

Underground, Imprisonment, and Polish-Ukrainian Relationships: Telling the Life of Polish and Ukrainian Female Underground Members

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The research for this paper comes partially from my dissertation research. Some of the findings that I am including here were published in my book titled: "*If the Walls Could Talk: Inside a Women's Prison in Communist Poland.*"¹ The book is a microhistory of life in a female prison cell in post-1945 Poland. It is based mostly on oral interviews and archival sources, such as interrogation protocols, cell spy reports, and documents coming from prisoners' personal archives, such as letters. The book focuses mostly on the daily lives of prisoners – daily coping strategies, the relationships the women developed with the guards, interrogation officers, other women in their cells, as well as men in neighboring cells. The majority of the material (and the majority of the stories) in the book come from Polish prisoners (both Communist as well as anti-Communist). Only a fraction come from Ukrainian prisoners. While I did pay attention to the treatment that Ukrainian women received as well as the relationships they developed with their Polish cellmates and guards, I did not explore in depth the differences in how both groups integrated the prison experience into their lives, though I am grateful for the opportunity that this workshop offers to reflect on this topic.

There is an important caveat that I need to make out the outset regarding the sources. While I was able to interview a significant number of the Polish prisoners, this was not the case with the Ukrainian women, many of whom simply refused to talk to me. The responses I received from Ukrainians contrasted starkly with those of their Polish counterparts, who showed an overwhelming willingness and sometimes even an enthusiasm to talk. The Ukrainians were almost uniformly reluctant and many refused. I obtained some phone numbers and addresses of Ukrainian prisoners and continued to call or write letters, but I was constantly reminded by those I contacted how distrustful they were towards Poles. I received a number of letters that contained brief and kind refusals to meet with me. I wanted to talk about something they were trying to forget. Their silence spoke for them. Leaving prison after their release, many of them stayed in Poland – a place they were forced to accept as home. Their past was too much of an open wound. As a Polish citizen, I represented the world that they had reluctantly become part of.

I was only able to arrange interviews with a small number of Ukrainian women. We spoke Polish, but Ukrainian came through in certain phrases, anecdotes, and expressions. Those who agreed to share their stories with me lived rather comfortable lives with their children and grandchildren, who had managed to quite successfully assimilate into Polish society. They spoke Ukrainian with their family members and maintained Ukrainian traditions. In the absence of oral interviews with the Ukrainian woman, I mostly worked with material collected by Maria Pankiv,

¹ Anna Muller, *If the Walls Could Talk: Women Political Prisoners in Stalinist Poland, 1945-1956* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

a Ukrainian woman who lives and works in Poland and who in the early 1990s embarked on a project to document the experiences of Ukrainian prisoners in Polish prisons. At the end of the 1990s, Pankiv, who worked for the Ukrainian Institute *Slovo* in Warsaw, gathered and published two volumes of recollections of former Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) members who were later imprisoned in Polish prisons. Pankiv shared the notes from her fieldwork and archival research with me. She also spent countless hours talking with me about the women she had met, while trying to help me understand the horror they had been through and the difficulties they may have with me as a researcher of Polish origins. Born and raised in Siberia where her parents were sent for being Ukrainian nationalists, she provided me with a perspective of both a researcher and someone struggling with a difficult past. In addition to Pankiv, I worked with material collected by Eugeniusz Misilo in his private collection, the Ukrainian Archive in Warsaw (*Ukrainskij Archiv*), which mostly contains documentation regarding Operation Vistula.

