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**THE UKRAINIAN ISSUE IN POST-WAR POLAND  
AS A SPECIAL INDICATOR OF UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX  
SOCIO-POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF TODAY**

**Abstract.** *The purpose of this work is to show that a set of issues that summarizes the term “Ukrainian Issue in Poland” can be a tool for understanding the universal problems of today. The article refers to the ways of understanding history, repected in such a delineated level of emotionality that it changes over time. From the XIXth century history became the basis of national legitimacy in modern states. Despite the changes that took place in the world over the past two centuries, the matrix of thinking of the Polish society is based on the national idea. This also applies to the Polish historical thinking. This factor plays a key role for the Ukrainians, citizens of Poland, who are mainly descendants of migrants from the Vistula campaign. And although there is an opinion in this community about their difference from the Polish majority, in their approaches to the past, the Ukrainians in Poland are similar to the majority. The article is based on hermeneutic methodology. The scientific novelty consists in an attempt to universalize the experience of the diaspora. The article ends in several practical conclusions. The Conclusions. The universalization of the experience of the Ukrainians in post-war Poland can replace unpromising accentuation. That is, writing it into the common code. We need to understand the other person’s emotions for this to happen. Empathy is needed for the second person. It takes work to measure the criteria by which we evaluate the world. At the same time, we also need a mature consciousness of possible manipulations to which we may be subjected. Universal in the experience of the Ukrainians in post-war Poland is loss, patience, fear, nostalgia, chance, but also stubbornness, sacrifice, or on the other hand curiosity, insignificance, naivety. Universal destinies of the Ukrainian partisans, underground fighters, prisoners, peasants and burghers, women, activists, priests, poets, engineers. A universal story about the road: from place to place, from time to time. A universal story of change. There is something to replace 1947, to stop fearfully thinking that we may indeed be “the last Ukrainians in Poland”.*

**Key words:** *historical thinking, the Poles, the Ukrainians, worldview, national idea.*

## УКРАЇНСЬКЕ ПИТАННЯ У ПІСЛЯВОЄННІЙ ПОЛЬЩІ ЯК ОСОБЛИВИЙ ІНДИКАТОР РОЗУМІННЯ СКЛАДНИХ СУСПІЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНИХ ВИКЛИКІВ СУЧАСНОСТІ

**Анотація. Мета роботи** – показати, що комплекс питань, які підсумовуються терміном “українське питання у Польщі”, може бути знаряддям для розуміння універсальних проблем сьогодення. Від XIX ст. історія стала у модерних державах основою національної легітимзації управління. Попри зміни, які впродовж останніх двох століть відбулися у світі, матриця мислення польського суспільства і надалі базується на національній ідеї. Сказане вище стосується і польського історичного мислення. Цей фактор відіграє ключову роль для українців, громадян Польщі, які в основному є нащадками переселенців з акції “Вісла”. І хоч у їхньому середовищі існує думка про відмінність від польської більшості, у підходах до минулого, українці у Польщі подібні до більшості. Стаття спирається на герменевтичну **методологію**. **Наукова новизна** полягає у спробі універсалізації досвіду діаспори. Стаття завершується низкою практичних висновків. **Висновки**. На заміну безперспективній акцентуації може прийти універсалізація досвіду українців у повоєнній Польщі, тобто вписання його у загальнозрозумілий код. Щоб це сталося, потрібне зрозуміння емоцій іншої людини, емпатія для неї. Потрібна праця, щоб мірила, якими оцінюємо світ, були однаковими. Потрібна при цьому і дозріла свідомість можливих маніпуляцій, яким можуть нас піддавати.

Універсальні у досвіді українців повоєнної Польщі втрата, терпіння, страх, ностальгія, випадковість, як і впертість, жертвовність, чи, з іншого боку, заінтересованість, нікчемність, наївність. Універсальні долі українських партизан, підпільників, в'язнів, селян і міщан, жінок, діячів, священників, поетів, інженерів. Універсальна розповідь про дорогу: з місця до місця, з часу до часу. Універсальна розповідь про зміну. Є чим заступити 1947 р., перестати з острахом думати, що може й справді ми “останні українці у Польщі”.

