

*Chapter 8*

**CIVIL WAR IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES**  
The Polish–Ukrainian Conflict during the Interwar Years  
and the Second World War



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When it comes to Eastern Europe, the definition of nation-states is a nightmare. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when nationalist conceptions first gained ground among urban social elites—and which were in turn supported by a political awakening of peasants, workers, and the lower social strata—the whole of Eastern Europe was under the domination of three empires (or four, if we include Germany) that were not at all interested in fostering national separatism, though they were also unable to do anything against the developments that took place in their respective realms. Having no realistic opportunity of realizing their dreams, nationalist politicians developed maps that included all those areas where their co-nationals were actually living or had lived in historic or prehistoric times. These areas were, as a rule, very large. And not all of these maps actually reflected the actual ethnic-cum-national situation in a given area.

Having said that, we must concede that disputes over borders, the concept of nations (inclusive/exclusive), and the “national” quality of a certain area were unavoidable. Even if we accept the idea that every person has a definite ethnic or national identity (which was far from true in Eastern Europe), settlement policies, regime changes, shifts in identification from one nationality to another, as well as political and cultural (including religious) assimilation, created a patchwork of identities that rendered futile any effort to impose a system of national homogeneity on the situation. Many nineteenth-century identifications were simply based on religious affiliation—Protestant, Catholic, Uniate, Orthodox, Jew—and to make things more complicated, families were often dispersed across

national borders. In the light of this complex situation, this chapter will focus on the Polish–Ukrainian conflict during the interwar years and the Second World War.

## **National Disappointment**

In the Polish–Ukrainian context two basic ways of thinking competed with each other for legitimacy. In the case of Poland there were, first, the National Democrats (ND), a largely lower-class grouping whose vision of a Polish state was ethnic in concept. They perceived primordially Germanized Polish people far to the west of undisputed central Polish areas. Consequently, they demanded the creation of a Poland that would stretch far to the west to include the Germanized populations that would have to be re-Polonized (the Piast concept).<sup>1</sup> To the second group, the Pilsudskites, such a nation-state seemed politically dangerous because it would lead to German–Polish competition. Instead, they preferred a historic concept of Polish statehood. The Poland they envisaged was to include those areas ruled by the Jagiellonian dynasty since the Middle Ages. This harked back to the time of the combined Polish-Lithuanian state, which included not only ethnic Lithuania but also what is today Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of Russia. This second perspective was primarily an upper-class one, structurally premodern, and one based on rulers rather than on people. It was also one which made light of the fact that Józef Pilsudski, a descendant of the Polonized Lithuanian gentry, was also one of the founders of Polish socialism. Arguing that Poles were the more developed and “more cultural” social stratum, Pilsudski’s followers, while verbally “respecting” local non-Poles, were convinced that in the end they could educate the “lesser developed” eastern Slavs and turn them into Poles. Until then, the Slavs should live in a “federation” with the Poles, who, of course, would be the dominant partner.<sup>2</sup>

In a general sense, the ideologies of the National Democrats and the Pilsudskites were not peculiar to the Polish situation. Practically everywhere in Eastern Europe, different historical concepts, varying as to which historical period was referenced, competed with ethno-linguistic interpretations of the present situation. Whatever frontier was drawn, there would be a party, nation, or group willing to dispute it and call for it to be revised.<sup>3</sup> In many cases the dispute was about which ethnic group was a “real” or “historic” one, and which was just a bunch of arrogant defenders of a dialectical group, an “ethnographic mass,” as the Berlin-based Polish Slavist Aleksander Brückner called Ukrainians.<sup>4</sup> To Lithuanian nationalists, Vilnius, the capital of the Lithuanian grand dukes, had to be part of a new Lithuanian state, notwithstanding that the city itself was predominantly Polish and Jewish, with Poles also being the majority population in the city’s environs. Force won over argument in the Vilnius case. In October

1920, Polish troops occupied the Vilnius area, created Central Lithuania (*Litwa Środkowa*), and annexed it to Poland after an election two years later. As a consequence, relations between Poland and Lithuania, with its capital now at Kaunas, were similar to those that now exist between North and South Korea—there was not even a postal connection between the two countries until Poland extracted a “normalization” referring to its German “friends” after the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938.

In Poland, the National Democrats and the Pilsudskites, differing on many political issues, agreed on a compromise: the ND represented Poland to the West, whereas Pilsudski cared for adding areas in the east. Here, however, the Poles encountered a rival.

Ukrainians created a national concept of their own in the nineteenth century. But Ukrainian nationality is a disputed category even today, with Rusyns in Transcarpathia claiming a separate nationality and many Russians denying national status to what they call “Little Russians” (*Malorossy*), the term used in the Czarist empire. Historically, the southern areas of today’s Ukraine were unsuccessfully claimed by the Kievan Rus’ around the ninth and tenth centuries, though they were inhabited by Turkic or other steppe peoples, the Tatar Mongol Golden Horde, and the Crimean khanate, a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. Only in the eighteenth century were they resettled by Russia (as *Novaja Rossija*, “New Russia,” using settlers from all over Europe), after the Russian Empire under Catherine II and Prince Potemkin conquered the steppe and Crimea.

Much of the eastern part of the Ukraine (*Slobodskaja Ukraina*, around present-day Kharkiv) had also been resettled and experienced an influx from all over Russia during the process of industrialization. Russia considered the central part of Ukraine to be Little Russia (*Malorossija*, corresponding with northern Great Russia), and even today the regular narrative of Russian history considers Kiev to be the cradle of Russia and the “mother of all Russian towns.” Only late in the nineteenth century did the historian Mykhaylo Hrushevsky develop a historical narrative that detached the Ukrainians from Russian history. The creation of two different nationalities has been a topic of many peaceful and bloody “discussions” from that time on.

