employ an inter-imperial lens in Chapter Four, particularly when discussing representations of Hutsulshchyna that predate Plytka-Horytsvit's practice. These representations can be viewed as a counterpoint to her work, shedding light on the broader historical context within which her photography emerged.

### *3.3 Soviet Modernity-Coloniality*

Since my thesis combines Soviet gender history and decoloniality, I briefly highlight main premises of the Soviet modernity-coloniality that are relevant for my analysis. Modernity in the 20th century was developed in two forms: the liberal/capitalist and the socialist/statist. Tlostanova argues that each of them had its "sunny and darker side" and its specific form of coloniality.[90] The Estonian scholar Epp Annus asserts that the perspective of coloniality-modernity is relevant for the scholars who are dealing with the Soviet Union, especially those dealing with the continuity between the Soviet ideals and Enlightenment values. Annus further adds that "though many Soviet efforts turned into a large-scale waste of productive potential, one can still conceptualize Soviet modernity as an effort to establish welfare, general education, culturedness (sic) (kul'turnost'), and large-scale industrialization."[91] The darker side of Soviet rule was marked by mass displacements and killings, human-made famines (in Ukraine and Kazakhstan), and the establishment of the Gulag forced labor camp

[89] Ibid, 396.
[90] Tlostanova, "Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial?," 137.
[91] Annus, "Between Arts and Politics," 4.

systems. In my thesis, I mainly address the darker side of the Soviet modernity, since my research subject spent nine and a half years in the Gulag labor camps.

Adapting decolonial theory to the Soviet realities, Tlostanova addresses the production of "loyal" and "disloyal" citizens. Modernity justifies violence and the denial, or reversal, of human rights of those categorized as "not fully human," such as those who are not entirely "European, Soviet, Christian, White, etc."[92]As I further argue in this thesis, the marker of "enemy of the people," paranoia, and collective distrust were issues Soviet ex-political prisoners had to live with for the rest of their lives, which left them in highly vulnerable social positions.

### *3.4 Decoloniality and Environmental Humanities*

Ukrainian decolonial scholar Darya Tsymbaliuk, who draws parallels between Soviet extractive policies and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, asserts the necessity of "postcolonial and decolonial environmental scholarship" to comprehend the consequences of these extractive forms of violence. She argues that by examining the historical impact of the Russian imperial core on regions, lands, and ecosystems through military-geological entanglements, we can begin to grasp the extensive and profound damage inflicted.[93]

Consequently, critiquing the USSR through a decolonial lens involves addressing Soviet policies concerning the land, including practices of forced resettlement of the people and re-shaping the landscape, issues I briefly address in the textual and visual analyses of Chapters Three and Four.



[92] Tlostanova, "Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial?," 133.
[93] Darya Tsymbaliuk, "What Does It Mean to Study Environments in Ukraine Now?," Environment & Society Portal, August 18, 2022, https://www.environmentandsociety.org/arcadia/what-does-it-mean-study-environments-ukraine-now.

### *3.5 Conclusions*

This study adopts a multifaceted approach that combines gender history, decoloniality, inter-imperiality, analysis of Soviet modernity-coloniality, and insights from environmental humanities to provide a comprehensive understanding of Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice within its broader historical and socio-political context.

In this chapter, following Yuliia Gradskova's work, I emphasized the importance of writing the histories of Soviet women from the peripheries and semi-peripheries into the existing scholarship on Soviet Gender History. Subsequently, I briefly introduced Joan Scott's idea of deploying gender as a category of historical analysis by briefly mentioning the possible intersections of the concept with class and rurality.

The idea of Soviet modernity-coloniality helps to critically assess the mechanisms of crafting the production of "loyal" and "disloyal" citizens by labeling ex-prisoners such as Plytka-Horytsvit as "enemy of the people." In my thesis, I consider these practices to have had a lasting effect on people who survived the Gulag and thenr emained under surveilance and were othered by the Soviet state. Regarding the intersections of the Soviet modernity-coloniality and environmental humanities, I will combine decolonial and environmental humanities theories, examining the impact of the Soviet/Russian imperial core on lands, and ecosystems and emphasizing the need to address Soviet policies related to forced resettlement and landscape alteration.

By using theories of decoloniality and inter-imperiality, I will analyze the emergence of the representation of Hutsulshchyna and how Plytka-Horytsvit's photos corresponded to or differed from it both aestheticly and conceptually.

## CHAPTER THREE: **CONTESTING NORMATIVITY: REEXAMINING TRAUMA IN PARASKA PLYTKA-HORYTSVIT'S MEMOIRS AND LETTERS**

In this chapter, I present a critical analysis of the memoirs and correspondences of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit; I will also discuss interviews I conducted in the village of Kryvorivnia (Ukraine) in September 2021 and January 2022. I analyze the complex lived experiences of this photographer through the analytical categories of intersectionality and decoloniality and further engage with concepts such as silenced narratives of past and self, community, kinship, and eco-sensibilities. I do not claim to represent Plytka-Horytsvit's authentic lived experiences but rather my and her own interpretations of them. By examining the intersection of analytical categories such as gender, class, rurality, and ethnicity with the concept of decoloniality, I interpret her private materials such as her Gulag memoirs, letters, diaries/memoir, and postcards.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to challenge mainstream victimizing narratives that paint Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit as having lived a lonely and isolated life. As I argue in this chapter, even though Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit spent the last decade in solitude, grieving the loss of her mother, her life before 1984 (but also afterward) contained various types of fulfilling relationships and connections. It is important to stress that in local Kryvorivnia reality, a solitary and childless life like Plytka-Horytsvit's is often deemed a failure. While such evaluations can apply to men, it is more often women who receive the greater stigma. There is a heteronormative frame of what constitutes family and relationships; however, those assumptions are often false and fail to recognize alternative manifestations of relationships/connections. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit is frequently seen through the lens of heteronormativity. Such heteronormativity in the late socialist period in Kryvorivnia, located in the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains, meant that having a husband and children and mainly caring for the household were seen as normal and natural, whereas living alone and writing, painting, and taking photographs

were deemed abnormal. The lens of heteronormativity warrants a discussion on how the idea of relationships should not be shortened to romantic relationships only.

To facilitate this discussion, I argue that it is necessary to rethink what connections and relationships meant in the first place during Plytka-Horytsvit's life. It is crucial to stress that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was a significant part of the Kryvorivnia community; she spoke in the local Hutsul dialect, followed the local customs and traditions, and was often perceived by the people from Kryvorivnia as the one straying from the normative understanding of what a Hutsul woman should be and which kind of relationships she should have. In this chapter, I will try to answer two main questions: how can we think about Plytka-Horytsvit's relationships and connections beyond a heteronormative framework? How did Plytka-Horytsvit's traumatic experiences in the Gulag shape her ways of connecting with people and her sensibilities to a more-than-human world[94] (landscape, plants, animals)? These questions are significant for my thesis since they show the myriad ways of connecting with the world, resulting in Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive, which is the focus of this thesis.

### *4.1 Silenced Narratives of Self and the Past: the Gulag and Private Life Narratives in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Memoirs*

Hutsul naïve artist, writer, and photographer Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit spent nine and a half years (1945-1954) in a Gulag forced labor camp of the late Stalinist period version (1939-1953) due to her participation in the guerilla movement of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA – Ukrains'ka Povstanska Armiia) against the Red Army. Imprisonment and displacement were not uncommon experiences for people from Western Ukraine. Ukrainians were the second-largest national group in labor camps during Stalin's rule. According to Ukrainian gender historian

[94] I use a term more-than-humans or more-than-human world to refer to multispecies interactions such as plants, animals, and landscapes, and peoples. This term was firstly used by the US American ecologist and philosopher David Abram and then widely appropriated by environmental scholars and anthropologists.
Source: David Abram, "The Spell of the Sensuous," *CSPA Quarterly*, no. 17 (2017): 22–24.

Oksana Kis, since the 1930s, enemies of the regime were less judged by class and more according to their ethnicity. The gender composition of the camps also changed significantly after 1945, with the percentage of imprisoned women rising from 7.6 percent to 30.6 percent. Such political prisoners contained women *Ostartbeiters*, once forcefully exploited by Nazi Germany, and those accused of cooperating with the Ukrainian Nationalist Underground.[95] Summarizing the gender-specific aftermath of the Gulag, Kis argues that:

> Women in the Gulag were isolated from the rest of society through prohibitions on correspondence, given no access to newspapers and other sources of information, depersonalized through the use of numbers instead of names, dressed in ill-fitting uniforms, and prevented from having personal items of any kind, and totally controlled by the severe prison regimen and rigid daily schedules. Prohibitions on ordinary activities, endless searches, a complete lack of privacy, constant violence, both physical and psychological (on the part of both the administration and other prisoners), and widespread sexual abuse.[96]

Kateryna Radchenko, a prominent researcher of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive, argues that Plytka-Horytsvit's life story is not unique for women from Western Ukraine. However, the path Plytka-Horytsvit followed after returning to Kryvorivnia following her imprisonment is somewhat different from that of most women subjected to similar circumstances and living in the countryside: she remained unmarried and childless and did not grow vegetables or keep domestic animals.[97] Her unconventional lifestyle was another reason why Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was perceived as unusual or untrustworthy by the local community. Nevertheless, she had a fulfilling social life, sincere friendships, and a deep loving connection with her mother, Anna (unknown – 1984). Plytka-Horytsvit's relationships with her



[95] Oksana Kis and Lidia Wolanskyj, *Survival as Victory: Ukrainian Women in the Gulag* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 5, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2d8qwvp.
[96] Kis and Wolanskyj, 4.
[97] Kateryna Radchenko, "Kuratorskyy Pohliad Kateryny Radchenko. Znayty Parasky Plytku-Horytsvit," The Kyiv Review, May 2020, Retrieved from: https://rozmova.wordpress.com/2021/06/05/kateryna-radchenko-3/

father, Stephan Plytka (unknown – 1977), were tense for several reasons I will explain further in the second part of this chapter. In her diaries, she also reflects on something I interpret as a relationship with the landscape and more-than-human subjects, which I will address further in this chapter.