**Ключові слова:** історичне мислення, поляки, українці, світогляд, національна ідея.

**The Problem Statement.** It is easy to summarize that in the public sphere in Poland the prevailing view is that knowledge of history (along with language and religion) is one of the main components of a human identity<sup>1</sup>. The same view is shared by members of the “indigenous” Ukrainian community in Poland (i.e., citizens who are mostly descendants of displaced people of the operation “Vistula” or residents of non-resettled parts of Podlasie), although they have some problems with the very concept of “identity”. As a rule, they refer to the standards of the XIXth and the first half of the XXth century, when the Ukrainian communities functioned in a compact form. Today, the Ukrainian “indigenous” community is mainly united by the idea and a virtual communication, which strengthens the position of history or collective memory, which should be understood as a transmission (often recorded) about the past.

**The Analysis of Recent Research Works and Publications.** There is no direct empirical data, no specialized opinion polls were conducted to confirm my hypothesis<sup>2</sup>. **The purpose** of this work is to show that a set of issues that summarizes the term “Ukrainian Issue in Poland” can be a tool for understanding the universal problems of today.

<sup>1</sup> This leitmotif can be in the books of Roman Drozd, for example: Drozd R. (2013). *Українці в Polsce wobec swojej przeszłości (1947–2005)*. Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej w Słupsku. [in Polish], but also in the title of a selection of materials edited by Roman Drozd and Igor Hałagida: Drozd R. & Hałagida I. (Ed.) (1999). *Українці в Polsce 1944–1989: walka o tożsamość: dokumenty i materiały*. Warszawa: Burchard Edition. [in Polish]. We could list many works by such authors as Bernadette Wojtowicz-Huber, Yaroslav Moklyak, and from the earlier works of Stepan Kozak in which the question of identity, and in fact outlined the type and content of identity and their connection with the understanding of the past.

<sup>2</sup> In 2017, a report was published by Tomasz Stryjek, Joanna Konieczna-Salamatin, and Kamila Zacharuk. However, the study was conducted in Ukraine. Stryjek T., Konieczna-Salamatin J., Zacharuk K. *Українці о історії, культурze і stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich*. More here: <https://nck.pl/badania/projekty-badawcze/raport-ukraincy-o-historii-kulturze-i-stosunkach-polsko-ukrainkich> (accessed: 12.06.2020)

**The Main Material Statement.** At the same time, it should be remembered that even scientific history is not the same as the past. History is only *an image of the past*. The image is created by someone on some basis, or so, and not otherwise read (given the possibilities, the will, etc.). The image is simplified. The complexity of reality, or life, always is given a condensed code as a word, a picture, a movie, a ritual. An image, whose meaning can be understood by content that is written and hidden, drawn and empty. Such an image can just as well “remind” the past, as well as “distort” it.

To evoke the past in presence, we often use the analogy of our own experience and compare it to the social experience of the past. Through history, they say, we can relate to other people’s experiences. The question of how to read the past, finally (naturally), makes you think about the meaning of life. At the same time, this very question, by the modalities of reading of the past, explains the phenomenon of social relations. They aren’t accidental, but hierarchical. There are embedded in the very essence of time: something was, something is, something (perhaps) will be. Words are spoken in order and only silence allows complicity. In other words – history as an attribute of the description of time becomes an attribute of the establishment of a hierarchical relationship. Here it “matters” who speaks and who listens to, in which turn the words fall, from which dictionary they are taken. Those who want to speak, those who agree/are forced to listen to, it is in which turn the words fall and in which dictionary they are written, it seems to fence off the real world from the past with a thick screen (although and so it is separated by time). This “fog” is paradoxically built of a mixture of secrecy (taboo) and selectivity. Neither those who speak nor those who listen will always be in a hurry to break such a curtain. Both sides are restrained by fear of misunderstanding, chaos. Fear gives energy to those who lead, at the same time forces those who get commands to listen. It is an eternal ritual of the emotional chain if we refer here to the famous sociologist Randall Collins (Collins, 2011). R. Collins notes that the ritual of establishing a hierarchical relationship does not always go smoothly, in which he sees the mechanism of a social conflict (Collins, 2011, p. 133). Transferring this to the basis of understanding history, one could see in this the actual mechanism of conflicts concerning understanding or interpretation of the past. This applies not only to the world of “big politics”, but also to quarrels between politicized or simply unaware communities, parishes or, ultimately, families.