This corresponds with the similar position of Polish nationalists who view today’s western Ukraine (Eastern Galicia) as Ruś (Ruthenia). Still, in the Austrian (*Ruthenen*) and Polish (*Rusini*) terminology of the early twentieth century, Ruthenians (that is, Ukrainians from Galicia and Carpatho-Ukraine) were separated from Ukrainians who (at best) lived east of the Polish borders of 1772—that is, the borders before the first partition of Poland. And in Austrian Galicia, the Ruthenians (divided into Ukrainophiles and Russophiles) never really settled the question of whether they were Ukrainians, members of a separate nation, or a western part of the larger Russian nation. Only when the occupying Russians treated these who were pro-Moscow as badly as Ukrainian nationalists

in 1914/15 did this orientation become a thing of the past. In the interwar period, when Poland fought and won against a Ukrainian army in 1918/19 and the Entente Powers finally accepted its ownership of Eastern Galicia in 1923, these territories were understood as an extension of Little Poland (*Małopolska*), the area dominated by Cracow (Kraków) and the counterpart of Great Poland (*Wielkopolska*), dominated by Posen (Poznań). Thus, after the First World War, it was renamed Eastern Little Poland (*Małopolska Wschodnia*).

Whereas before the First World War, in the Austrian part of partitioned Poland, Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) national consciousness was supported by a religious and later secular school system (both Polish Roman Catholic and Ukrainian Greek Catholic), and by peasant politicization triggered by general and local elections,<sup>5</sup> in the mixed areas under Russian rule nothing of this kind happened. That is why in Volhynia, as opposed to Galicia, national and political consciousness remained a low-key affair. Here, as with areas to the north, such as Polissja (Polesie) and other parts of Byelorussia, some people even in the 1930s still defined themselves as locals (*tutejsi*) only, because they had not learned to identify themselves with another category, such as Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, or Byelorussian.

The first efforts to bring about a Ukrainian state (in Kiev in 1917, and in Lviv in 1918) resulted in disasters. Whereas imperial Germany and, reluctantly, Austria supported a Ukrainian state (which was actually nearly destroyed by the Bolsheviks)—triggering its declaration of independence in January 1918 in order to sign a peace treaty (on February 9) and continue fighting Russia (up to the peace treaty signed on March 3, 1918)—the German and Austrian helpers turned into occupants who soon replaced the leftist government with a Ukrainian State under *het'man* Pavlo Skoropads'kyi who enjoyed a semi-monarchical status, but depended fully on the Germans and left with them in December 1918. Ukrainian republican, czarist Russian, communist, and peasant-anarchist governments and their armies fought each other until the disputed area was divided up between the Soviets and the Poles in 1921. Thereafter, non-Soviet Ukrainians became one of the most revisionist nations in the interwar period. And they began a search for possible helpers.

Over the next few years—with most of Volhynia (except Zhytomyr) and Eastern Galicia now part of Poland, and central and eastern Ukraine under Soviet rule—different and rather unexpected developments took place. Soviet Ukraine, heavily Russified since the nineteenth century, was Ukrainized in the *korenizatsiia*, an effort by the Soviet communists to create a base for the party within the non-Russian ethnic groups of the Soviet Union. Agrarian reform that dispossessed estate owners (mostly Russian and Polish) appealed to the Ukrainian peasantry across the border.<sup>6</sup> Combined with an extensive alphabetization drive that pushed literacy from around 20 per cent to more than 80 per cent during the interwar period, Soviet Ukrainians learned to

write and speak Ukrainian in the USSR, thus presenting a constant example for their co-nationals under Polish rule. Though this soon ended in the 1930s and was replaced by Russification, forced collectivization, artificially created famine, and repression, Soviet communism continued to have followers in Polish Ukraine.

On the Polish side, we find a double policy. In Eastern Galicia, Austrian prewar policy in the territories with a mixed Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish population had given rise to an extensive Ukrainian school and library (*prosvita*) network that supported the development of a national consciousness, national parties (even rivaling socialist parties),<sup>7</sup> and resulted in competing state proclamations and wars. During the 1920s, pro-Soviet communism and growing nationalism (including terrorist attacks and murders of Polish and moderate Ukrainian politicians) gave rise to Polish “pacification” counter-attacks and efforts to Polonize and dispossess Ukrainians—and to change the demographic balance by bringing in Polish “colonists,” often demobilized soldiers.

North of the former Austro–Russian border, in Polish Volhynia, the situation was different. During the period of Russian rule, the use of the Ukrainian language was banned and the Uniate Church was incorporated into that of Russian Orthodoxy in the 1830s; national consciousness here was as underdeveloped as the economy and other settlers (Germans, Czechs, Baptists), brought in during the nineteenth century, blurred the ethnic landscape. Poland separated these areas from “troublesome Galicia” and its nationalist Ukrainians by a police-guarded border (*kordon sokalski*) in order to prevent Galician Ukrainian nationalists agitating among “peaceful” Volhynian Ukrainians.

When Pilsudski came to power in Poland following a coup d’état in 1926, he placed the administration of Volhynia under his friend Henryk Józewski. Born in Kiev, Józewski was a member of the Polish gentry; as well as being a painter, he had been Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs in Symon Petlyura’s short-lived Ukrainian People’s Republic of 1920. Following his appointment as governor of Volhynia, during his time in office he tried to alleviate the impact of national strife. Fostering a Volhynian regional identity that included both Poles and Ukrainians, Józewski supported Ukrainians in government and teaching positions, presenting his province as a counter-model to the Soviet one. In return, he demanded allegiance to the Polish state and banned Galician Ukrainian nationalist activity.<sup>8</sup>

In Galicia, on the other hand, political polarization within the Ukrainian community resulted in the development of two major political blocks in the 1930s: whereas the majority of the establishment supported the Ukrainian National Democratic Union (UNDO) under Milena Rudnytska and Vasyl’ Mudry, which tried to represent Ukrainian interests in Poland by legal and political means, many young people (peasants, gymnasia pupils, and university students) were attracted to the terrorist Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO)

and its successor, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), founded in 1929.

When Poland became nationally radicalized after Pilsudski's death in 1935, any prospects for peaceful Polish–Ukrainian cooperation vanished. Józewski had to change posts with the governor of Łódź, a radical Polish nationalist. UNDO declared an end to the “normalization” process of Ukrainian–Polish cooperation in 1938, and Polish nationalists started a new drive to colonize Ukrainian lands and dispossess Ukrainian churches (*rewindykacja*). Though UNDO declared its loyalty to the Polish state, when Germany attacked on September 1, 1939, many Ukrainians hoped that German support would bring about a change in their plight.