As I argue in the following subchapters, the traumatic outcome of her imprisonment shaped how Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit built relationships with locals and how she perceived and connected with more-than-humans. Additionally, the imprisonment trauma with some local perspectives, resulted in the perspective on the world she represented in the photographic archive I analyzed in Chapter Four.

### 4.1.1 Silence and Silencing

In this section, I identify two types of silences in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's private materials and the testimonies of Kryvorivnia locals in my interviews. The first one is silence as a survival strategy. In *Rethinking Silence, Voice and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains: Beyond the Binary*, Jane Parpart and Swati Parashar consider how silence operates beyond the binary of voice and silence, in which silence is always the prerogative of those lacking agency and voice. They claim that, in the postcolonial context especially, silence can be an act and a choice to prevent oneself and others from re-traumatization.[98] Similarly, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's decision to remain silent about her Gulag exile appears to have been a conscious survival strategy through which she protected herself and others from re-traumatization.

A recurrent pattern in answer to my question, "Why do you think Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit did not talk with you about the Gulag?" was that it was Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's conscious decision not to focus on the traumatic past and instead forget about it. As Olena Bilak, Horytsvit's close friend with whom she lived after her return, remembers, "She did not want to

[98] Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar, *Rethinking Silence, Voice and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains: Beyond the Binary* (Milton, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 16, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5614576.

upset people with such talks. Instead of thinking about violence and suffering, she concentrated on creative and artistic practices and nature; she wanted to celebrate life, not to get stuck on something painful and dark."[99] Soviet historian Irina Sherbakova described similar strategies her respondents used to cope with past traumas, dividing them into two categories: 1) bringing up vivid memories with attentively detailed descriptions of those who tortured them; 2) refusing to talk about the Gulag or saying they forgot/wanted to forget the atrocities inflicted upon them.[100] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit did not fall into this classification since she combined both approaches. She collected her memories in a detailed manner in her memoir, *Ostannij Reis* (The Last Journey),[101] but she also refused to talk about her experiences in the Gulag with her family and friends.

In addition to silence as an individual choice and strategy, it is imperative to address silencing as a state-imposed mechanism aimed at silencing ex-prisoners. Official state documents concerning the Gulag became available only at the end of the 1980s. Before then, discussing one's experiences in forced labor camps was prohibited. During an interview with local Hutsul ethnographer Ivan Zelenchuk, he mentioned that "such talks could endanger not only her but her friends too." He added that, even after returning home, Plytka-Horytsvit was heavily surveilled. As a schoolteacher, he was reminded several times by local authorities that making connections with Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was a considerable reputational and safety risk:

> My daughter Oksana visited Paraska very often. Paraska Plytka-Horytsiv was like a second grandmother to her. Our Oksana was interested in poetry, and no one was keener to teach how to write poetry than Paraska herself. Of course, she did not charge us for those classes, but we wanted to pay her back. So, I asked my pupil, Paraska's neighbor (I was a teacher of Physics

[99] Interview with Olena Bilak, conducted in Kryvorivnia 26/09/2021.
[100] Irina Sherbakova, "The Gulag in Memory," in *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 1997), 4.
[101] As mentioned by Oksana Rybaruk, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's close friend and researcher, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit did not show this book to anyone. Now this memoir is located in Kryvorivnia in newly-established Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memorial museum.

> in Kryvorivnia back then), to bring her some bread. Several times, local authorities questioned why my daughter was visiting 'this political prisoner' and why I was giving her bread.[102]

Such governmental treatment and refusal to rehabilitate ex-prisoners resulted in never-ending suspicions, leading to social marginalization. In the case of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, it was challenging to overcome the stigma and regain trust within the community, which partially explains why some of her letters, even those with fellow ex-convicts, omit any information about their shared experiences as exiles. As art historian and Horytsvit's biographer Inga Levi points out, all her foreign and domestic correspondences were subjected to perlustration, which can be proven by the presence of the seals on the envelopes.[103]

### 4.1.2 Reading Ostannij Reis (The Last Journey), 1962

Memoirs about the Gulag exist as their genre of text. Oksana Kis states that such testimonies are often highly self-censored since they bear in mind their potential readers, which affects what is said and what is not.[104] But what if some memoirs were not meant to be published and only served as a space to solely get freed from the traumatic past?

As mentioned, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit did not share her exile memories with friends and acquaintances or write about them in her diaries or correspondences. However, she left a hand-written memoir called Ostannij Reis (The Last Journey) (1962), where she writes in great detail about her experiences in the Gulag. This book contains unique testimonies about the Gulag from a woman's perspective. Additionally, Plytka-Horytsvit's narrative is also essential as it represents the experiences of a rural, working-class woman with limited education (four classes of elementary school) compared to, as historian Veronica Shapovalov



[102] Interview with Ivan Zelenchuk, conducted in Kryvorivnia 16/09/2021.
[103] Inga Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit Collection of Letters". In *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity* (Kyiv: NACM Mystetskyi Arsenal, 2019), p. 48.
[104] Kis and Wolanskyj, *Survival as Victory*, 48.

asserts, the overwhelming number of similar texts written by educated, urban middle-class women.[105]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit wrote this testimony in 1962, eight years after she returned to Kryvorivnia in 1954. As Oksana Rybaruk explained, she did not share this book with anyone or mention writing it. Ex-prisoners of the Gulag often were also obliged to sign a "politics of disclosure document," which prevented them from sharing any information about the Gulag.[106] It is safe to assume Paraksa Plytka-Horytsvit's manuscript was not meant to be published or seen by others during her lifetime, as it potentially endangered her life and the lives and freedom of those she loved. Presumably, writing this text was Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's way of structuring her memories, reflecting on her past, and symbolically overcoming it. Excerpts from this memoir, collected by Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk, are published in *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Overcoming Gravity*. Plytka-Horytsvit's manuscript contains various stories and reflections that I have divided into two categories: dehumanization and gender-based solidarity. Next, I will provide a short analysis of these topics corroborated by quotes from the book.

#### 4.1.2.1. Resisting dehumanization in Gulag camps

The Stalinist version of Gulag labor camps was designed to depersonalize prisoners. In his recent text, phenomenologist Yonhai Ataria describes how Gulag imprisonment could be interpreted as a transformation from a human to a nonhuman condition.[107] In Ataria's view, imprisoned people began to doubt their humanity and became objects of the system. Although this theory partially correlates with many stories of Gulag prisoners, it also ignores

[105] Veronica Shapovalov, *Remembering the Darkness: Women in Soviet Prisons* (Lanham, MD, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 12, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1124600.
[106] Kis and Wolanskyj, *Survival as Victory*, 41.
[107] Yochai Ataria, "Becoming Nonhuman: The Case Study of the Gulag," *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (June 2019): 2, https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020027.

myriad practices of everyday resistance to constant objectification. For example, Oksana Kis describes many ways through which her informants practiced their subjectivity and femininity even in the harshest conditions: how women took care of their hair, repaired and decorated clothes, painted, embroidered, and sewed.[108]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's testimonies that I reviewed began when she was transferred from Perm, near the Ural Mountains, to Spassk, in Kazakhstan. According to Inga Levi, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was transferred due to her significant health issues caused by the relocation from Ukraine to Perm. During that relocation, her legs were frozen, and she almost died near other prisoners who did passed away. She was lucky enough that someone from the Soviet camp authorities saw that she was still alive and took her to the hospital in Spassk. For the next five years (from 1946 to 1951), she was not able to walk without crutches.[109] In her memoir, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit reflects on the harsh conditions of the Gulag camps: the cold, the neglect of the prisoners' health, the harsh working conditions, and the total control over the prisoner's self-expression:

> They brought us to the so-called bathroom. But how could we clean ourselves there? There was only approximately one cup of musty water for each person. So, we lied that we had already washed up earlier… At night, we slept on the wooden boards, one by one, and warmed up to sleep more calmly. Sometimes they brought us food, but far from enough. We ate it but also saved some bread for potentially harsh times.[110]

However, Paraska Plytka-Horytvit also recalls various small details that presumably helped her survive the Gulag. One such story is about a pair of beautiful black gloves she received as a gift from a male prisoner during one of the few intergender interactions. In return, she presented him with a book by Lesia Ukrainka (1887-1913), a famous Ukrainian modernist

[108] Kis and Wolanskyj, *Survival as Victory*, 385.
[109] Inga Levi, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit Collection of Letters", 45.
[110] Ostannij Reis. Part of the unpublished manuscript, typed by Oksana Rybaruk. Fragments of the manuscript published in "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity". p. 7.

writer and feminist. Plytka-Horytsvit does not specify how she smuggled this book to the Gulag in the memoir. Paraska Plytka-Horytvit describes how her self-expression and sexuality changed after Joseph Stalin's death on March 5, 1953. For example, she writes:

> After Stalin's death, there were some changes in the camp conditions. We could walk in our clothes more often, which we could finally receive from home. They also did not control us as harshly as before. They did not punish us over small details as it was before. However, we still had some problems, mainly caused by men who started to visit their loved ones more often.