The approach to history, along with the approach to religion, tradition or language (!) in reality can only be indicators of the deeper elements of our spirituality and emotionality. They may reflect our fear, which is transferred to attempts to dominate or turn into subordination. In addition, we are talking not only about the relationship of a man with the universe (i.e., most likely the relationship of a man with himself), or a relationship of the individual with another individual, but also a very important social aspect – the relationship of an individual with a community. If the community is conjunct by some understanding of the idea, then belonging to the community is measured, no doubt, by a zeal to confess to the idea.

At the end of the twentieth century, sociologists and anthropologists of culture were noted, that individual cultures or communities, who are bonded by elements of culture, including language, political structure, etc., can be grouped by personality indicator (IDV) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007 pp. 106–107). On one hand, such an indicator can help to understand the differences in the approach to history not only in different nations but also within one community. Opens new ways to analyze the reasons for the taboo of history, its mythologizing, an inclination to accentuation, and etc. On the other hand, it exposes the particular mechanism of the individual and group, including the pressure to which the

individual is subjected by the group, and unambiguously outlines the sources of the identity of the individual (group as a source of identity).

The general descriptions, of course, will not reflect the peculiarities of the Ukrainian community in Poland. Problems with the approach to history or the past, arise when we begin to analyze what it means to understand history, or how we treat our identity, and even more often when we move from a general statement to a conversation about the concrete past, which is remembered (or not) in individual events, or finally when we to process knowledge about the past to interpretations (here on occasion there is a question about the level of such knowledge). That is, when we create a story from single sentences.

The general formula of collective knowledge, or better the collective memory of the past, which in the works of historians of the Ukrainian origin<sup>3</sup>, but also articles in “Nashe Slovo”, “Vatra”, “Ridna Mova” or “Blahovist”, can be characterized by several points. First of all, this knowledge is national-centric. This is documented primarily by the topics raised in “Nashe Slovo”, initiatives for perpetuation (this is especially evident in the example of the struggle for the memory of the UPA guerrillas). Also, the majority of professional historians are ethnohistorians, when the subject of analysis we take their monographic studies.

In the nation-centric perspective, the most important factor is the affiliation, and in fact, the very clearly defined affiliation of the unit to the community. Such thinking is a manifestation of the superiority of the collective over an individual. Everything is further connected with the first. The most touching point in historical thinking is a simplification. This is primarily evidence of a paradoxically little knowledge of the past, sometimes dictated by fear, sometimes ordinary intellectual laziness. People who study history have their views, which are sometimes difficult to change under the influence of research. It seems even that the essence of these studies is to find “evidence” for their right. However, in my opinion, simplification is the most dependent on access to information and the availability of popular forms of such.

There are many simplifications or missing places in the knowledge of our past from the last 75–80 years. This applies even to seemingly recognizable topics, such as the martyrology of the Ukrainian villages in Lemkivshchyna, Boykivshchyna, Nadsyannia, Kholmshchyna in 1944 – 1947, the UPA, USKT, the functioning of churches, schools with Ukrainian as the language of instruction, and the problem of UB / SB informers network, attitude of the Polish state to the Ukrainian minority, possible influences of the Russian agents in displaced environments, etc. One of the unanswered questions is about the fate of those people who were