Thus, national disappointment was the mood in this ethnically and historically mixed area at the beginning of the Second World War. Poles still were not sure of their territorial possessions and Ukrainians had repeatedly experienced setbacks regarding nationalist aspirations.

### Hopes Set on the Great Powers

We should divide the peoples and politicians of 1939 into two categories. Those who profited from the status quo wanted to continue to do so and, therefore, were for continuous peace. The others, who considered that they had lost in the first round of liberation after the First World War, expected change to come only from war—and that is why they were not at all interested in the preservation of peace. When we look at coalition partners, this gives us a clue to the events of 1939. Official Poland and Great Britain wanted to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, some Polish politicians dreamed of further expansion to the east, and they wanted closer ties with Germany; for them, even Nazi Germany seemed to be better than the older Weimar “Prussians” who were anti-Polish from the start. On the other hand, they were (with good reason) afraid of Germany, and that is why, in the end, they did not enter into an alliance with the Germans in 1939. After having realized that the Poles would not become their junior partners, the Germans decided to operate against them instead—in alliance with the Soviets.

The Soviets wanted change, too. That is why as a partner they preferred Nazi Germany to Great Britain, with whose representatives in the summer of 1939 talks lingered on without coming to an agreement. Britain offered stability, Germany offered change, and the USSR was at that time still interested in something like a world revolution. Stalin's lesson from the First World War was that, if a revolution should break out, one had to have war first and the following disaster would then foster revolutionary awareness. And Ukrainians of all creeds wanted change as well. They were currently without a state, so only a war

could bring them the statehood (*derzhavnist*) they wanted so dearly. Thus, many Ukrainians were pro-war. Even UNDO leaders, who at one stage pledged allegiance to Poland, among them Vasyl' Mudry, were the first to offer to collaborate with the Germans as soon as they could do so—that is, in October 1939.<sup>9</sup> The OUN—active against everything Polish, and having changed their statute into a fascist leadership-oriented organization in August 1939 in Rome—supported the German army with a small band of volunteer soldiers. When the Germans realized that the Soviets would stand by their promises and the latter entered the war on September 17, 1939 the OUN were brought back into the German zone of occupation, though not without being told that they would be used again as soon as possible.

The Soviets, too, employed a national logic in their rationalization of the new (fifth) partition of Poland. Security for their compatriots in western Ukraine and western Byelorussia, the creation of a united (Soviet) Ukraine and Byelorussia, and the defeat of the Polish *pany*, considered to be model imperialists—those were the slogans of the USSR when the eastern parts of the Polish Republic were incorporated into the Soviet Union. In Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, Polish anti-Ukrainian policy was thus followed by nominally pro-Ukrainian Soviet policy. Being accompanied, however, by all the shortcomings, cruelties, and terror that was part of Sovietization, even most Ukrainians soon came to dislike what many of them (from the lower strata) had hoped would be a liberation. In this they did not differ from Jewish leftists, who in the first weeks welcomed the Soviets, too, if only because they saved them from being occupied by anti-Semitic Germany. Soon, however, both came to realize that Soviet domination would have positive effects only for a very small part of their respective communities. Whereas the Ukrainians could now hope for German intervention, the Jews could not.

Between 1939 and 1941, the Germans treated the small group of Ukrainians that lived in German-occupied Poland (the General Government) well. The school and cooperative systems of the Ukrainian minority were expanded, Ukrainians could take over Jewish enterprises as fiduciaries, and they could become mayors instead of the Poles. In 1940, the cathedral of Chelm (Kholm), given to the Catholics after the First World War, was transferred to a newly created Autocephalous Orthodox Church of the General Government, whose southern parts became an Orthodox Ukrainian church.

Poles, on the other hand, were the losers on both sides. On the German side, however, they, too, were compensated to a certain extent by profiting from the even worse treatment of the Jews. But on both sides of the German–Soviet demarcation line, it was now better to declare oneself a Ukrainian than a Pole. This possibility is one of the least researched in inter-ethnic relations—most people, including scholars, tend to accept nationality as a fixed category. This is not so, however. Whereas Germanization is a well-researched field, nationality changes among other nationalities have remained relatively unexplored.

Admittedly, the survival of Jews as “Aryans” has been researched. Normally well-accepted categories of Jew and Pole/Ukrainian answer to a political logic. Zionists, Orthodox Jews and radical gentile nationalists try to impress on the public (even the learned ones) that these were stable categories. But they overlook the fact that—especially in Galicia—the borderline between Jew and Pole was very easily crossed, and that confessionalization, which made one’s creed a private affair, had progressed a long way in the larger cities where, as in Lviv, Polish nationalists as a rule counted the Jews as Poles in order to outnumber Ukrainians.

The same holds true with the distinction between Pole and Ukrainian. For example, Volodymyr Kubyovych, head of the Ukrainian Central Committee, established by the Germans in Cracow, had a Polish mother: two of her four children were brought up as Poles, two as Ukrainians. Even Volodymyr’s first wife was Polish. The brother of the Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andriy Sheptytsky from Lviv, Polish General Stanislaw Szeptycki, considered himself to be unquestionably Polish (in fact his family descended from Polonized Ruthenian gentry). Andriy’s Christian name had been Roman before he chose to join the Ukrainians.

This fluid nationality situation was countered with a specific kind of radicalism. Whereas one might think that a society with so many ethno-national crossovers would be more tolerant, the contrary was true. To a high degree, it was uncertainty (including that of national status) that made the respective groups profess their national attitude more uncompromisingly than one might expect. This might have been overcome in closer relationships, but even that rule did not always work.

## The Changes of 1941

When Germany attacked the USSR on June 22, 1941, hope and fear were equally present. Whereas there was no place for independent Slavic states in the Germans’ *Generalplan Ost*, which foresaw the creation of the German *Lebensraum*, their Slavic allies had different expectations and hopes. Killing those who were pointed out to them to have been commissars or otherwise held communist sympathies, the German *Einsatzgruppen* that screened Soviet POWs for execution also searched for “reliable” men to help the Germans.