Intergender interactions in the Gulag camps are also significantly present in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoir. She stresses that women and men were strictly divided and prohibited from communication. Nonetheless, she also describes situations in which the Gulag authorities asked women to pose for men to show their figure because men did not see any women for a long while. To such a suggestion, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit answered that "she will be fine not seeing them for even a hundred years."[111]

#### 4.1.2.2. Solidarity

Oksana Kis states that networks of support and solidarity and the experience of living together as a big family were among the key things that kept women alive and sane during their imprisonment. She writes that "mutual support, compassion for their sisters in misfortune, care for the weakest, and help for the ones in greatest need in a situation where every single life was, in fact, under threat—these were the greatest manifestations of humanism, self-sacrifice, and humaneness."[112]

Solidarity, predominantly women's solidarity, is another crucial topic in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Gulag testimony. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's testimonies show how imprisoned

[111] Ostannij Reis. Part of the unpublished manuscript, typed by Oksana Rybaruk. Fragments of the manuscript published in "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity". p. 5.
[112] Kis and Wolanskyj, *Survival as Victory*, 346.

women from different ethnic backgrounds expressed support and solidarity toward each other and how the sense of community they built helped them survive physically and mentally. Plytka-Horytsvit shortly describes an example of such support. For example, she describes how she encountered various acts of kindness and support from random older women she met when she was transferred from one place to another. Kateryna Filkina, whom she mentions in the book, "greeted her with tears and gave her two karbovantsi so she [could] buy some bread when she [was] hungry." [113] Overall, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit recalls that women in the Gulag administration were much kinder and more sympathetic than the men.[114]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit also describes how humor, various ways of teasing each other, and collective creative practices, such as singing, helped to allay her anxiety and loneliness. One of the observations I had after reading the memoir is how quickly people bonded with one another. Thus, even one day under Gulag's extraordinary and grueling conditions may have brought people spiritually and mentally closer than months at home. Illustrating this point, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit describes how other prisoners were willing to help with their last resources; how random people in the hospital, when she got her appendix removed close to the end of her imprisonment, stayed with her until she felt better.[115] Similarly, Amanda Chalupa and Monica Tomlinson, in their chapter "Migration and Survival: An Analysis of Memory, Identity, Solidarity and Coping Among the Gulag Survivors after World War II," mention how Polish Gulag prisoners reflected on how their sense of solidarity was significantly higher in the exile than during normal circumstances.[116] Thus, the shared trauma of displacement and imprisonment sometimes created a space for



[113] Ostannij Reis. p. 5
[114] Ostannij Reis. p. 4
[115] Ostannij Reis. p. 14
[116] Amanda Chalupta and Monica Tomlinson et al., *Solidarity, Memory and Identity* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UNKNOWN: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014), 228. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2076805.

sympathy and solidarity, often exceeding the camp's walls. Many prisoners carried this way of bonding and sensing the world into their post-imprisonment lives.

### *4.2 Reading Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Memoirs*

In this subchapter, I focus on Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs she wrote in the 1990s, analyzing her writings on building relationships and connections. I argue that trauma played a crucial role in how Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit made close connections and relationships with those who went through similar experiences of displacement and torture. Additionally, this subchapter aims to trace the connections and relationships Plytka-Horytsvit was engaged in and think about how one can theorize about relationships beyond the heteronormative framework. Additionally, this chapter reflects on how forced resettlement shaped Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's bond with her native Carpathian environment and how this new sensibility shaped her perception and representation of the Carpathian landscape.

I accessed Plytka-Horytsvit's private materials, such as memoirs, letters, albums, and postcards, during my fieldwork in Kryvorivnia in September 2021. By then, all her private materials were stored in a small room in the local school. The community of Kryvorivnia had decided to temporarily put all Plytka-Horytsvit's materials there before establishing the new memorial museum. It was essential to keep these materials away from the humidity and mold spread around Plytka-Horytsvit's house up in the hills, which for over two decades served as a memorial museum that welcomed visitors from Ukraine and other countries. Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk[117] kindly sent me a digital version of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs she has been typing up for the past ten years, which were not published or publicly accessed before.

[117] Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk is a poet and cultural worker from Kryvorivnia. She started to visit Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's house as a child as Plytka-Horytsvit was teaching her how to write poems. After Plytka-Horytsvit's death, Rybaruk-Zelenchuk took care of her private archive.

The memoirs Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit wrote in the 1990s are often referred to as diaries; however, in my view, these texts are closer in definition to memoirs since they present well-structured scenes that reflect on the past; they were written in retrospect, not contemporaneously.[118] They did not present a direct documentation of events; thus, they should be read as a text in which memories and imagination meet. Reflecting on Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs, Oksana Rybaruk states that her mother's death was likely a push to start the diaries since she had a large amount of unresolved, unspeakable grief.[119] That detail shaped the very format of this memoir, which predominantly described past events with some attention to the documentation of Plytka-Horytsvit's present-time feelings and events. Oksana Rybaruk emphasizes that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit became more isolated and self-involved after her mother's death; that time became the period of her extensive writing. This grief also created a space and time for Plytka-Horytsvit to reflect on her past.

### 4.2.1 Familial kinship

The period when Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit returned to Kryvorivnia from the Gulag labor camp needs to be further researched and written about; however, I can partially reconstruct it with the help of interviews I conducted in the autumn of 2021. One person who remembers Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit well from the 1950s is her relative and friend Olena Bilak; I interviewed her twice in the autumn of 2021. Olena Bilak went through deportation together with her family due to the politics of dekulakization[120] (*rozkurkulennia)* of Western Ukraine, which happened from 1939 to 1947.[121] Olena was born in 1939 in the village of Il'ci,

[118] Peter Heehs, *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013), 6.
[119] "Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk pro Parasku Plytku-Horytsvit", Living by Art, 2020. Retrieved from: https://livingbyart.online/istorii/literatura/oksana-rybaruk-zelenchuk-pro-parasku-plytku-horyczvit/
[120] Dekulakization (or rozkurkulennia in Ukrainian) is a Soviet campaign of political repressions, mass-deportations, and executions of prosperous peasantry.
[121] Stepan Borchuk and Maria Sankovych, "Collectivization in Prykarpattia during the Second Sovietization of Western Ukrainian Lands," *History Journal of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University*, no. 54 (December 15, 2021): 108, https://doi.org/10.31861/hj2021.54.106-112.

Verkhovyna region. The Soviets took most of her family's properties. Only the old house was left, where her brother and his wife lived. After Stalin's death, Olena and her family returned to Kryvorivnia. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit stayed with Olena Bilak's family when she returned from the Gulag. Back then, she was twenty-seven years old Bilak and Horytsvit shared the room; thus, she remembers that Plytka-Horytvit wanted her private space to focus on writing and painting throughout the night.

According to Olena Bilak, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit temporarily stayed with her family because Plytka-Horytsvit's father did not allow her to write and paint; he thought these actions might endanger his family's safety, since Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit was an ex-Gulag prisoner and her actions remained under control.[122] While reflecting on the relationships between Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and her father, Bilak recalls that Plytka-Horytsvit and Stephan Plytka had "a complicated, not always friendly, relationship."[123]

The book "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit: Overcoming Gravity" does not discuss the relationship between Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and her father, Stephan. There is a mention that Stephan Plytka built a house for Plytka-Horytsvit.[124] Olena Bilak stated that this is a common misconception. She recalls that Stephan Plytka did not want to make that house in the first place. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started to do it herself, often asking her friends to help. Her father stepped in only after he saw some significant efforts.[125] Olena Bilak recalls how Plytka-Horytsvit and some of her friends and neighbors were helping Plytka-Horytsvit gather wood and make the house's foundation. Building a house for herself was significant for Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit on both material and symbolic levels. It provided her with the space for creative practices such as writing and taking photographs yet also accommodated

[122] Interview with Olena Bilak, Kryvorivnia 26/09/2021.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Inga Levi, *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography*. in "Paraska Plytka-horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity", Mystetskyy Arsenal, January 2020, p. 30.
[125] Ibid.

the fast separation from her family and some aspects of the communal, often patriarchal, practices. Thus, rephrasing the famous Virginia Woolf quote, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction,"[126] by starting to build a house after returning from the Gulag and finding a long-term job in the Kryvopillia Forestry, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit gained space and resources for her photographic practice and the life she aimed to live. Inga Levi states that the house was earthen and bleached, which was not typical for the Hutsul region. It consisted of a pantry and two rooms. It was built on the piece of land that belonged to her great-great-grandfather.[127] Levi adds that people from other cities and countries who were visiting Plytka-Horytsvit's house called it a "house under the stork " because of the stork nest located just above the building.[128]

Figure 4.1. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's house in Kryvorivnia, photo: Serhii Havryliuk

[126] Virginia Woolf and Anna Snaith, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2015), 4, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5891438.
[127] Inga Levi, *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography,* p. 35.
[128] Ibid.

The relationship between Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and her parents is a complex topic that historians have only vaguely touched upon. Nevertheless, reading her memoirs and interviews could partially recreate those relationships. Stephan Plytka (See Figure 4.2) was a locally famous blacksmith. Plytka-Horytsvit describes him as "a hardworking person who learned how to forge himself and was famous for it."[129] In most of her photographs, he is represented as someone who works around the household or who hunts. Most likely, hunting was his main hobby. Interestingly, in Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs and writings, I did not encounter criticism of hunting. At the same time, she often criticized the cutting of trees and the harming of plants, which I address further in this chapter.

Figure 4.2. Stephan Plytka, a portrait from Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive

[129] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Old-World Narratives. Pysanyj Kamin Press, Kosiv, 2008, p.64.

During my interview with Olena Bilak, she recalled that Plytka-Horytsvit had a complicated relationship with her father, Stephan, who did not support her wish to engage in creative production. She also remembers that Stephan Plytka was comparing Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit to his older daughter Vasylyna, who, contrary to Plytka-Horytsvit, was not interested in going to school and mainly engaged in household work and cooking[130]:

> Paraska and her father had a very tough relationship. He was constantly angry with her because she was not "just a regular housewife" (*zvychaina gazdynnia*). He was continually comparing Paraska to her sibling, Vasylyna, who was married to a local man, regularly cooked, and cleaned the house.[131]

Despite the tense relationship during the first decade after her return from the Gulag, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit briefly mentions her father at the end of her memoir. She calls him a hardworking, talented blacksmith and builder who taught her to be hard-working and self-reliant and "never to fall into despair."[132] Stephan Plytka died in 1977, and Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit photographed his funeral. Later, she created a book, "Commemorating the Departed" (not published; the original is stored in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's museum in



[130] Interview with Olena Bilak, Kryvorivnia 26/09/2021.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Memoir. July 3rd, 1992.

Kryvorivnia), that contained photographs from the funeral and personal reflections on life and death.