Not surprisingly, research for my book indicated that both Ukrainian and Polish women used specific coping mechanisms in prison. They also responded differently to imprisonment. The violence and cruelty that they witnessed and experienced in prison was comparable and yet the women differ in how they treated the prison years after the releases. Both the Ukrainian and the Polish women saw their imprisonment as a time of suffering, loss, passivity, and difficult choices. Recently in *Dance in Chains. Political Imprisonment in the Modern World*, Padraic Kenney argues that the shared experiences that activists gain in prison becomes a tool with which they arm themselves. Their life, their prison activities, everything they do or produce in prison can turn into a political statement.² Imprisonment is a school of life, but also a test of one's individual strength and readiness to engage in political life. The state aims at punishment, but it ultimately grants prisoners something like a badge of honor while creating a special place in politics and history for them. In my reading of the sources, this phenomenon rarely describes the experiences of the women that I had a chance to speak with. It was rather the Ukrainian women (and not the Polish women) who viewed prison as an extension of their struggle and part of their individual input into the struggle for the future. That sense of continued struggle in prison seems to be lost in case of the Polish prisoners.

In the following pages, I will delineate the situation of Polish and Ukrainian women who were in Polish post-war prisons. After doing that, I will briefly look at their post-prison lives while trying to capture their attitudes towards the imprisonment after their release. Towards the end I will sketch some of the possible reasons for these differences. It does not end with some concluding remarks, but rather with questions for potential future research and furthering this project.

Women Prisoners

Apart for ordinary prisoners (also known as criminal prisoners), the largest category of prisoners in post-war prisons were those imprisoned for participating in illegal anti-Communist organizations (mostly alternations of the Home Army and the National Armed Forces [NSZ]) Ukrainians from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and those imprisoned for Nazi crimes (including Nazi sympathizers and collaborators as well as people from illegal organizations charged with collaborating with the Nazis). Other categories included people imprisoned for sabotage, espionage, and responsibility for the September 1939 failure.³ The estimated number of prisoners

² Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains. Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 237. Based on partial data from 1948. "Wykaz zaludnienia

varies greatly. The highest estimates are as high as 1.2 million prisoners (both criminal prisoners and political prisoners) and people detained for a short period, between 1944 and 1956 in all penitentiary units: arrests, prisons, and camps.⁴ However, the majority of historians point to much lower numbers. According to Tadeusz Wolsza, at its peak, in 1952, the total number of all prisoners was over 117,380.⁵ The number for each year depended on the flow of people imprisoned and released and on amnesties (there were four amnesties between 1945 and 1956). The quantity and nationality of non-Polish prisoners is difficult to establish. Only partial data is available regarding the number of Ukrainians in Polish prisons. But according to the first report from Jaworzno – a work camp for Ukrainians in Jaworzno, in southern Poland – in March 1945, 945 men, 935 women, and 31 infants were confined there. This number grew significantly in the next two years.⁶

The largest wave of Ukrainians entered the penal system in April 1947, with Operation Vistula, which was launched by Polish authorities. The UPA existed on Polish territories from 1945 to 1948 mostly in southeastern Poland. In 1946, UPA units changed their methods of fighting, demobilized many formations, and reorganized the remaining units into a strict military underground that was intended to survive until the expected Third World War. In other words, on both sides of the Polish–Soviet border, the UPA members went into the so-called deep underground, which meant that they shifted from being offensive to defensive. For Polish Communist authorities, the presence of large Ukrainian minorities who were militarily predisposed constituted a problem. Operation Vistula, the forced resettlement of the Ukrainian population living in southeast Poland, was designed to disperse and assimilate Ukrainian communities into Polish society.⁷ The goal was the liquidation of the UPA units and the transfer of Ukrainians from the southeast border zone to northwestern Polish territories that had been added to Poland after the war. The operation lasted three months, resulting in the resettlement of more than 40,000 people. The UPA fighters who were discovered during the resettlement were initially imprisoned in Jaworzno. The camp existed until January 1948 when many Jaworzno prisoners were transported to other prisons in Poland.⁸

UPA members who were arrested in Poland were accused of violating Article 85 of the Small Criminal Code—which stipulated a harsh punishment, from a long prison sentence (ten to fifteen years) to a life or even death sentence—for their attempt to deprive Poland of part of its

więzień wg stanu na dzień,” 1 June 1948. Warsaw, p. 37, MBP 758, AAN. Barbara Otwinowska and Teresa Drzał, “Wprowadzenie,” in *Zawołać po imieniu. Księga kobiet-więźniów politycznych, 1944–1958*, ed. Barbara Otwinowska and Teresa Drzał, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Vipart, 1999), 11.