Poles and Ukrainians in western Ukraine hoped that the Germans would either re-establish the old order (Poles) or bring them the statehood that their nationalist leaders had expected from the Germans. Further to the east, where political aims were not so prominent after many years of Soviet rule, the locals at least expected the Germans to return to re-establish a “bourgeois” way of production, including private enterprises and the redistribution of forcibly collectivized lands.



Hitler himself declared on July 16, 1941,<sup>10</sup> at a conference at his *Wolfsschanze* headquarters, that though the Germans should declare that they will act in the interest of local inhabitants, they should nevertheless shoot and deport the locals. On the other hand, he declared that he had no intention of transforming those people prematurely and unnecessarily into enemies. To this end, the Germans should continue to pretend that they were the bringers of freedom—though the Germans had no intention of leaving.

This bogus “freedom” initiative resulted in the Ukrainians welcoming the Germans. One week after the invasion of the Soviet Union (and perhaps even before that date, because the relevant document referred to undocumented information given on June 17, 1941), Heydrich ordered his security-police task groups (*Einsatzgruppen*) “to activate without leaving a trace (*spurlos auflösen*) self-cleaning efforts of anti-communist and anti-Jewish circles.”<sup>11</sup> There was not too much to be done, because many Ukrainians, indoctrinated by the anti-Jewish propaganda of the OUN that identified Jews with both communists and Russians, readily held their Jewish neighbors responsible for Soviet atrocities and started pogroms all over the German occupied areas.<sup>12</sup> Though there is still uncertainty as to what extent these “self-cleaning efforts” were self-made or introduced by the Germans, it is clear that it was not difficult to find a sufficient number of locals to undertake pogroms and mass killings of Jews.

As this happened in the first weeks of the German invasion, one cannot separate these massacres from the Ukrainian nationalist project of creating a Ukrainian state under German domination. In Lemberg (Lviv) on June 30, 1941, Yaroslav Stets’ko, the deputy leader of the Bandera faction of the OUN, and some of his comrades proclaimed a Ukrainian state, only to be arrested and deported to the German concentration camp at Sachsenhausen and other prisons in the following weeks as Eastern Galicia became the fifth district of the General Government. In a similar effort in Kiev, a Ukrainian National Council (*Ukrainśka Natsional’na Rada*), created by the Mel’nyk faction of the 1940 split OUN immediately after practically all of the Jews of Ukraine’s capital had been shot in nearby Babiy Yar, operated until the city was brought under German civil authority under the notorious East Prussian *Gauleiter* Erich Koch, the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* (RKU). Leaders who continued to work politically had to flee (like Oleh Kandyba-Olzhych, who took refuge in Lviv but was arrested later) or they were shot in Babiy Yar (like the OUN martyr Olena Teliha).

Thus, Ukrainians who had placed great hopes on the Germans were disappointed when their nationalist efforts remained unsuccessful. Whereas nationalist political leaders had hoped for Ukrainian statehood under German suzerainty that would finally bring them support against Poles, Russians, and Jews, areas where Ukrainians formed most or part of the population remained distributed between the General Government, the RKU, German military administration (the *Rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet Süd*), Romania (Transnistria), and Hungary

(Carpatho-Ukraine). Self-government was permitted up to the county level only, and the Germans, who had nominally sided with the Ukrainians before, now saw to it that nowhere (not even in the religious field) could national Ukrainian unity develop.

The Germans followed the directives of July 16, 1941. Whereas most Jews were killed in 1941/42, Ukrainians were treated well under the General Government as they could be used against the Poles. Their Ukrainian Central Committee (*Ukrainischer Hauptausschuss*, UCC), headed by Kubiyovych, had much more power than the parallel Polish collaborationist organization, the Main Trustee Council (*Rada Główna Opiekunicza*). Though both bodies were assigned mainly a charity role, the Ukrainian one developed into a kind of cultural ministry, an economic interest lobby (supporting Ukrainian cooperatives), and held close links to General Governor Hans Frank. When the German military found themselves in serious trouble after Stalingrad, and Goebbels proclaimed a different approach to the “eastern peoples” (*Ostvölker*), the UCC became the unparalleled guiding body for the Ukrainian (Galician) SS troops, formed under the General Government and which enjoyed a large influx of volunteers hoping for German support for Ukrainian statehood.

On the one hand, German propaganda—namely, the “liberation” rhetoric of the first weeks of the war in 1941—seems clearly distinct from the German position after Stalingrad. In this respect it is not incorrect to speak of two distinct phases. On the other hand there were communal and territorial differentiations that transgress such a simple dualistic timeline.

While the Germans were in fact only interested in ensuring their own dominant position, they were at the same time well aware that this end would be more easily reached if the locals not only cooperated but also linked their own objectives to that purpose. This did not mean in the least that these objectives would be tolerated or endorsed by the Germans in the long run—they would only be accepted as short-term goals and only if they served German aims.

Alfred Rosenberg, the German minister for the occupied eastern territories, appointed in 1941, is sometimes described as someone who would have favored autonomy or even independence for Eastern non-Russian peoples, as long as they cooperated with the Germans.<sup>13</sup> The aforementioned Erich Koch often serves as the negative counterpart to this seemingly tolerant approach. In fact, the two men did not differ very much. Whereas Rosenberg simply wanted to use the cooperation of local people for German ends—very much in line with what Hitler indicated on July 16, 1941—Koch was more blunt in that he used open force from the beginning, rather than camouflaging exploitative measures with promises of autonomy.

To begin with, Koch clearly won the direct support of the German center. In his RKU, however, he had to rely on the locals as well. That is why political promises were replaced by temporary material incentives. These were especially

promising, because Ukraine was used as a reservoir of food and manpower. Agricultural delivery rates were put so high that those who remained in Ukraine (and were not deported for forced labor) lived on the verge of starvation. German auxiliaries and German-appointed civil servants were in charge of the food stores and could thus support their closest family members. That is why many Ukrainians joined the auxiliary units, only to desert to the woods when this looked like a better solution.