Figure 4.3. Hannah Plytka, a portrait from Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit photo archive

As stated earlier, the main topic of the later memoir is reflections and memories about Plytka-Horytsvit's relationship with her mother, Hannah. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit wrote them eight years after her mother's death in July 1992. She reflects that her life became complicated after her mother died in 1984. Thus, notes and reflections about the time they spent together the recent past became an instrument to free herself from the constant grief, became a way to "not simply drawn in the sea of despair, but sometimes rise from it."[133]

Hannah Plytka was at the center of the emotional support for Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. That is why her passing away evoked deep loneliness and grief, which, with time, resulted in social isolation and Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's Christian religiosity in the 1990s. Levi mentions that from "the second half of the 1970s, Plytka-Horytsvit tends to live a more

[133] Ibid.

and more isolated life" and occasionally put a sign "No authorized entry" on her window.[134] However, Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk recalls that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit started to become less social only after the death of her mother in 1984, which is a decade later. Even after 1984, Rybaruk-Zelenchuk frequently visited Plytka-Horytsvit in her house. She assumes that her youthful presence probably eased Plytka-Horytsvit's pain of losing her kin.

### 4.2.2. Beyond romantic love: friendship as a loving communion

Romantic heterosexual love, marriage, and children are often understood as a condition for a happy and sustainable life, especially in societies formed by European and Soviet modernities, such as Ukraine. As a result, a lack of this aspect of life can easily lead to victimizing narratives of loneliness and suffering[135]. Theorizing love and relationships beyond their romantic heteronormative version might provide an alternative view of how friendship, family, creative practices, community, and other human/more-than-human actors might constitute a fulfilled life.

Friendship as an alternative loving and accepting space outside of the marriage or familial connection is a widespread topic in feminist theory. One such example is the idea of the Black intersectional feminist bell hooks, the pen name of Gloria Jean Watkins, about friendship as a loving communion that positions friends as members of a chosen family. In her essay "Community: Loving Communion," she explains how friendship could be a potential third space outside of marriage and familial ties and serve as an effective source of love and acceptance:



[134] Inga Levi, *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography,* p. 37.
[135] My "silence" on Plytka-Horytsvit romantic life in this thesis is not an attempt to evade this complex question, but rather a decision to postpone addressing it until the time when I might have archival materials to make statements and not just presupposition.

> Many of us learn as children that friendship should never be seen as just as important as family ties. However, friendship is the place in which a great majority of us have our first glimpse of redemptive love and a caring community.[136]

One can also apply this idea to Plytka-Horytsvit's life since she was not married, but other connections fulfilled her life, one of which was friendship. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit had several close friends, but her closest friend was also an ex-prisoner: the local writer and musician Theodosia Plytka-Sorokhan. Even though Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and Theodosia Plytka-Sorokhan share the same surname, they were not siblings or cousins. As the poet and Plytka-Horytsvit's close friend and pupil, Oksana Rybaruk, mentions in her article:

> Teodoziya Andriivna Sorokhan, Odosia, cared for Paraska and entertained her from age two. She took great care of her, protected her, and understood her. They were the closest friends and remained so until Paraska's death. As a political prisoner, Odosia [137]was sent to Kolyma.[138]

An important source of information about Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's upbringing is a short autobiography book, "Myka Knyzhechka: Z Najmolodshych Rokiv Mojich," published in Ivano-Frankivsk in 2005. Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan wrote an introduction to this posthumous publication. There she warmly describes her first meeting with Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit:



[136] bell hooks, "All about Love: New Visions," New York: William Morrow, 2000.
[137] Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan was sent to a Gulag camp in Kolyma for helping Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).
[138] Oksana Rybaruk, "Zabuta Ikona Parasky Plytky-Horytsvit," Uknainska Kultura, 2008, p. 48.

After ten years of suffering, thank God, we finally met in our native village. On the 30th of October 1956, I came there. It was Sunday. One day later, Paraska came to visit me. Can you imagine how we were greeting each other after all these sufferings and being apart for so long? My house was without a roof; the yard was deserted and empty. I spread out my prisoner's jacket, and we sat shoulder to shoulder. We cried.[139]

Figure 4.4. A snapshot of Paraska and Odosia featured in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's private album

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and Theodosia Plytka-Sorokhan (Odosia, as she was called in Kryvorivnia) wrote poetry and prose and collected local folklore. After returning from Kolyma, Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan lived in her ancestral house, located not so far away from where Plytka-Horytsvit lived. They both remained unmarried for the rest of their life. As Theodosia Plytka-Sorokhan remembers, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit said that if she would not

[139] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, "Myla Knyzhechka. Z Najmolodshchych Rokiv Mojich," Misto NV Press, Ivano-Frankivsk, 2005, p. 10.

find a pen friend, potentially a code for a lifetime partner, she would become a burning flower (Horytsvit). And Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit wrote: "In your letters, you called me a swallow-blossom (lastivko-tsvitko). Swallow is my guerilla pseudonym. But I am still not sure about the second part. If I woud not find a penfriend (druha po peru*)*, a mountain flower will be my friend. A swallow will come early in spring. A flower will bloom all over the mountains. And I will be burning from my love for them [mountains]".[140] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit added a second part to her surname as a symbolic act of marrying herself and dedicating her life to writing, painting, and taking photographs. Most likely, by calling herself Horytsvit, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit had in mind the rare flower Adonis Vernalis that grows mainly in the Steppe region but can also be found in the Prykarpattya region. Theodosia Sororkhan had the pseudonym Lileya (Lilium, in English).

Plytka-Horytsvit's and Plytka-Sorokhan's union became a powerful source of support after they returned from the Stalinist Gulag with the humiliating marker of the "people's enemies" until they were rehabilitated in 1991, with Ukraine gaining its independence. They remained closest friends until Plytka-Horytsvit died in 1998. Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan passed away in 2017 when she was ninety-six years old.

### 4.2.3. Human/more than human relations

A strong bond with nature, or in other words kinship with the landscape, plants, and animals, is among the central topics in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs and photos. In my bachelor thesis on the cultural landscape in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive, I focused on various ways in which places and people co-constitute each other; how place, a lively space of events, interactions, and rituals become fixed cultural landscape in her photographs.[141] However, that analysis lacks textual illustrations from the primary materials

[140] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, Myla Knyzhechka. Z Najmolodshchych Rokiv Mojich,, p. 3.
[141] Yuliia Kishchuk, Konstruiuvannia Kulturnoho Landshaftu na Svitlynach Parasky Plytky-Horytsvit. Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, 2020, p. 34.

and human/plant and human/animal dimensions. In this subchapter, I will address various multispecies interactions with the more-than-human world described in Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoir and in the interviews I conducted during the fieldwork.

Ivan Rybaruk, a local Orthodox priest from Kryvorivnia, mentions a short story widely told among the Kryvorivnia community. He describes how Paraska once had a territorial conflict with her neighbors. There was a small piece of land where a young birch tree grew. As part of the fair resolution, her neighbors proposed cutting the tree and building the fence. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, to the contrary, decided to give them a piece of that land for free in return for a promise that they would not hurt the tree. "If you want to understand Paraska, you should remember this story. It perfectly reflects her sensibilities to every creature alive. It was a huge shock for the villagers back then. Here, in Kryvorivnia, people tend to be more pragmatic, and Paraska is very different. That is also why the community did not fully accept Paraska [Plytka-Horytsvit]. They perceived her as a weirdo (dyvachka) and not practical," comments Ivan Rybaruk.[142]

Human/land relationships and Soviet modernity are emerging topics in the recent scholarship on decoloniality concerning the Soviet/Russian Empires.[143] I derive from the standpoint in which Soviet/Russian modernity was not so much of an alternative to the Western modernity project, but rather its continuation.[144] Ukrainian decolonial scholar Darya Tsymbaliuk, who draws parallels between Soviet extractivist policies and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, states that "postcolonial and decolonial environmental scholarship is needed to understand the repercussions of these extractivist forms of violence. By studying

[142] Interview with Ivan Rybaruk, 12/09/2021.
[143] Darya Tsymbaliuk, "What Does It Mean to Study Environments in Ukraine Now?," Environment & Society Portal, August 18, 2022, https://www.environmentandsociety.org/arcadia/what-does-it-mean-study-environments-ukraine-now.
[144] Tatsiana Shchurko, Jennifer Suchland, "Postcoloniality in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia", Routledge, 72, accessed September 7, 2022, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781138347762-12/postcoloniality-central-eastern-europe-eurasia-tatsiana-shchurko-jennifer-suchland.

the darkness of the Russian imperial core and how it has shaped regions, lands, and ecosystems through military-geological entanglements, we can start to understand the extent and depth of the damage done."[145] As follows, contesting the USSR from the decolonial lens means addressing Soviet policies toward the land, such as extractivism and resoursification, a newly created term proposed by the Ukrainian scholar Asia Bazdyrieva[146], and toward people, such as displacement and resettlement.

Such perspective requires closer attention to a comparative lens to such spatial politics of the USSR as mass deportation (of Crimean Tatars from the Crimean Peninsula in 1944) or dekulakization, which was often turned against the Ukrainian peasantry, who were not parts of the bourgeois elites. Regarding Ukrainian Carpathian spatial Soviet politics, Ivan Zelenchuk, a Kryvorivnia-based ethnographer and anthropologist, explains that there has been spatial politics, mainly concerning the highlanders. He calls it *zselennia*, which could be translated as resettlement from the highlands to the valleys. Soviet authorities justified such resettling as part of the modernizing project: the resettled population would have easy access to schooling, electricity, radio, et cetera. This was true, but Ivan Zelenchuk argues it was also a way to gain control over those living far from the center of the village, where all the power was accumulated. "Consequently, many old houses located high in the mountains are now destroyed or abandoned. I think it had a detrimental effect on Hutsul ways of living; lots of things were just erased", concludes Ivan Zelenchuk.[147]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's sensibilities toward land, plants, and animals did not result from her temporary displacement to the Ural and then Spassk, Kazakhstan, where she tried to find

[145] Darya Tsymbaliuk, "What Does It Mean to Study Environments in Ukraine Now?,"https://www.environmentandsociety.org/arcadia/what-does-it-mean-study-environments-ukraine-now.
[146] Asia Bazdyrieva,"No Milk, No Love", May 2022, e-Flux," accessed September 11, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/127/465214/no-milk-no-love/.
[147] Interview Ivan Zelenchuk, Kryvorivnia, 23/09/2021.

some similarities in the ecosystems and the landscape of Carpathians and Kazakhstan. In the short film "Svit Parasky Horytsvit," 1992 (The World of Paraska Horytsvit) by the Kyiv-based film director Pavlo Fareniuk, Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit recalls how she was climbing to the highest spot in Spassk (Kazakhstan) because it "made her feel closer to her native landscape"[148].