⁴ Email exchange with Marcin Zwolski, May 2017. Zwolski refers to an official letter of Henryk Dulijas from March 26, 1954 in which he claims that while from 1945 to 1950 around 100,000 people were imprisoned annually, between 1951 to 1953 that number reached an average of 140,000.

⁵ Tadeusz Wolsza, *Więzienia stalinowskie w Polsce. System, codzienność, represje* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo RM, 2013), 8. Marcin Zwolski, “Amnestie lat 1945–1956 oraz ich realizacja w więziennictwie. Praktyka ogólnopolska a lokalna specyfika na przykładzie białostockim,” in *Komunistyczne amnestie 1945–1947—drogi do ‘legalizacji’ czy zagłady. Lat 1945–1947*, ed. Wojciech J. Muszyński (Warsaw: IPN, 2012), 345. Brian Porter-Szücs suggests a much lower number of 243,063. Brian Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 208.

⁶ Kazimierz Miroszewski, *Centralny Obóz Pracy Jaworzno—Podobóz ukraiński (1947–1949)* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2001), 15. See also Eugeniusz Misiło, “Listy Ukraińców więzionych w Polsce,” unpublished material, Eugeniusz Misiło’s Private Collection.

⁷ Wnuk and Motyka, *Pany i rezuny*, 46–47, 69–71.

⁸ Grzegorz Motyka, *Tak było w Bieszczadach. Walki polsko-ukraińskie 1943–1948* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1999), 383–400; and Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 197.

territory.⁹ And in the eyes of Communist authorities, that anti-state activity meant also educational or propaganda work that the members of UPA attempted to do underground. Paraskiewia Babiak, a UPA liaison, was arrested on May 14, 1947. A few weeks later, on June 9, she was accused of and executed for her hostile attitude toward Poland. Her sentence emphasized that as an intelligent person she knew the consequences of her actions.¹⁰ Arrested in September 1948, Józefa Krzywko received twelve years for circulating UPA brochures for two years.¹¹ Halina Martyn, a UPA member from the 1930s, withdrew from UPA and moved to Poland in 1944. She was arrested in April 1949 and received an eight-year sentence for publishing Ukrainian poems that celebrated Ukrainian nations in illegal UPA brochures. As incriminating evidence, the court noted “her high intellect, her previous political activity, and her political skills.”¹² Martyn’s story is typical: many female UPA members traveled to Poland, where in cities located near the border, such as Przemyśl or Jelenia Góra, they were to lead a legal life. Many of the women were born in pre-1939 Poland and hence spoke fluent Polish and had Polish citizenship. Having Polish citizenship facilitated the process of obtaining Polish documents. While in Poland they were to provide messengers and couriers with a place to stay who were traveling from Ukraine to western Europe or further to the United States. They also looked for ways to transport UPA propaganda materials to the American-occupied zone in Germany.¹³ In that sense, Poland was a window into the world for propaganda activities as well as contact between the Ukrainian Soviet Republic and the West. The ultimate goal was a national uprising for Ukrainian independence.

Who were these women?