### **The Change of the Tide**

After the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk in 1942/43, the Ukrainians realized that German domination would end very soon. It also did not escape their attention that relations between the Soviet Union and the Western Allied Powers had worsened as far as Eastern Europe was concerned. For Poles, it was the discovery of the Katyn massacres by the Germans and the ensuing propaganda campaign that was successful in breaking relations between the Polish government in exile and the USSR. From any perspective, the situation in mid 1943 was bizarre. At that time, the Germans had killed many more Poles than the Russians (even if one excludes Polish Jews from this number), but they now seemed to take a moralistic position against the Soviets, with whom they had been allied when the killings took place. Far from defending the Poles openly, they adopted a position of defending the Poles against the Soviets. Or so they thought, because subsequent efforts to build up an anti-Bolshevik European front, successful in many other countries, failed in most Polish areas.

Ukrainian nationalists, strictly bound to cooperate with the Germans—*notwithstanding their failed efforts at statehood of 1941*—were in a highly difficult position. They feared the Soviets much more than the Germans. Ideologically, they were very far from the democratic model of the Western Allies, but they expected (like many Germans in 1945) that the Allies would turn to fighting the Soviets after Germany's defeat, and they wanted to prepare for that. We will not treat extensively the ideological volte-face of the Ukrainian nationalists following their clandestine congress in the Ukrainian woods in 1943. At this meeting, the Third Extraordinary Grand Assembly of August 21 to 25, 1943, the Bandera faction of the OUN condemned "internationalist and fascist National Socialist programs and political concepts" as well as "Russian-Bolshevik communism" and proposed a "system of free peoples and independent states [as] the single best solution to the problem of world order."<sup>14</sup> This sounded all well and good, but that was only one half of the problem—the theoretical one.

One might discuss here to what extent this was anything more than a move to follow Dmytro Dontsov's rule that Ukrainian nationalists should always side with the enemies of Moscow (Russia), irrespective of their political perspectives.

As Germany's position began to decline, the Western Allies took their place with respect to Dontsov's rule—as they had in the 1920s. Thus, the Ukrainians had to attach themselves to a new ally.

Much more interesting is the fact that Ukrainian nationalists began to envision a postwar redrawing of the map of Eastern Europe. And in this they were not alone: nationalist and communist Poles at the same time formed paramilitary groups in preparation for the postwar period. When we hear about partisans in the Second World War, at first we assume that their main enemy was the occupying power: Germany (and in this we are supported by postwar propaganda, both by the Soviets and other official historiographies). Of course, this is not a wholly false perspective. But as important as the fight against the occupiers, and sometimes even more important, was the fight for positive objectives. In these offensive planning objectives, the Germans were only a transient factor. The real objective was the postwar map—and this had to differ from the one that had existed in 1939/40.

Here, we come back to the main question of prewar Europe: Should the borders remain in their prewar form or should they be revised? Revisionism was the objective of the losers at the Paris Peace Conferences of 1919/20.

At this stage in the war, one could declare, more or less audaciously, that the great powers that had fought a frontline war (Germany and the USSR) partly became of secondary importance in a very different war, in which different insurgents far from the front fought against each other.

The main aim of this war was to clarify who would own disputed territories in the future. This was the political thinking of those days, and in many ways it did not change until recently. Whereas many politicians declared their allegiance to “ethnologically correct” nation-states (whatever that might mean), in fact the topic of the day was *corriger la fortune* by denationalizing, transferring, deporting, or killing those who were deemed to be undesirable. Of course, Germans and Soviets had started these moves in 1939 (just to pass over earlier examples). But the deportation of Poles and Jews from annexed Posen, Upper Silesia, and Wartheland came to a halt early in 1940 due to technical reasons and a protest by Governor General Hans Frank. More successful was the bringing in of “ethnic Germans” from what was then Soviet eastern Poland, the Baltic countries, and Bessarabia. After the deportation of Jews from Germany proper and Western Europe into the ghettos and concentration camps, the first “non-Jewish” project was started in the Zamość area of the General Government late in 1942.

On July 15, 1942, the head of the SS and police in Lublin, Odilo Globocnik, declared that the area around the town was to be renamed Himmlerstadt or Pflugstadt (this never happened) and would become the first German settler area in occupied Poland. The first resettlement took place in Skierbieszów on November 27, 1942.<sup>15</sup> Whole Polish villages were emptied of their inhabitants, who were either killed, deported for forced labor, sent to German institutions

for “Germanizable” children, or allowed to leave for other places (the so-called *Rentendörfer*, for old people and children). Their homes were then given to German families from Southeast Europe (Romania). In order to bring some kind of safety to the German settlers, the Nazis brought in 7,000 Ukrainians (who had formed a rural population in these areas, too) to Hrubieszów county and resettled them in abandoned Polish villages.

The first reaction in these areas was the so-called Zamość Uprising (*Powstanie zamojskie*), a movement of Polish and Soviet partisans commencing in December 1942. The partisans destroyed both German and Ukrainian colonists’ homes and villages, and had such an impact that the resettlement drive was abandoned in March 1943. Between June and August 1943, German *Wehrmacht*, SS troops and Ukrainian auxiliaries “pacified” the area, deporting about 60,000 Poles from more than 150 villages.

Ukrainians in the General Government were in a pro-German mood at the time, as the Germans had approved a new policy towards “eastern peoples” (*Ostvölker*) after Stalingrad. Under this plan, Ukrainians (but not Poles) would get a partial recognition by the creation of the SS Galicia division (*14. Waffengrenadier Division of the SS*)—and the Ukrainians in the GG (including the Uniate clergy) rejoiced: there were more than 80,000 volunteers, though the division would not accept more than about 15,000.

The first military actions by the Polish armed underground (the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*, AK], the communist People’s Guard [*Gwardia Ludowa*], and the peasants battalions) were conducted in retaliation for German atrocities, but in the end they were directed against Ukrainians too, who were considered to be collaborators. In fact they were, though many of them had been forced to move into former Polish homes or had joined others in the hope of finding a better living. The Germans considered the Ukrainians to be friendly, and the Ukrainian nationalists, for whom the eastern areas of the Lublin district were ethnic Ukrainian territory, endorsed this expansion of their “living space” (*Lebensraum*).