She was deprived of the possibility to live in the Carpathian mountain for nine and a half years; she treasured her native landscape more than other people from Kryvorivnia. This argument can also be illustrated by passages from her diaries, where she spends paragraphs appreciating places around her, mainly reflecting on how those places evoke the creative force:

> Sunny days were singing and shaping my strong will to life, which called me on a short journey to the highlands, to listen to the melody of the mountain spring, falling from the top to down to the father Cheremosh (a local mountain river in Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains). So manyunsaid poetic words were then in my heart and my soul.[149]

While working seasonallyin the  Kryvopillia Forestry from 1955 to 1974, Plytka-Horytsvit planted forests in the Verkhovyna Region. There is still a big forest she partially planted in the village of Bystrets, an ancestral village of her father, Stephan.



[148] Pavlo Farenuik, "Svit Parasky Horytsvit," Kyiv 1992, Youtube, 2021, documentary film, 7:30 to 8:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4LD2a1YEoI&ab_channel=LAWNET

[149] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, "Memoir", unpublished,  typed by Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk. Quote translated by me.

Figure 4.5. Pictures of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit during her work in the Kryvopillia Forestry, scans from Plytka-Horytsvit's private album

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit bought her first camera in 1955 to document the local flora and fauna. However, most of the photos from the work period in Kryvopillia Forestry were lost; thus, I found some of them in Horytsvit's printed photo album. In the memoir, she often documents the time she spent in forests she had planted herself:

> Looking at the mountains that rose in the beauty of the spruce forest, I stopped this day near Paliyeva Kechira [in Kryvorivnia]. I looked down at that deep forest I had planted several years ago. I won't say otherwise, just like this: how did we sow you, woodland, in difficulties? There was so little clay in you. You (soil) held a powerful rebellion and resistance to it [tree-planting]; it charmed me.[150]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit worked in forestry for almost ten years; however, she did not internalize attitudes toward the environment as merely a physical resource. Plytka-Horytsvit

[150] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's dairies, typed by Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk. Quote translated by me.

continued seeing the environment as somehow alive and animated. She was in a continuous dialogue with her surroundings, describing her conversations with plants and trees, in particular, birches that grew near her house. It might be an exaggeration to call Plytka-Horytsvit a proto-eco activist. Still, her sensibilities toward nature and perception of the environment are highly valuable for rethinking the human/more-than-human relations in times of massive deforestation and environmental/climate destruction of the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains.[151]

### *4.3 Conclusions*

In this chapter, I focused on Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's memoirs and correspondence alongside the interviews I conducted in Kryvorivnia in the Fall of 2021 and January 2022 to describe Plytka-Horytsvit's traumatic Gulag experience and the period after her return to Kryvorivnia in 1954. I mainly concentrated on the various connections and friendships Plytka-Horytsvit made over time that served as a support network during her lifetime. I challenged the popular narrative about her lonely life by trying to think about love and connections beyond the romantic and heteronormative framework. This approach is relevant better to understand that part of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's life.

In the first part of the chapter, I took a closer look at the gendered experiences of the Gulag imprisonment, described in the memoir Ostannij Reis. I argued that the experience of imprisonment in the Gulag camp formed sensibilities and a way of bonding with other people, mainly women, which Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit carried with her during her life.

The second part of the chapter focused on the post-Gulag period of Plytka-Horytsvit's life. I described and analyzed her relationships with her parents and friends by further

[151] Oles Goy et al., "Preserving Ukrainian Carpathians: Law's Provisions and Present Day Realities," *ASA Annual Conference*, July 13, 2017, https://mds.marshall.edu/asa_conference/2017/accepted_proposals/108.

touching upon the connections with the more-than-human world, mainly plants, and trees. Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit worked in forestry for over a decade. In the memoir, she reflects on perceiving the trees and plants of the Carpathians as her companions, alive beings with whom she is having conversations. In the next chapter, I will analyze selected photographs from Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, further continuing the conversation about the representation of the land and community of Kryvorivnia.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REPRESENTING THE LAND AND THE COMMUNITY

In 2015, a group of Kyiv-based researchers visited a local memorial museum in Kryvorivnia that used to be the house of the Hutsul artist, writer, and ethnographer Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Under her bed, they found a box with photographic negatives and a short note that the author of those photographs left, "pale, spoiled snapshots."[152] This event started a long process of reintroducing Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit to Ukrainian and foreign wider audiences as a woman photographer who documented the local community for around thirty years, from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s.[153]

In this Chapter, I first briefly establish the analytical framework I use for my visual analysis. For this research, I selected several photographs and united them under the genres of landscape photography, private and personal portraits. I analyze these pictures using gender and decoloniality as my primary lenses. Historicizing the representation of Hutsuls and comparing those depictions with Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs, I argue that her positionality as both local and a woman changes the power hierarchies between the photographer and the photographed, creating landscape photographs and portraits, embedded in care and mutual trust and respect.



[152]Anastasia Moskovycha, Serhii Nuzhnenko, "Hutsuls'ka "liudyna Vidrodzhennia"," Radio Freedom, October 17, 2019, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/v-arsenali-vidkryly-vystavku-parasky-plytky-gorytsvit/30222140.htm
[153] Kateryna Radchenko, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive. When a Photograph Tells a Story". In *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming gravity*, Kyiv, 2019, 154.

### *5.1 Notes on Photographic "Authenticity"*

This section briefly traces back to the conceptualization of photography as an "eye-witnessing authenticity," prevailing in the USSR during the Khrushchev Thaw (I addressed this in my Introduction in more detail). Such an understanding of photography as a tool to represent "the real" history is also a central narrative in Kateryna Radchenko's article in the book *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Overcoming Gravity*, where Radchenko claims that Plytka-Horytsvit "only fixated the flow of times and events during thirty years."[154] Since Radchenko's article is part of the most coherent study of Plytka-Horytsvit's life and artistic practice, I believe it is important to unpack what it means to perceive Plytka-Horytsvit's photography as documentation.

Photographs from different eras are often united by their claim to possess a distinct relationship with the real, presenting us with an accurate and authentic portrayal of the world. Yet, this assertion has encountered challenges on several fronts. Perhaps the most straightforward way to challenge photographic "authenticity" is to inquire whether the subject in front of the camera's lens has been tampered with, deliberately arranged, or altered by the photographer.[155]

Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit pictured her own daily life, intricately woven into the fabric of her community; one can argue that her photos encompass both vernacular characteristics (considering her non-professional status) and those that exhibit a distinct authorial touch as she did not merely document[156] everyday life, but also interpreted/signified space, rituals, experimented with the composition and introduced narratives. I believe terms like representation, depiction, or construction better suit Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice

[154] Kateryna Radchenko, "Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic archive. When a Photograph Tells a Story", 155.
[155] Wells, *Photography*, 90.
[156] I emphasize on the fact that I rarely use the verb "to document" in this thesis. The main reason for such a choice is an idea of photography being a tool for constructing and inviting narratives, not simply documenting reality.

since she composes images; her models pose for her, and in doing so, she represents the land and the community.

### *5.2 Analytical Framework*

For the visual analysis of Plytka-Horytsvit's selected photographs, I mainly will use the theory introduced by British art historian John Berger. Establishing the base for his seminal work *Ways of Seeing*, Berger claims that every cultural product (a photograph, a film, an artwork, a TV show, or an advertisement) is a text consisting of signs that should be read and interpreted.[157] Semiotics concentrates on the visual elements of an image and highlights the crucial role of sign systems. These systems are mostly shaped by cultural interpretations rather than direct natural connections between images and their real-world references. American semiotician Charles Peirce classifies signs into three categories. They can be *iconic*, which means they resemble what they represent.[158] They can also be *indexical*, relying on a trace or indicator, like smoke indicating fire. Lastly, they can be *symbolic*, relying on established cultural associations.[159] Bringing all these three components together concerning photographs, Lizz Wells argues that

> Chemically produced photographs incorporate all three constituents: images resemble the person or place or object re-presented; they are indexical in that the subject had to be present for the photograph to be made, which means that the image is essentially a 'trace'; and images circulate in specific cultural contexts within which differing symbolic meanings and values may adhere[160]

Even though my central analytical question in this chapter would not be about the author's intentions (which I might never know since Plytka-Horytsvit did not write about photography in her diaries), the photographer's identity and positionality vis-a-vis the community and

[157] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. p. 8.
[158] Peirce, "Logic, Regarded as Semeiotics."
[159] Ibid.
[160] Wells, *Photography*, 53.

landscape she photographed are still crucial this analysis. Considering this in my analysis, it also traces back to the Chapter Three, which mainly focused on Plytka-Horytsvit's ability to build and restore relationships within Kryvorivnia after her Gulag exile (1945-1954).

Theorizing about Plytka-Horytsvit's locality, I claim that Plytka-Horytsvit's positionality to the landscape and the community she represents might not be characterized by the ready-made dichotomy, presented by David Lowenthal, of "looking at" and "living with" the landscape.[161] Lowenthal argues that under the pressure of visual arts, the landscape transforms from a place of settlements into a spectacle.[162] I claim that Plytka-Horytsvit disrupts that perspective as both "living with" and "looking at" the land around her. I do not intend to establish a strict dichotomy between the insider and outsider perceptions of the Kryvorivnia landscape, nor do I regard Plytka-Horytsvit as a unique local "genius" developed in isolation. Given that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit had access to various Soviet photo journals and guides, her depiction of the local landscape may have been influenced by what she encountered in those materials. Additionally, given the rich context of Hutsulshchyna and Hutsuls being actively represented mainly by the Polish, German, Austrian, and Ukrainian photographers and ethnographers, I consider the possible influences those pictures had on Plytka-Horytsvit's visual representation.