The majority of the Polish and Ukrainian women confined in Polish prisons belonged to the generation of women born in the 1920s or 1930s, though sometimes in the late 1910s. They were arrested as young adults at the threshold of their adult lives, often as young mothers and wives, who had spent their youth and adolescent years in Poland. For the Polish women, the fact that they grew up in independent Poland was crucial in the process of their education, which was predicated on strongly religious undertones and distinct roles for women and men.¹⁴ For both women and men, individualism was understood in specific terms. Space for individual development existed, but it had to be channeled through specific expectations. An ideal woman was a mother whose patriotic duty merged with a Catholic worldview. Her role as a mother

⁹ Witold Bogucki, ed., *Mały Kodeks Karny* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1946), 92; Eugeniusz Misiło, ed., *Akcja “Wisła.” Dokumenty* (Warsaw: Archiwum Ukraińskie, 1993); Eugeniusz Misiło, “Jaworzno,” *Kontakt*, no. 4 (1990): 55–61; Eugeniusz Misiło, “Ukraińcy w obozie koncentracyjnym w Jaworznie 1947–1949,” in *Historia martyrologii więźniów obozów odoobnienia w Jaworznie 1939–1956*, ed. Kazimierz Miroszewski and Zygmunt Woźniczka (Jaworzno: Muzeum Miasta Jaworzna, 2002), 58–70; and Kazimierz Miroszewski, “Powstanie i funkcjonowanie Centralnego Obozu Pracy w Jaworznie, 1945–1949,” *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 2 (2002): 23–40.

¹⁰ “Akt oskarżenia Paraskiewia Babiak,” June 1947, Eugeniusz Misiło’s Private Collection.

¹¹ “Akt oskarżenia Józefa Krzywko,” January 1949, Eugeniusz Misiło’s Private Collection.

¹² “Akt oskarżenia Haliny Martyn,” 1949, Maria Pankiv’s Private Collection.

¹³ “Zeznanie Moroz Olgi, pseudo Małusz,” 20 September 1947, pp. 14–18, Akta operacyjne dot. Włodzimierz Szczygielski. Materiały w sprawie przynależności do OUN-UPA.: 0192/ 338, vol. 16, BU IPN.

¹⁴ Hanna Świda-Ziemia, *Urwany Lot. Pokolenie inteligenckiej młodzieży powojennej w świetle listów i pamiętników z lat 1945-1948* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 31–47. See also, Florian Znaniecki, *Ludzie terazniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* (Warsaw: Państwo Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), 147.

delineated her position as a citizen; her main task was to raise children to be good patriots.¹⁵ Discussing the roles of women in prewar Polish society, historian Katherine Jolluck states: “The traits associated with a proper upbringing included discipline, respect for authority of elders, Christian resignation, courage, altruism, patriotism, and absolute selflessness vis-à-vis the fatherland—even if that required the sacrifice of the family.”¹⁶ The fact that Poland had just regained its independence strengthened this thinking alongside a respect for military values. Sociologist Hanna Świda Zimba, who analyzed the profile of interwar youth, emphasizes that the ideal, especially embraced after 1926, was a citizen soldier, who was very loyal to the state and aware of his or her mission.¹⁷

Even though a traditional worldview persisted, ideas about different models of gender relations began to be discussed in interwar Poland, mainly in larger cities and in intellectual circles. In 1918, for their active involvement in the war, Polish women received the right to vote and be elected. Women of this time belonged to the first generation of women who could enjoy easier access to education than their predecessors. In the years after the First World War, 23 percent of students at institutions of higher education were women, and this number grew to 28.5 percent in 1938-1939. A national census from 1921 shows that women constituted 44 percent of the entire workforce.¹⁸ The family model was changing as well. Parents were slowly losing control over their children to schools and various organizations responsible for extracurricular activities. On one hand, this meant a strengthening of the traditional worldview that was being taught at schools, but on the other hand, it led to the exposure of new ideas that were emerging with a growing openness to modernity.¹⁹ These new ideas included discussions of feminism, conscious parenthood, abortion, and the right of women to work. The most important magazine devoted to women’s issues in interwar period, *Moja Przyjaciółka* (My Girlfriend), “espoused a relatively pro-aggressive attitude toward women and work in Poland. . . . Some authors proclaim working a moral imperative for ‘today’s woman,’ giving her authority, opening new horizons, and making her the ‘master of her own will and actions.’”²⁰ Regardless of many social, economic, and political handicaps, interwar Poland was on its way to creating a modern and democratic society based on the belief in the values and principles of equality. And the women of this generation were the first provided with an opportunity to think about their life choices in terms of individual agency. These choices were still framed within national obligations, but in general, these women belonged to the first generation free from a previously ever-present and overbearing worry about the lack of Polish independence.