We should keep in mind that Polish attacks on Ukrainians, carried out as revenge and to keep territory “Polish,” also triggered those of the Ukrainian nationalists that had come together in Volhynia, east of the Lublin district, late in 1942.<sup>16</sup> The Ukrainian nationalists were a diverse group: members of disbanded pro-German paramilitary bodies like the *Schutzmannschaften*, Bandera-faction OUN nationalists (the OUN-B) and other smaller groups like the *Bulbovtsy* (*Polisśka Sich*, the original UPA), persecuted nationalists, peasants who had not delivered their contributions, Ukrainians who had escaped raids for forced labor, and those who had simply hidden out in the woods. Meanwhile, in those same woods there were also remnants of the Red Army, and Polish partisans of different (communist and non-communist) bodies.

After the fighting in the Lublin area began and news of Soviet approaches arrived, the Ukrainian nationalist partisans, brought into a shape by the OUN-B

as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukraińska Powstawska Armija*, UPA), started to attack Polish peasants in Volhynia on July 11, 1943. These events are emotionally raw even today; they were a taboo subject during the Soviet era and became a topic of discussion and dissent thereafter. Many publications by Polish veterans and nationalists present a gruesome picture of the events. In fact, both sides proceeded with considerable brutality.

There was large-scale killing in these areas. Soviet deportations and brutalities were followed by mass murder by the German *Einsatzgruppen*, in which real or alleged communists—and Jews, of course—were killed upon denunciation. At the end of 1942, nearly all the inhabitants of ghettos in Volhynia were liquidated by German police and Ukrainian auxiliaries. Partisans of different creeds fought against each other, and when news of German defeats in battles arrived, combined with that of Polish attacks on Ukrainians, individuals and groups used to brutal killing turned against those who now seemed to be their real enemies. Everybody expected the restitution of the prewar borders—and the Ukrainian nationalists did not want Volhynia and Eastern Galicia to fall into Polish hands again.

There are differing timelines for these acts of terror. Some consider the attack on Oborky on November 13, 1942 to be the beginning; to others it was the massacre of Poles in Parośla Pierwsza near Sarny on February 9, 1943 (probably committed by *Bulbovtsy* partisans).<sup>17</sup> The central events in Poland circle around July 11, 1943, when the UPA attacked about eighty villages in Volhynia. These actions continued, and in the second half of 1943 the UPA handed over the land they had gained, formerly owned by Poles, to Ukrainian peasants in what were deemed to be the “liberated areas.” These activities continued during the early months of 1944 and seeped into Eastern Galicia. Against these Ukrainian activities, a local Polish “self-defense” force was built up. These local militias, whose task was to defend Polish villages, were helped by the AK structures that also tried to reshape Volhynia and prepare the region for inclusion within a future Polish state. In January 1944, with the Red Army approaching, smaller units of the AK united to form the Twenty-seventh Volhynia Infantry Division. In 1944, the Germans controlled some of the main roads and towns, whereas Soviet, UPA, and AK partisans held different rural areas. All of them fought against each other for possession of the land.

When the Red Army came close to Sarny in January 1944, the AK mobilized Poles for Action Thunderstorm (*Akcja Burza*). The strategic goal was to liberate Polish areas with Polish soldiers instead of them being liberated by the Soviets. On March 18, 1944, after having contacted the advancing Soviets, the Polish AK started military operations against the Germans. The Germans on the other hand united with Ukrainian troops (from the SS Galicia division, the UPA, and from auxiliary units) and fought against the Polish insurgents. During one of these raids in late February, the inhabitants of the village of Huta Pieniacka in the

northern part of Eastern Galicia were annihilated in retaliation for the killing of two Ukrainian soldiers some days before. It remains unclear whether Ukrainians or Germans were the perpetrators of this massacre, which remains significant to this day: on February 28, 2009, both the Polish and the Ukrainian presidents took part in a commemorative ceremony there.

Strange bedfellows sought and found each other. Whereas Polish and Ukrainian nationalists saw each other as enemies, both were against the communist underground and the Red Army. In that respect they shared a tactical goal with the Germans. So, it is no surprise that from 1943 on Germans retained contacts with Ukrainian nationalist partisans.<sup>18</sup> Though both sides pretended that their contacts, talks, mutual assistance, and fights were “non-political,” in fact there was wholesale collaboration. The same holds true in the Nowogródek (Navahrudak) area of Byelorussia, where “Lech,” the local AK commander in Lida, arranged a ceasefire with the Germans in the winter of 1943/44, for which he was later court-martialed but acquitted.<sup>19</sup>

The main point, however, is that there was more than the German–Soviet war going on. There was fighting between nationalist Poles and nationalist Ukrainians, between nationalists and communist partisans, between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists on the one hand and the Red Army on the other (in 1946). Add to this that there were at times alliances between Germans and Ukrainians, and it is clear that there was a very complicated military and political situation.

Again, we have to point to the fact that national self-identification was a novelty in these areas. Earlier, religious allegiance—as in premodern times—was the organizing force in communities, and in many cases this religious system was simply translated into a national one. To make things even more complicated, others persisted in their religious system though pledging allegiance to an incompatible national one. Ukrainian *latynnyky*, Ukrainian-speaking Roman Catholics who were either Ukrainian converts to Roman Catholicism or the descendants of Polish colonists who had partially assimilated to Ukrainian culture, were complemented by Orthodox Poles, still today considered somehow alien in the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, whose majority is Ukrainian, Russian or Byelorussian.

When Poles and Ukrainians fought each other, they fought for their relatively new national creed. The earlier confessional diversity of these lands had given way to an ethnic one: ethnicity had replaced confession. And ethnicity was one of those things people had learned to fight for.

As the people fighting each other had only recently begun to identify themselves in national terms, I prefer the term “civil war” over “inter-ethnic war” for these events. Ethnicity was fluid—much more fluid than national ideologies from both sides would be ready to admit. But it was becoming stable, just like a lava flow that forms shapes out of fluid magma. The Nazis used these stabilizing ethnicities for the purpose of domination. The fight broke out when the ground

was brutalized by the war the Germans had brought to these territories, and when they had demonstrated that killing others and changing the population were accepted instruments in this *Volkstumskampf*.