<sup>3</sup> I drew the phrase “Polish historian of Ukrainian origin” from the biography of one of the historians in Wikipedia. Regardless of the wording, the phenomenon of the “generation of historians” in the Ukrainian community in Poland should be noted. Even before his appearance, in the communist period, he wrote and published his works, among others. in USKT publications, Roman Shagala, Mykhailo Kozak, Antin Serednytsky, Yaroslav Hrytskovyan or Stepan Zabrovary. Historical accents were found in the works of literary and linguistic scholars: for example, Mykhailo Lesiv, Volodymyr Mokry. Interesting points (for example, about the involvement of Ukrainians in the communist movement, participation in the Polish army, etc.) and interesting ways of covering them were found in mostly shorter studies of USKT figures, including Mykola Korolko, Stepan Makukh, memoirs of Mykhailo Donsky, etc. An important monograph on the Ukrainian question in Poland was published in 1990 by Myroslav Trukhan, a native of Poland. At the turn of the ‘80s and 90’s the works of Mykola Syvytsky, Oleksandr Kolyanchuk, Omelyan Vishka began to be published. Evhen Misilo (born 1954) should be recognized as a kind of luminary of the “generation of historians”. The outbreak of publications and the emergence of new authors began in the second half of the ‘90s. In this context, it is worth mentioning such persons as Bohdan Huk (b. 1964), Myroslav Sych, Marko Syrnyk (1962) or Roman Drozd (1963), and then Hryhoriy Kupriyanovych (1968), Ihor Halahida. (1971), Roman Vysotsky and others. In 2003, the Ukrainian Historical Society in Poland was founded, with Rostyslav Zherelyk (1956) as its first chairman. Among the members of the Society are Peter Gerent (1974), Maryush Humetski (1969), Bohdan Halchak, Petro Tyma (1966), Petro Syvytsky, Volodymyr Pylypovych, and Yaroslav Syrnyk (1970), and younger Andriy Bozhyk (1975), Marko Kozubel (1987), Magdalena Semchyshyn (1982), or Alina Bachich (1979). The society does not cover all historians of Ukrainian origin. There are also memoir initiatives (such as the Roman Kryk’s “Los” Foundation).

taken out in 1947 in the same trains as part of the “Vistula” campaign, which immediately “ceased to be ours”. It is somewhat surprising comfort that such persons are crossed out by one epic word “perekinchik” (=a kind of apostate). Of course, “on the dark side of the moon” were different people. Sometimes they are “neophytes in the second generation”, who – this is a fact – hold various government positions, become ambassadors, voivodes, starosts, actors, etc. Ukrainianness is not usually typical of them or it is the theme of taboo to them, it also happens that it turns into the most radical “anti-Ukrainianness”.

Interestingly, the experience of the Ukrainians in Poland did not stimulate them to attempt to find answers to universal questions: what is the role of women, how has it changed, what is the nature of the family, what are the causes of conflict, violence, what is power, whether there are alternatives for our planet, how to earn a living. All this is in the treasury of the past, which we did not even start, giving priority to the study of struggle and sacrifice, putting as an axiom of the meaning of life a striving to statehood, without even asking about the meaning of such.

Knowledge can be extracted from the history of real people, their not corrected biographies, from the history of individual families, or real communities provided that we will not be interested only in whether someone was in the UPA, USKT, or has written to “Nashe Slovo”, or “was a zealous member of the parish”. The leitmotif of fight or self-sacrifice crosses out to some extent the essence of an ordinary life. Tries to rise above it, thus establishing a symbolic hierarchy. History, like language, reduced to such function, becomes an instrument of control and subordination.

In addition to nationalism and simplification, a distinctive feature of our approach to history is imitation and related reactivity. Interestingly, at some point, one might notice a slightly different approach from community representatives or historians. Here I mean the break of the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century, when the works about the Vistula operation, memoirs of UPA soldiers, or later chronologically elaborations on the history of the Greek Catholic Church began to be published. However, something changed in the meantime. Firstly, the study of the Vistula action was not in-depth, which allowed the “other side” to establish the “alleged dilemma” of whether it was a political “action” or a military “operation”. Secondly, only for a short time did it draw attention to the issue of agential influence on our community by the communist services. Most importantly, however, until recently, the Ukrainians in Poland have failed to cope with the legacy of the UPA. To the accusations addressed to the UPA, whether they are justified or not, the reaction is fear and a chaotic search for counter-arguments. It is significant, that the Ukrainians in Poland “removed themselves” from learning the horrors of the “Volyn massacre”, on the second, how the same Ukrainians from Poland were pushed out of – albeit conditional – dialogue about Volyn, on the third – how the Ukrainian minority was used by the Polish politicians both within soft-politics of “reconciliation”, or the extreme policy of spokesmen “thesis of genocide”, where the Ukrainians, e.g., Petro Tyma, a former head of the Associations of the Ukrainians in Poland, became almost “a symbol of the Volyn liar”.