### 5.2.1 Representing the Land

> *How can the magnificence of mountains, the warmth of the sun, the arrival of spring, the serenity of streams, the rugged charm of rocks, the vibrancy of grass, the allure of birdhouses, the enchantment of blossoming gardens, and the magic of mornings and evenings fit into the confines of secular reasoning?*
>
> Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit[163]

[161] Lowenthal, "Living with and Looking at Landscape." p. 638.
[162] Ibid, 639.
[163] Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, "Memoir", unpublished, typed by Oksana Rybaruk-Zelenchuk. Quote translated by me.

In this segment, I discuss and analyze Plytka-Horytsvit's landscape photographs. While the central focus of this thesis centers on the Soviet era, specifically from 1954 to 1991, it is crucial to provide context for the convergence of landscape photography in the Hutsul region and on a global scale. This contextualization is essential for comprehending the nuances in Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs, asking whether they deviate from or align with prevailing visual conventions and representations of the East Carpathian landscape.

In her recent work "Photography: Critical Introduction," British visual researcher Liz Wells explores the genesis of the landscape genre. Wells underscores a fundamental distinction between “land” and “landscape.” While “land” refers to a natural phenomenon, a significant portion of it, particularly in Europe, has undergone substantial human modifications, including the establishment of fields, cultivation of crops, and fortification of coastlines.[164] In contrast, 'landscape' is a cultural and symbolic creation, originating from the artistic practices of seventeenth-century Dutch painters.[165]

Landscape photography draws technical elements from landscape painting, specifically adopting the golden-rule perspective with one-third/two-third horizontal proportions.[166] During the 19th and early 20th centuries, landscape photography emerged as a means of escaping the rapidly industrialized environments, offering a glimpse into the "pristine" and "pastoral" aspects of nature.[167] This inclination is closely tied to the artistic movement of Romanticism, which idealized rural life and emphasized its spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. Mountain landscapes, renowned for evoking a sense of "spirituality" and "wilderness," gained particular popularity during this period.[168]



[164] Wells, *Photography*., p. 331.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid, 332.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid, 333.

The emergence of landscape photography in Hutsulshchyna is mainly connected to exploring the region through tourist and ethnographic lenses. Patrice Dabrowski argues that the "discovery" of East Carpathians, a significant part of which was the Hutsul region, dates from the last decade of the 19th century when lowlanders from Poland and Ruthenians of Galicia became aware of highlanders and highlands and started to inscribe them into various imperial and nation-building projects.[169] It is important to highlight that most photographers depicting Hutsuls and Hutsulshchyna were men, except for the renowned Polish female photographer Zofia Rydet (1911-1997). Notable male photographers in this context included Polish and German photographers such as Juliush Dutkewicz (1834–1908) and Hans Hildenbrand (1870–1957), as well as the Ukrainian inter-war photographer Mykola Senkovskyy (1893-1939).

The context I provided above presents Plytka-Horytsvit as one of few women (and the only one local/Hutsul woman) who captured the Eastern Carpathian landscape and Hutsul community through photography. A closer examination of her landscape photography unveils noteworthy distinctions in her local perspective of Kryvorivnia's landscape.

Photograph One (Figure 5.1) could be situated in-between landscape and portrait photographs of Theodosia Plytka-Sorokhan. I assume that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit photographer Odosia arrival at the Easter Christian Church Liturgy and afterward the baptizing of the baskets, containing traditional easter bread, called paska, hand-painted eggs (*pysankas*), vegetables, and meat products. Her figure looks small concerning the vastness of space behind her. She does not look at the camera or observe the landscape behind her. The composition of this snapshot corresponds with the dominant modes of Western two-dimensional art, mimicking the golden ratio rule.[170] British cultural geographer David

[169] Dabrowski, "'Discovering' the Galician Borderlands.", 381.
[170] The golden ratio, also known as the golden mean or divine proportion, is a mathematical concept that has been used in art and design for centuries. In photography, the golden ratio is a compositional principle that

Lowenthal claims that looking at the landscape as primarily a background objectifies nature.[171] However, while still being a background, in Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs, it also serve as a constant reminder of the inseparability of people and their environments.

Figure 5.1. Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan facing Kryvorivnia, photo: Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit

In rural areas, strict zones that are claimed "natural" or "recreational " are less common," such as parks in cities. People live alongside the "natural" world, not visiting it occasionally.



involves dividing an image into sections using specific ratios to create a visually pleasing and balanced composition. Source: Livio, "The Golden Ratio and Aesthetics."

[171] Lowenthal, "Living with and Looking at Landscape." p. 642.

That makes the representation of natural landscapes as a background for portrait photography differ from those made by visitors.

The second picture I discuss, similarly to the previous one, combines human and environmental components. In terms of composition, life is presented as in flux, not static scenery. The composition of this picture is somewhat "ruined"; however, it is not apparent whether the horizontal line is curvy or those are "natural" angles of hills. This asymmetric composition creates a feeling of movement. She captured this snapshot in motion, most likely meaning that the photo was not staged, which is not typical for Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs.

Figure 5.2. A scenery of Kryvorivnia, photo: Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit

This photograph signals the major Soviet transformation of the land, namely the shift from private to collective farming. The woman who looks after cows in the picture might work as a farmer in the *kolhosp* (Ukrainian word for collective farm). Landscapes witness how particular orders are imposed and how socio-political order transforms the land. Examining the timeframe documented by Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (spanning from 1956 to 1991), it is crucial to consider how shifts in the political system also played a role in reshaping the

spatial arrangement (these alterations can be discerned in the photographer's images). Novel "shared areas," such as collective farms, emerged instead of individual homesteads. These spaces served three primary functions: cultivating sugar beets for animal fodder, gathering hay, and facilitating sheep grazing.[172]

In conclusion, Plytka-Horytsvit's landscape photography goes beyond capturing mere scenery; it encapsulates the intertwined narratives of land, community, and change. Her work is a testament to the power of photography to represent visual aesthetics and reflect on new modes of relating to the landscape through using the eye of the camera.

### 5.2.2 Representing the Community

Photography has a long history of being used as an "imperial eye" that helped central administrations document their imperial peripheries and inhabitants. During the 19th century, East-Central Europe witnessed intense discussions of what to consider "nations," "people," "tribes," and "races" or "anthropological types." As a representation tool, photography played an important role in creating "human taxonomies" by dividing people into anthropological types by Polish and Ukrainian photographers.

Situating Hutsuls and Hutsulshchyna within contemporary post-colonial debates, Ukrainian-American ethnomusicologist Maria Sonevytsky claims that during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Hutsuls "embodied a Herderian[173], romantic ideal of exoticism, stereotyped as colorful, independent, superstitious, and simple folk—the pet ethnicity of neighboring Polish and Ukrainian urban intelligentsia."[174] Hence, this exoticized external perception of Hutsuls as "true" and "authentic" folks dominated external (non-Hutsul) visual representations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As an example, Juliusz Dutkewich's

[172] Interview with Ivan Zelenchuk, conducted in Kryvorivnia 16/09/2021.

[173] Critically approaching Johann Gottfried Herder's diaries (1769), Sonevytsky points out to ways in which he approached Eastern Europeans peasantry as "noble savages" that should free Europe from the strains of modernity. Source: Maria Sonevytsky, "Wild Music," 7.

[174] Maria Sonevytsky, "Wild Music," 7.

series on “Hutsul Types” serves as an example of such ethnographic/anthropological “creation” of Hutsuls as the separate exotic “other.”


Figure 5.3. Hutsul Types Series, photo: Juliusz Dutkiewicz

Plytka-Horytsvit has been photographing the village of Kryvorivnia for over thirty years. The substantial difference between Plytka-Horytsvit and other photographers is that she saw people from Kryvorivnia as a community, not “anthropological types". Her photo archive consists of various representations and experiences with all complexities and without oversimplified pastoralism and romanticized labor.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines community as "the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality."[175] For the purposes of this thesis, I define community as a group that lives alongside each other and its environment since it is often the place, a particular locality, that characterizes their interests and ways of living.

Figure 5.4. A group of people in Hutsul attire, photo: Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit

During the Soviet rule, Hutsulshchyna remained seen as a "cradle" of Ukrainian Soviet folk culture.[176] History and ethnography students from all over the Ukrainian SSR were visiting Kryvorivnia to collect local songs, called *spivanky*, and document Hutsul customs and beliefs.[177] Those students were visiting Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's house since she was known as an amateur ethnographer.[178] Plytka-Horytsvit's photography also

[175] Stevenson, "Community", *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010.
[176] Maria Sonevytsky, "Wild Music," 7.
[177] Inga Levi, *Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. Biography,* p. 37.
[178] Ibid.

incorporates an ethnographic element in her pictures. She often captured her co-villagers in traditional Hutsul clothing during various occasions, such as church holidays, weddings, funerals, and private family celebrations.

In Picture 5.4, Plytka-Horytsvit presents a scene featuring five people. Except for a young girl on the right, most are adorned in traditional Hutsul attire. Positioned at the center, a man wears an embroidered shirt, black pants, an ornate sheep-skin vest known as a *keptar*, and a traditional *krysania* hat. Standing beside him, women long embroidered shirts, woolen skirts (*zapaskas*), and headscarves. While the intention might have been to capture just three subjects, its atypical composition intrigues this snapshot. Such a composition could be interpreted from Sontag's idea of the peripheral in photography. In her seminal text "On Photography," Sontag emphasizes that photography captures only a portion of reality within the frame, leaving out what lies beyond the photograph's edges. She emphasizes that this selective framing can influence the viewer's interpretation of the image and the subject being portrayed.[179]

In the left corner, an older woman converses with the portrayed subjects, perhaps offering guidance on their poses. Meanwhile, a small girl in the opposite corner appears perplexed; she clasps both arms behind her head, her gaze fixed on the unfolding scene. As prospective observers, we are granted an opportunity to glimpse the orchestration of this photograph, a behind-the-scenes view of the meticulously cultivated "authenticity." The margins of the photographs, whether captured intensively or not, create an additional field for interpretations.