The Germans actively motivated different nationalities to fight each other. They supported anti-Jewish propaganda, supported Ukrainians against Poles, and tolerated the “civil war” that unfolded because as long as the different partisan groups fought one another they did not fight the Germans. And when the locals then turned to the Germans for assistance, they helped the practically defeated Germans against the Red Army.

### **After the War**

After the war, the war went on. When the front moved away from Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1944 there was no end to fighting in the disputed territories. On August 16, 1944, the Soviet Union forced a border treaty on the communist Poles of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN). This body was commonly known as the Lublin Committee, after establishing itself in the city, the first to be liberated by the Red Army east of the Curzon Line. The border treaty declared the Curzon Line with some small adjustments to be the Polish–Soviet border.<sup>20</sup> What historians normally find most interesting about this treaty is the fact that the USSR had forced the communist Poles to accept most of the territorial acquisitions of 1939 (only the Bialystok area returned to Poland). But there is another aspect to this, too. The new border was to be the dividing line between two nation-states. Far from the eyes of the Western Powers, more or less at the time the Germans were expelled from the areas east of the Oder and Lausitzer Neiße rivers, communist Poles and Soviets started an ethnic cleansing operation. The declared aim was to ethnically homogenize the areas around the border between the two states.

This was facilitated by two treaties between the PKWN and the Ukrainian resp. the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic of September 9, 1944. These treaties provided for a voluntary population exchange: persons of Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Russian, and Ruthenian descent were free to cross the border into the territory now belonging to the Soviet Union, whereas people of Polish and Jewish descent, who were Polish citizens before September 17, 1939, could leave the Soviet areas for Poland. A similar treaty with Soviet Lithuania was signed on September 22. On July 6, 1945, these treaties were complemented by an agreement on the change of nationality of those involved.

At first appearance, these treaties looked fine. In fact, there was no voluntariness: they soon resulted in forced expulsions on both sides. From Soviet Ukraine, about 750,000 Poles and Jews were transferred to Poland; from Byelorussia the



number was about 300,000 to 400,000, and from Lithuania about 180,000. Meanwhile, about 480,000 Ukrainians were transferred from Poland to Soviet Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> All these numbers are approximations only. At the time there was a civil war going on in the border areas: relics of the Polish nationalist underground reorganized in 1945 into the National Military Union (*Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe*). Former members of the London-oriented AK joined Freedom and Independence (*Wolność i Niezawisłość*), a dubious partisan body that temporarily even cooperated with the UPA, which was the main power opposing the “repariations.” On the other side, there were the Red Army, members of the NKVD (the Soviet secret police), and Polish communist military and paramilitary bodies (border guards, internal security corps, and police units). The Polish civil war came slowly to an end in 1948, and in the Ukraine the UPA was infiltrated and defeated by the Soviets in the early 1950s.

Still, claims that Ukrainians were disloyal to the new states and supported the UPA led to the infamous Vistula Action (*Akcja Wisła*) in 1947, during which more than 140,000 Ukrainians were transferred from the southeastern border areas of Poland and scattered in the villages of formerly German territories. Most of them turned into Poles by a process of assimilation, whereas some retained their cultural background and developed a cultural network in Poland when this became possible again after Stalinism. Since the early 1990s some of them have returned to the towns they were expelled from. The southeastern corner of present-day Poland was never resettled. Remains of burnt-out villages, some with chimneys surviving, dot a landscape that has become one of the most beautiful national parks in Poland, the Bieszczady.

Whereas the expulsions of the Germans have garnered attention, those of the mixed areas to the east were a taboo subject during the communist era.<sup>22</sup> That is why the governments of both Poland and the Ukraine have tried to improve relations by publishing relevant documents and scholarly discussions of the “difficult questions.”<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, however, militant nationalists want to make up for lost time: more prominent on the Polish side, plenty of nationalist pamphlets pronouncing against Ukrainian cruelties were issued in the 1990s.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, Ukrainian and Soviet revisionism was successful. Galicia and Volhynia, once known for their cultural mix, are now practically culturally homogeneous territories. The result of the Second World War was the destruction of territorial Jewry—this was done by the Germans. Poles and Ukrainians cleared their respective territories of the other nationality. German settlers left the territories with the retreating German army. Smaller groups like the Czechs left their territories after the war. The Soviets reclaimed what Russians had lost in the aftermath of the First World War and the USSR had regained with German help in 1939.

Neither of the outcomes of revisionism fully responded to the wishes of the respective parties. Ukrainians would have preferred to keep Ukrainian-settled

territories west of the present border in the area known as Zakerzonnja, the land behind the Curzon Line. Poles, meanwhile, have developed a romantic culture of remembrance concerning the Kresy, the eastern Polish possessions. Having lost their gains with the ceding of Ukraine and Belarus following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, we now witness (dangerous) Russian dreams to revise the map once again.

Hopefully, much of the cultural ideology that underlay the violent atrocities of the past has changed. Between the wars, nobody in the region really liked the Jews and most nationalists scorned the multi-national empires of the past. Now, in Cracow a kind of Jewish Disneyland has been created in the formerly Jewish part of town, and in Lviv nostalgic cafés recreate the Poland of the 1920s and the style of *fin de siècle* Vienna.