As in the case of a large part of the Polish historiography, the Polish thinking about the past, the attitude of the Ukrainians to the same past is emotional. Emotionality can be found in the words and phrases about “preservation”, “consistency”, “value”, “dedication”, “wrong”, etc. Even in works of a scientific nature only in a few cases (Huk, 2013), one can find an opinion that is based not only on emotions (they do not run away and they do not have a problem) but attempts to sift the empirical material theoretically substantiated by a sieve. Only a chronological establishment of facts based on available sources is, in principle, an agreement

to distort knowledge of the past. Although the key materials about the past, including the past of the Ukrainians in Poland, are not in Warsaw and not in Kyiv, but in Moscow, however, available materials should be analyzed using sociological, anthropological and psychological tools.

The universalization of the experience of the Ukrainians in Poland is essentially a translation into generally understood, regardless of a language, issues related to a human understanding of the world, passions, human expectations, and etc. One concrete example could be an updated interpretation of the Vistula operation. The only thing we know about the Vistula action is that it was unfair, that it was an insult to the Ukrainians in Poland. The Vistula action was an element of a much larger episode. Without that context, no useful conclusion emerges for the Ukrainians in Poland, but also it is impossible to describe in categories that are understandable for people in every corner of the Earth. First of all, the Vistula operation, together with the resettlement of the Ukrainians to the USSR in 1944 – 1946, was a common, albeit large-scale, land theft. At the same time, the consequences of which weigh on generations, political or military aspects go into the distance.

Approaching in more detail the rather universal issues listed above, I will dwell on the problem of the role and fate of the Ukrainian women. In the classical historical format, the Ukrainian woman is primarily not a woman, but a mother-wife-daughter or – and this is the second a paradoxical type of narrative – “main character” of the background of events. Interest in a women’s past, always, or mostly exist in a special context: struggle, martyrdom, labour. A woman is a mother of a hero, a wife of a hero, a daughter of a hero, an archetypal mother-sufferer, a widow, a maid, etc.

The fact that narratives, often used by women themselves, reflect the relevance of the patriarchal type of society we create, despite all the changes that have taken place, is one thing. More important is the actual will removal of women from the shadows of men and men-dominated history. By the way: history would have ended long ago without women. In other words, it is possible, first of all, to acquire knowledge about the fate of individual women, to create tools for studying them not only in connection with the heroic or martyrological but also everyday, ordinary, sometimes ugly.

Recently I have come across source materials about a young woman from Vysova (Lemkivshchyna). She was born in 1926 and died 20 years later. Her name was Sofiya. The material I’ve mentioned is the interrogation reports created by the OUN Security Service investigator. The young woman was detained when she crossed the Polish-Soviet border near Peremyshl at the end of autumn of 1945. There are five protocols left, only a few dozen pages written in small handwriting. They contain a lot of information and another unwritten one, although it specific one seems quite obvious. Sofiya was suspected of collaborating with the Soviets. At first, she denied it, then she admitted it, then she denied it again. Although this does not arise directly from the text, one can guess that she was finally shot. However, in the text itself, there is a lot of interesting information about the everyday life of the pre-war and occupied Lemko region, family relations, living standards, raising children, financial matters, inheritance from a mother who died, disagreement with a new father’s wife, recruitment to Germany and more. Then there is an interesting story about the journey of a 16-year-old Lemko woman through Krakow to Dresden region, and then the life in the part of the Czech Republic embodied in the Reich. A growing woman, away from home, in a strange environment, who struggles with various life situations in the context of war. Then a fragment of “life on the road”. Unhappy love, the Soviet camps in the Czech Republic, Romania, moving to Lviv and purely adventurous, albeit without happy-end shots of the last

weeks of life. Life and the fate of Sofiya from Vysova, are understood everywhere, mainly for people who were born a woman, who has a child or who was forced to live like a refugee. Universalization of experience seems incomprehensible for those who find it necessary to show the originality of Ukrainianness. It is a question of horizons. Whether the group should be closed, which directly leads to its self-destruction, or the group should be open, ready for change. The historian does not want to impose such a choice, but probably must be aware of the consequences of words and the way of thinking that is enclosed in words.