Staying within the topic of the unusual experimental compositions and ethnographic depiction, I shortly discuss a photograph taken during the Christmas Celebration at the Christian Orthodox Church in Kryvorivnia. Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive contains various

[179] Susan Sontag "On Photography," p.11.

depictions of religious holidays and rituals, mainly performed in the church. Unlike in other churches in Hutsulshcyna, the Christian Orthodox Church in Kryvorivnia still functioned during the Soviet rule. Main reason for that was its Orthodox denomination. In comparison, Greek Catholic churches were criminalized in 1946 by "canceling" the Union of Brest (1596).[180] The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church stood as the most extensive prohibited religious community within the Soviet Union.[181]

Thinking through photography and access, John Berger states that, in photography, *what is shown evokes what is not shown*.[182] Taking this statement somewhat further, I also think about photography in terms of access: a person's gender, especially in the community of the strict gender divisions of space and activities such as Hutsulshchyna, influences what could be seen and what not. What also strikes my attention and what might become the narrative for the future researchers of Plytka-Horytsvit's photo archive is how there are almost no photographs that were photographed inside her or other people's houses. I assume that such lack can be augmented because the photo lenses she owned were not light-sensitive enough to catch the light in often dark Hutsul houses. However, one can also think of it in relation to domesticity, often associated with a woman's reproductive work and the conscious decision to de-center herself from such narratives.



[180] Bociurkiw, "The Catacomb Church," 5.
[181] Ibid, 6.
[182] John Berger, *Understanding A Photograph*. p.19.

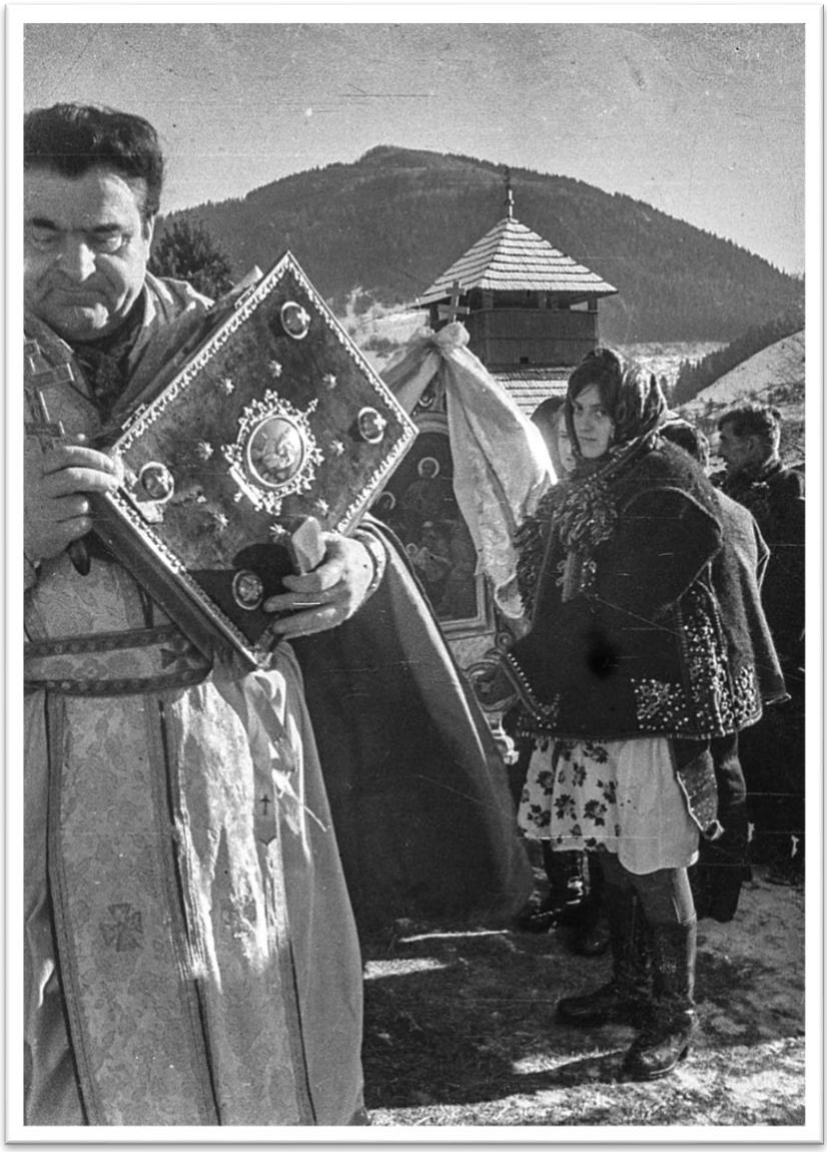

Figure 5.5. A Christmas scene from the church in Kryvorivnia, photo: Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit

For instance, in several villages within the Verkhovyna region, notably Kryvorivnia, women are prohibited from participating in the practice of carol singing, a ritual traditionally regarded as "male."[183] Consequently, there are scarcely any images of traditional Carol singing preserved in Plytka-Horytsvit's archive. It can be inferred that the absence of such visual documentation stems from women's restricted access to these specific rituals and religious observances. The Church exemplifies this pronounced gender division. Presently,

[183] Interview with Ivan Zelenchuk, conducted in Kryvorivnia 16/09/2021.

churches in Hutsulshchyna still feature two distinct entrances: a frontal entry designated for men and a rear one intended for women and children.[184]

This snapshot possesses a distinctive composition that could be an intentional capture, or a fortunate instance seized in time. The image's central focus could be the priest, a figure imbued with authority. However, his prominence is somewhat diminished when viewed from a certain angle. The captivating aspect of this picture lies in the interplay of gazes among the subjects. The girl on the front is wearing a dark red coat (*serdak*), a linen blouse or shirt with multicolored embroidery, and a wraparound skirt (*zapaska*) and colorful kerchief (*khustka*).

The theme of work appears repeatedly in Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic collection. This theme, akin to the religious context, carries distinct gender implications. The images frequently depict men immersed in tasks like woodcutting, house construction, and sheep farming. Ivan Zelenchuk, in a conversation with me, shed light on Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's involvement in seasonal one-day jobs, known as *den'ky,* particularly during the summer and spring. Carrying her camera, she often documented the people she worked alongside, capturing candid moments.

From the 1970s onwards, a significant shift occurred. Plytka-Horytsvit acquired a new camera equipped with a timer, enabling her presence in the very snapshots she captured.[185] Her desire to weave herself into Kryvorivnia's memory spurred this transition. Thus, her photographs evolved from mere documentation to immersive storytelling, reflecting her connection to the community's labor and its role in shaping her identity.

Considering the concept of photography as "essentially an act of non-intervention,"[186] Susan Sontag asserts that when we take pictures we inherently assume the role of an observer, creating distance between ourselves and the events unfolding. This quotation aptly

[184] Ibid.
[185] Kateryna Radchenko, "Kuratorskyy Pohliad Kateryny Radchenko. Znayty Parasky Plytku-Horytsvit," The Kyiv Review, May 2020, Retrieved from: https://rozmova.wordpress.com/2021/06/05/kateryna-radchenko-3/
[186] Susan Sontag "On Photography," p.11.

exemplifies Sontag's perspective on photographers as inherent outsiders—individuals who wield influence and inadvertently contribute to perpetuating violence. Sontag's primary focus lies in the examination of street and war photography. Her most well-known work, "On Photography," is often critiqued for containing numerous oversimplifications and broad generalizations. By neglecting to contextualize her perspective within a specific geographical framework, namely the USA, she inadvertently comes across as excessively centered on Western perspectives.

However, it is important to acknowledge that photographic practices and the relationships photographers have with the subjects and locations they capture are inherently diverse. In the concluding segment of this chapter, I reflect on my favorite photograph by Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, underscoring the notion that photography can also be grounded in principles of care and trust. This perspective challenges the perception that all photography is detached and distant.

“A woman with a bird on her head,” this photograph triggered my curiosity several years ago and led me to this long journey of trying to understand who Plytka-Horytsvit was and why her photographs affect my sensibilities, evoking the feeling of knowing people she represents (I address this point in Chapter Two). This particular image possesses a remarkably cinematic quality, conjuring a sensation of observing a life intimately close and from a distance. In this photograph, Plytka-Horytsvit employs a composition technique commonly found in cinema—the "frame within a frame." This technique deliberately incorporates elements within the image that function as a frame nested within the larger photograph frame. Here, the "frame within a frame" approach beckons viewers to engage attentively with the narrative meticulously woven by the photographer.