Up to the late nineteenth century, most Poles did not consider peasants to be their co-nationals, and up to the First World War Ukrainians fought over whether they were a separate nationality or Little Russians. Gorals, Lemkos, Hutsuls, and Boykos were, until very recently, free to define themselves in various ways. Given this very recent consolidation of national conscience, it seems astonishing how fiercely the respective groups fought each other on nationalist grounds. Or maybe not. Many of the modern definitions of nationality came from outside—learned from concepts developed in Central and Western Europe and imported in a modernization drive that included both technical advancement and nationalist exclusivity. Revisionism and modernism were two faces of this development; there was a desire to revise the situation in order to modernize. Modernization happened, and revisionism as its vehicle abounded between the First and the Second World Wars. The ideas of the revisionists mainly came from outside, brought in by the nationalist intelligentsia, a group of semi-intellectuals—mostly sons of popes, journalists, and teachers. They did not care for the big issues of the Second World War<sup>25</sup> as they had their own agenda. For neglecting Germany's plans, Ukrainians had to pay a heavy price. They were used as cheap laborers and cannon fodder. Poles were given up by their Western allies long before the civil war ended. "Heroism," an activity which always fails to take into account reality, produced lots of sorrow. Still, we are unable to evaluate the relative significance of ideology and pragmatism in these battles. We need a much more open discussion of the referential frame of values that underlay them. And we have to further discuss if and how this framework changed.

## Notes

1. A good introduction to this is: Albert S. Kotowski, *Hitlers Bewegung im Urteil der polnischen Nationaldemokratie* (Wiesbaden, 2000).
2. Kai von Jena, *Polens Ostpolitik nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2010).

3. This holds equally true of the Curzon Line suggested in December 1919 by the then British Foreign Minister. It was irrelevant at that time but became a basic tool during the Second World War.
4. Alexander Brückner [Aleksander Brückner], "Der 'ukrainische' Staat: Eine politische Utopie," *Das neue Deutschland*, March 13, 1915, 157–60, 160.
5. Kai Struve, *Bauern und Nation in Galizien* (Göttingen, 2005).
6. As late as 1935, Mikhail Dubson's film *Granitsa* ("The border") pictured the Soviet Ukrainian appeal to both Ukrainian and Jewish inhabitants across the Polish border.
7. Kerstin Jobst, *Zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus: Die polnische und ukrainische Sozialdemokratie in Galizien von 1890 bis 1914* (Hamburg, 1996).
8. Cornelia Schenke, *Nationalstaat und nationale Frage: Polen und die Ukrainer 1921–1939* (Hamburg, 2004); Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven, 2007).
9. Vasyli' Mudryj, "Odyn Propam'jatnyj Lyst i joho naslidky," in Vasyli' Lev and Matvij Stachiv (eds), *Na Pošanu simdesjatyriččja narodyn Romana Smal'-Stočkoho* (New York, 1963), 340–46.
10. *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof*, vol. 38 (Nuremberg, 1949), 86–94; cf. Eberhard Jäckel, "Hitlers doppeltes Kernstück," in Roland G. Foerster (ed.), *Unternehmen Barbarossa* (Munich, 1993), 13–22.
11. Telex from Reinhard Heydrich to the heads of the *Einsatzgruppen*, June 29, 1941; cf. Peter Klein (ed.), *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Berlin, 1997), 319.
12. Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer*, 2nd edn. (Munich, 2007), 569–71.
13. See, e.g., Roman Ilnyckyj [Il'ny'ckyj], *Deutschland und die Ukraine 1934–1945*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1958), 3.
14. Myroslav Yurkevych, "Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists," *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 3 (1993), 708–10, online at: <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages\O\ROrganizationofUkrainianNationalists.htm>. For a recent dissertation of the development of OUN ideology, see: Franziska Bruder, *"Den ukrainischen Staat erkämpfen oder sterben!" Die Organisation Ukrainischer Nationalisten 1929–1948* (Berlin, 2007).
15. It was here that the former German Federal president Horst Köhler was born.
16. While they undoubtedly occurred, I do not follow up Polish attacks on Germans in this chapter.
17. Grzegorz Motyka, *Ukraińska partyzantka 1942–1960* (Warsaw, 2006), 187.
18. These contacts are well documented in the excellent editions by Taras Hunczak, *Litopys UPA*, vols. 6 and 7 (Toronto, 1983).
19. Kazimierz Krajewski, "Der Bezirk Nowogródek der Heimatarmee," in Bernhard Chiari (ed.), *Die polnische Heimatarmee* (Munich, 2003), 563–84, here 580–81.
20. The Lublin Committee reached Lublin on July 27, 1944. Soviet propaganda referred to a manifesto proclaimed in Chelm on July 22, 1944. July 22 was also the date of the Polish People's Republic state holiday. In fact, on that day in 1944 nothing of the kind happened in the liberated area. The manifesto was published in Moscow and republished some days later in the liberated territory. "Umowa między Rzeczpospolitą Polską i Związkiem Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich o polsko - radzieckiej granicy państwowej, 16.8.1944." The document was formally re-signed in Warsaw on February 4, 1946, and officially published in *Dziennik Ustaw* 35, 1947, dok.167, 557–59.
21. A first source edition was Eugeniusz Misilo, *Repatriacja czy deportacja?* 2 vols (Warsaw, 1996). A joint Polish-Ukrainian effort resulted in Jurij Šapoval and Jędrzej M. Tucholski (eds), *Pereselennja Poljakiv ta Ukraïnciv 1944–1946* (Warsaw and Kiev, 2000).
22. One of the exceptions was the novel by Jan Gerhard, *Łuny w Bieszczadach* (Warsaw, 1959), which glorified Soviet and Polish communist fighters.

23. This is the title of a series of Polish-Ukrainian discussions (Polska—Ukraina: Trudne pytania) on many aspects of twentieth century history, the last one published in 2006.
24. See, e.g., Artur Bata, *Bieszczady w ogniu* (Rzeszów, 1987); Jan Sokol and Józef Sudo (eds), *Kresy wschodnie we krwi polskiej tonące*, 2nd edn. (Poznań, 2005); Edward Prus, *Szatańskie igrzysko: Historia OUN* (Wrocław, 2009). On Volhynia, see: Roman Kucharski, *Krwawa łuna* (Warsaw, 1997); Władysław Filar, *Wydarzenia wołyńskie 1939–1944: W poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi na trudne pytania*, 2nd edn. (Toruń, 2008).
25. This becomes clear when one hears the accounts of former SS Galicia soldiers in a Ukrainian TV documentary: *Vijna—ukraïns'kyj rakbunok*, part 8 (TV 1+1, 2002). This can be seen online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=JP&hl=ja&v=GVI-eW9mBQQ>, retrieved May 20, 2011.