The question of assimilation for the community, whose members try to keep it the community “alive”, actually becomes a question of whether or not to be. That is why, it is emotional. If we combine the classical understanding of the past with ideology, then we must conclude that the ethnohistorical or nation-centric narrative of the past strengthens the ideologizing of the life of such community as a whole, as well as its members. Since in a full-fledged community the ideologisation of life must compete with the experience of real contact and exchange, then in the case of the Ukrainian community in Poland ideologisation closes the “identity aspect” of life in parentheses. Therefore, at work, at school, in the store, in hospital, in transport, etc., “native Ukrainians” are “ordinary” citizens, whose identity does not matter, but only for some reason is gaining importance in the middle of these brackets. This is transferred to the real relations, sometimes destroying them.

There are a few things to be aware of. First of all, one should stop using the word “assimilation” as a “horror story” or understanding it in the negative sense of identity. Assimilation is a process of change associated with time and therefore, from life to death, this category is obvious. Why should we argue that we are changing? What is important: is the vector of change. This begs the question: who determines this vector? Or maybe it’s better – how is it determined?

It is worth noting that those who write or talk about the past in the context of assimilation (which is provoked by some, for example, records of government documents related to the “Vistula”), emphasize the necessity for “preservation of identity”, “stability of views”, “obviousness of history”, etc., mostly made a choice that cancels out the most important alternative – the alternative of returning. We all “write from somewhere”. Not only metaphorically, but also really: from Gdansk, Slupsk, Szczecin, etc. That is, writing “from there” we give a solid testimony, which sometimes contradicts pathetic words. Assessing heroism or abomination, that is, using emotional and moralistic categories, we give ourselves the right to excuse: it is not my fault, we say that I am where I am. Just as it is easy to show off “patriotism” sitting on a comfortable chair 1 500 km from the front line in Donbas, just as it is easy to persuade yourself that “this is all I can do”, writing about examples of the heroic past, which can “warm-up” my ego with rays of “past glory”.

The problem with the category of “assimilation”, which we find in texts about the past, shows other things, e.g., the already mentioned methodological weakness of historical works. In-depth research with a sociological perspective is rare. The authors, with exceptions (including Bogdan Huk), actually use an intuitive popular vocabulary to describe the past. On the one hand, this improves communication with the reader, but also paradoxically narrows the circle of readers. The imitation of similar strategies in the case of the majority of society, government, education system, or media is counterproductive in my opinion, as the actions of the Ukrainians in Poland are spontaneous. This is an actional, closely related to individuals.

Understanding the variety of assimilation should seem to arise from knowledge of history. But it does not work. The figure of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, Vyacheslav Lypynsky, but

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also hundreds of unprocessed biographies of people from “mixed families” from the period of war, displacement, and finally the complexity of the Lemko or Podlasie issue – all this should indicate that our attitude to term “assimilation” motivated by fear or something similar, does more harm than good. Usually, a change has been directly related to the recognition of truth. But also with the courage to say “as is” and not as “as it should be” to speak.

One of the features of our understanding of the past is the strategy of non-reception. Those who take a voice in the affairs of the past naturally feel the need to “protect” the community of which they feel part. Whether for personal reasons or due to external pressure, at some point it turns into unambiguity and a kind of syndrome of “besieged stronghold” – intellectual positions become the final bastions. I experienced that when I listened to a well-known professor in Poland a few years ago (albeit a non-historian), who I previously accepted as a symbol of the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue. His way of life seemed unambiguous under that view. But from the same professor, I heard – and this in a public speech – unambiguous, emotionally-charged statements addressed to the idea of dialogue, which, as he said, did not take place. These were words full of disappointment.

Rejection is a kind of “soft” denial. The mechanism of accentuation, “mine-not mine” establishes clear preferences. If the choice is “my pain – someone’s pain”, of course, we will, first of all, relate to what affects us. It is worth following a selection of words and a selection of arguments of individual authors. When different words are used for a similar or identical phenomenon, it is a visible sign of the author’s unequal approach to the problem. It is not uncommon to see “our people being not killed”, but “our people are being eliminated”. This mechanism can be attributed to dehumanitary tools. The second, very common example, is when “ours is attacked by a forest gang” in response to which “a retaliatory action is carried out by a detachment”. You do not need any applications to understand what role is assigned to whom.

If a parallel analysis of what was written about the Polish-Ukrainian relations were made, perhaps its image would be exceptionally monotonous when it comes to wording and would differ only in the vector of content saturated with terms that are not subject to scientific analysis and terms that testify to the functionality of history. “Evidence”, “testimony”, “crimes”, “victims” are – in addition to the mentioned carriers of emotions – elements of the vocabulary of lawyers and politicians. The trouble is that many historians do not think about it at all. Much less numerous, but more aware of this fact very active group of cynical politicians is dressed as “respectable”, “objective” specialists.