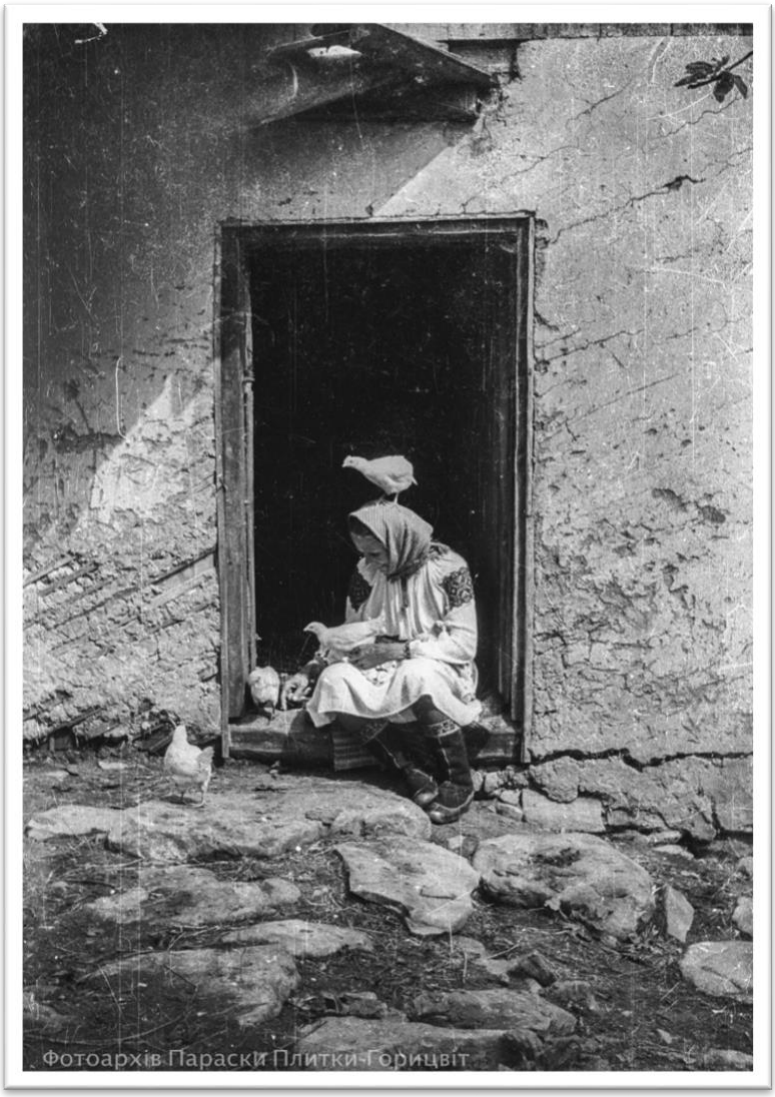


Figure 5.6. A woman with a bird on her head, photo: Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit

The scene unfolds with a woman, likely Odosia Plytka-Sorokhan, seated at the entrance of a henhouse, enveloped by a gathering of chickens. She cradles one of the birds while another perches atop her head. Her smile is warm, and her right-hand gestures toward the ground. What becomes evident is an intimate interaction between a human and a bird, a connection suggesting a quiet understanding. Perhaps Odosia directs the chicken's attention to the ground, a gentle instruction for exploration of the ground. This snapshot presents a narrative

ripe for diverse interpretations, inviting viewers to imagine the countless stories that could unfold within its frames.[187]

### *5.3 Last Reflection on the Margin*

During the fieldwork in Kryvorivnia, the people I interviewed invited me to their houses. There, we sometimes looked through their private photo albums. Photographs that Plytka-Horytsvit took of them and then gave them as a small gift always occupied a special place there. “See, this is the one by Paraska,” said Olena Bilak, a friend of Plytka-Horytsvit.

Olena Bilak invited me over to her beautiful wooden house on a hill on a rainy day on the 26th of September, just before my departure to Vienna. Despite our conversation mainly revolving around narrations, she graciously exhibited photographs that Paraska gave to her decades ago. Evidently, she held these photographs in high regard, cherishing them as tokens of memory associated with Paraska and as triggers for reminiscing about her youth—the cherished days of the past that remain beyond her reach. This tea-infused meeting triggered contemplation within me. It dawned upon me that the significance of Horytsvit’s photographic archives transcends mere aesthetic value, which holds importance for visual critics; rather, these photographs hold a tangible value for the community. For the community, these images are not just a visual representation; they possess a substantial materiality. These photographs don't just depict the community of Kryvorivnia; they are an intrinsic part of its identity.



### *5.4 Conclusions*

In my exploration of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic legacy, several key themes and insights emerged. Plytka-Horytsvit's work goes beyond capturing visual aesthetics; it

[187] John Berger, *Understanding A Photograph*, 47.

encapsulates the intricate narratives of land, community, and transformation. Her photography demonstrates that the camera's power extends beyond mere scenery, inviting viewers to reflect on their relationship with the landscape. This is evident in her distinctive compositions that blur the line between observer and environment, reminding us of the interdependence between humans and their environment.

The gendered and decolonial lenses through which her work is analyzed further reveal her unique perspective. Through the visual approach introduced by John Berger, her photographs become texts laden with signs and symbols that require interpretation. This approach highlights her role as observer and participant, blurring the lines between insider and outsider perspectives. Importantly, Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs also underscore the potential for photography as an act of care and trust. Her intimate interactions with subjects and deep integration into the community's fabric redefine the common perception of detached photography.

# CONCLUSION

This study has adopted a multifaceted approach that combines gender history, decoloniality, inter-imperiality, analysis of Soviet modernity-coloniality, and insights from environmental humanities to provide a comprehensive understanding of Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic practice within its broader historical and socio-political context. I examined Plytka-Horytsvit's private archival materials such as memoirs, correspondence, and photographs, deploying gender and decolonial perspectives that led me to the following insights.

By incorporating the gender analytical framework articulated by the renowned historian Joan Scott, this study has uncovered several significant insights. Firstly, it has shown the impact of gender on Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's ability to engage in photography. It argues that her unmarried and childless status provided her with the essential freedom to devote substantial time to her photographic pursuits. Furthermore, given that photography served as Plytka-Horytsvit's hobby, this research briefly addressed the gender dynamics that influenced leisure activities during the Khrushchev Thaw era. Secondly, this study examined how gender influences the shaping of space within Kryvorivnia. It shed light on how gender affected both access to various topics and domains and their overall accessibility. Lastly, it provided a unique perspective on Plytka-Horytsvit's experience of incarceration within the Gulag system, particularly highlighting aspects such as gender-based solidarity within the confines of the labor camps.

The decolonial and inter-imperial perspectives helped me to place Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit within the broader tradition of representing the land and people of Hutsylshchyna. Through a comparative analysis of Plytka-Horytsvit's photographs alongside snapshots taken

by male photographers in the early 20th century, I have argued that her portrayal of both the land and the community offers a less objectifying and more intimate representation of the Hutsuls and their environment.

My primary findings underscore that Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit, who maintained her single status throughout her lifetime, shared a profound and loving bond with her mother, as well as cultivated numerous close friendships, predominantly with women. In this thesis, I argue that despite Plytka-Horytsvit's decade of solitude following her mother's passing in 1984, her life, both before and after this period, was enriched by diverse and fulfilling relationships and connections.

Secondly, in the realm of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit's photography, my research reveals that her images vividly portray her intimate connection with and integration into the environment and community of Kryvorivnia, which significantly influenced her local perspective. Collectively, these findings challenge the prevailing heteronormative narrative surrounding her life—a narrative that suggests that her singleness and lack of children equated to unhappiness and unfulfillment.

This research makes a humble contribution to the evolving academic trend of examining Soviet gender history through the critical lens of decoloniality, thereby recognizing and addressing both internal and external hierarchies. Additionally, it offers a partial but I hope noteworthy contribution to the field of Ukrainian and broader Eastern European gender historiography by introducing the life and work of Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit to a wider audience.

My research was inevitably limited to some themes, which means that there are important themes that require further exploration in future studies concerning Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit. One critical area deserving more attention is Plytka-Horytsvit's spiritual Christian identity and her relationship with her mother, Hannah Plytka. A more comprehensive

investigation into these aspects could shed light on how her personal beliefs and family dynamics influenced her gendered experiences and photographs. Additionally, this study could not allocate sufficient time to discussing nationalism within the context of the modernity-coloniality framework. This topic presents an exciting avenue for future research, particularly when considering the contemporary reception of Plytka-Horytsvit's biography and artistic contributions.

Regarding the limitations of my visual analysis, and hence the directions for further research, I could not examine her photography's materiality. One of the primary constraints I encountered during this study was a limited access to the film rolls containing Plytka-Horytsvit's work, due to their fragile physical condition. These invaluable artifacts are currently preserved in a studio in Kyiv and are not readily accessible to the public. Nevertheless, gaining such access and delving into the materiality of these photographs could significantly enhance the depth of further analysis of Plytka-Horytsvit's photographic works. Such further research might help to better asses Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit’s status as a talanted photographer in Ukraine as well as in a more global perspective.

# APPENDIX 1

**Interview guide**

1. Start with oral consent.
2. Ask about recording.
3. DO NOT FORGET to record the preview (my name, interviewee's name, date, location).

**Plan**

It will be a semi-structured interview, thus, my interviewee may only sometimes follow my interview design. As well as I can also change it and adapt to the flow of the conversation. It will be conducted in Ukrainian. I plan to make it on the 4th, 5th, and 9th of January 2022. I may transcribe the interview and send it to my interviewee for review if they request it.

**Questions**

I divided questions into separate spheres (work, private life, community engagement, photographic practice). Besides that, I also have some introductory questions about personal connections between the interviewee and Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit.

Introduction

1. Please, briefly introduce yourself.
2. When did you first hear about PPH?
3. How did you meet PPH?
4. Which kind of relationships did you have with PPH?

**Work and the period after GULAG exile**

1. What PPH did when she came back from GULAG? Did she had a job?
2. Where did she live when she returned from GULAG?
3. Can you please tell me more about her work in Krasnoyilsk forestry? What was her official job title?
4. What was she doing after retiring from Krasnoyilsk forestry?
5. How was she earning money after retirement?
6. Was she published as a writer during her life? If not, do you know why?

**Private life**

1. Was she religious? If yes, in what way?
2. What do you know about PPH's private life?
3. Why did she decide not to get married/have kids?

4. What was her stance on marriage/family?
5. How did the locals perceive PPH? How did you perceive her?
6.

**Photographic process**

1. Which books about photography she had in her library? Where does she get them?
2. Was she having any connections with other Soviet photographers?
3. Why did she start to photograph?
4. Was she identifying herself as a photographer?
5. Was she earning money as a photographer?
6. What do you think is the biggest value of her photographic heritage? Does it have any communal value, in your view?

**Community life**

1. How was Paraska engaging with the community?
2. How was she making connections with locals after the exile?

Besides the core questions, I will also ask some additional questions based on the answers I will receive.

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