In nature, a physical pain is difficult to imagine otherwise in human biology. However, because we do not stand on Darwinian positions, do not profess evolutionism or its modern variants, because we accept the existence of the human spirit as something more as a result of chemical processes. The transfer of understanding of a physical pain in the world of ideas can occur in different ways. This in no way contradicts the acceptance of the biological components of a human nature but complements them. One other example of understanding pain is its universalization. That is, “pain” becomes important whether it is ours or not.

Even attempts to find to the victims numerical data findings can be a type of division of the pain into ours or not ours. Radoslaw Zenderowski calls this a “The victimization battle” (Zenderowski, 2009), seeing in it several very dangerous processes, which is possible to wind the next spirals of violence. Since subjective experience is difficult to compare (in parallel, such experience is easily subjected to various forms of metaphors, or “poeticization”), there must be other things that say something about the past. On the one hand, the twentieth century, called the “century of genocide”, so it would be impossible to describe events

without numbers. The problem is an extraordinary focus on them. The consequences of such thinking are terrible. More victims subconsciously diminish their significance, making them either forgotten or at least “less important” victims.

The analysis of our approaches to the past always says a lot about ourselves and our understanding of the world in which we live. You can approach this in an individual dimension, i.e., for example, try to “understand” the understanding of the world by the author of these words, seeing in his books some traces of the other authors influence, strategies for proving their views, or even some more or less hidden things. Whether they are all true (of course not). The full content of the text might be hidden even from its author. Sometimes one or another reader realizes this which is the wisdom of Gadamer, who identified the truth in dialogue (Gadamer, 2008).

You can also try to find common or related elements of the narrative. Again, it is more about form than content. Here returns the already recalled case of the relationship between the individual and the community (group). You can make a thesis about the actual heroes of historical descriptions, despite the presence of various characters and events. In my opinion, as already mentioned, the advantage or even a monopoly belongs to the part of the group. It is defined in different ways (perfect illustration is in the descriptions of the same people who are the Ukrainians for some, the Lemkos for the others, the Ruthenians for the others, etc.). Assignment to a specific group is a separate thing. So, at far, the advantage is given to the group compared to the individual.

To the explanations used above about the distinction between individualistic and collectivist cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007), another factor should be added – globalization. The basis of globalization changes is in the field of communication, the disappearance of existing barriers (technical, political), the acceleration of information. However, instead of the old barriers, the world is not free, but a world is born in which various organizations but also smarter units try to establish new principles (i.e., – new barriers), adapted to the current opportunities and ambitions of some of them. The pressure created by change itself, but also attempts to correct changes in the world, which often contradict each other, i.e., the process of actually strengthening the pressure of change, brings a variety of reactions. One of them is defensive reactions, which are called the return to national roots. When we write about the varieties of situations, here we are primarily talking about establishing the level of the spontaneity of such phenomena. Some of them may be “sabotage” in nature (i.e., they are a direct or indirect consequence of global players’ rivalry).

Appetite for planetary domination is not a new phenomenon. And this is by no means a “conspiracy theory” but a statement about the actions of two blocks cut by the “iron curtain” in the second half of the twentieth century, which after a kind of vacuum in the ‘90s, more and more heading to the rivalry between China and its satellites, and the United States and its satellites. Russia also has its ambitions here.

Geopolitics influence historical narratives. And also narratives concerning the Polish-Ukrainian past. This is evident primarily in the anti-Moscow rhetoric of a significant part of the historiography of Poland and Ukraine. That is, there is a key in the new historiography, which contrasts the actual, true “Polishness” or “Ukrainianness” with all kinds of “Moscowness” (“Soviets”). On the anti-Moscow basis, the myths of the “cursed soldiers” and the UPA guerrillas were built. This is also a reaction to long-standing attempts to impose a mirror-opposite myth (which is now firmly restored in Russia) – the myth of the “evil, rotten West”, which has taken the form of the “Russian world”.

Thus, different people are calling (and some are forcing) to “join them”, “unite” with them. The problem with this is that joining in most cases means “acknowledging and obey”. That is, those who call to “join” to, have an interest that we become a part of their world. “Packaging” will be a promise, emotional blackmail, or a machine gun.

Another problem is that individuality is a very scarce commodity. That is, in principle, the individual has to choose not “alone or in a group”, but “in which group”. According to the principle on which they unite, there is a hierarchy of “political power” of groups. The national, ethnic principle turned out to be stronger in comparison with the class or modern idea. Also, a national principle is comparable to the religious one. Ideological principles uniting in groups mask the violence (physical, symbolic) that appears with each attempt to create a hierarchical structure. The power of this phenomenon is so great that every attempt to hint at the theoretical possibility of another kind of community (non-hierarchical) causes a stream of ridicule about another “utopia”.

In the real world, the vectors of influence of individual groups, their ideologies, actions, etc., create confusion. Whether it is seen or felt by individuals is an individual matter. My observations lead me to the conclusion that everyone needs a “solid foundation”. That is, the model we have accepted is required for normal functioning. Such individual models are necessary for our constant comparison and correction (although some like to declare themselves: “we are consistent”). In a full-fledged community, corrections are dynamic and multi-vector. When the community is crippled, there are not enough natural mechanisms to correct the model. This sometimes deepens the tendency to seal the remnants of the group, and eventually to its final decline. Following this path, we come to the wall: the success of one generation is only a postponement of the inevitable – and this is exactly what describes the state of our community in Poland. Provincialism cannot be competitive with geopolitics, and should not be compared with it. However, this is the formula that the next generation of “the Ukrainians in Poland” is trying to implement (Kryshtopa, 2019). Everything written in grief is in some way combined in accentuation, i.e., the psychological tendency to over-defend “one’s own” and at the same time underestimate “another’s”. The narrative of the past is full of resentment and a constant struggle for recognition of the exclusivity of the “Zakerzonnya” (= territory beyond the Curzon line) space for speculation. The lack of value (truth, and ultimately Truth, i.e., the Absolute) as a point of reference that should bind the national idea, destroys it. Therefore, any accentuation in the historical narrative is not only counterproductive but extremely harmful for people who are open to adopting such a distorted idea as a true idea.

The practicality of history and the true role of the historian are to cover the events of the past as carefully and comprehensively as possible and offer general conclusions that may be useful today. The historian is more like a data analyst, or a surgeon, than like Prometheus or Moses. The surgeon is not expected to weep over the operated patient. The surgeon must know “how and why”, although he and everyone else must be aware that his knowledge is relative. In turn, the data analyst knows that the quality of the conclusions depends on his data. This approach breeds criticism. If a community is to be treated as a whole, it needs such a sanitary means that it can develop. This is not “art for art’s sake”, as it seemed to someone. It is also not always a manifestation of extreme individuality, swollen egocentrism or the like.

Words, including words about the past, will not bring it back, will not reconstruct it. Just as in geometry one must understand what a plane projection is, so in history one must understand what a word projection is. The operation Vistula, like the past, is billions of episodes that no common denominator will give away. The action “Vistula” as words is only

a projection, and in fact – each time projections of the past. Today, we are experiencing the struggle for the projection pattern recorded in cultural memory, the key that will “unpack” further description. It will not change the past, but it can affect the future.

If the story of the past has its key, it is worth realizing what it is and what it is capable of, that is, what doors it opens. This is the responsibility of words, not just professional historians.

The universalization of the experience of the Ukrainians in post-war Poland can replace unpromising accentuation. That is, writing it into the common code. We need to understand the other person’s emotions for this to happen. Empathy is needed for the second person. It takes work to measure the criteria by which we evaluate the world. At the same time, we also need a mature consciousness of possible manipulations to which we may be subjected.

Universal in the experience of the Ukrainians in post-war Poland is loss, patience, fear, nostalgia, chance, but also stubbornness, sacrifice, or on the other hand curiosity, insignificance, naivety. Universal destinies of the Ukrainian partisans, underground fighters, prisoners, peasants and burghers, women, activists, priests, poets, engineers. A universal story about the road: from place to place, from time to time. A universal story of change. There is something to replace 1947, to stop fearfully thinking that we may indeed be “the last Ukrainians in Poland”.

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