¹⁵ Adam Winiarz, “The Evolution of the Role Model of a Polish Women in the 19th and 20th Century,” in *Gender and the Secondary Education in Poland and Sweden*, ed. Ryszard Kucha and Ulla Johansson (Lublin: Marie Curie-Skłodowska Press, 2002), 19; and Kusiak-Brownstein, “Płeć kulturowa, ‘doświadczenie’ i wojna,” 414–415.

¹⁶ Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity. Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 90. See also Małgorzata Fidelis, “‘Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation’: Polish Women Intellectuals in the Cultural Construction of Female Gender Roles, 1864–1890,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13 (Spring 2001): 108–109.

¹⁷ Świda-Ziemia, *Urwany Lot*, 34.

¹⁸ Józef Miąso, “Kształcenie dziewcząt w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej,” in *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warsaw: Instytut Historyczny UW, 1995), 53.

¹⁹ Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie. Wielkomięjska rodzina inteligencka w Polsce, 1919–1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2003), 49–50.

²⁰ Jolluck, *Exile and Identity*, 50. See also Adam Winiarz, “The Ideal of a Polish Women in the Interwar Period,” in *Gender and Secondary Education in Poland and Sweden in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ryszard Kucha and Ulla Johansson (Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2002), 32.

Women's social activism in Ukraine was of a similar nature, though respect for traditional values was even stronger due to an increasing attempt to reach out to peasant communities.²¹ Ukrainian women who engaged in various social activities during the interwar years focused solely on spreading traditional national values. The precarious nature of the Ukrainian national movement and the lack of independence made the desire to liberate Ukraine from Russia and Poland even more desperate. In 1929, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), an underground political organization that fought for Ukrainian independence, was established. Already before World War II in the 1930s, thanks to aggressive propaganda and active recruiting policies, thousands of young Ukrainians became active members of OUN. The youth sections of OUN, *iunky* (for girls) and *junatstwo* (for boys), targeted high school and college students and trained its participants for future full-scale subversive missions. According to historian Oksana Kis, adolescent girls became the most educated and well-trained members of the youth movement. While highlighting their role as activists, the available documents also underline the role of women as mothers, referencing their unique role in both the physical and mental reproduction of the Ukrainian nation.²²

In Prison

Many of the old prison buildings had served as prisons since the end of the nineteenth century. Seriously affected by war destruction and chaos, many of them were hastily organized as incarceration sites. Prisons welcomed prisoners with terrifying conditions, such as dirt floors, no windows, no sanitation, and problems with ventilation in the summer and heating in the winter. In the first years after the war ended, almost all sites were insufficient to serve as prisons. In later years, documents produced by the Prison and Camps Department and the MBP suggest some efforts to improve conditions. Changes reflected a more general drive to reconceptualize the purpose of prisons in socialist Poland. With more attention on rehabilitation practices came occasional visitation of various prisons by the Prison and Camps Department officials. While most prisons remained overcrowded, access to food, bathrooms, and showers increased in both interrogation and regular prisons. These changes were not universal; they varied across institutions.

In general, cells located in basements were not initially well insulated. They were hot and humid in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. Many interrogation prisons outside Warsaw were not heated through most of the winter.²³ Halina Szopińska, who was arrested in 1945 by the Soviet secret police, was kept in a small cell on the outskirts of Warsaw before being moved to Lublin Castle. The bathroom in the Lublin prison had a broken window, and her cell was so cold that the wet floor turned to ice during the winter.²⁴ Most prisoners complained about the lack of access to windows. In Mokotów, cell windows were covered with a special dense metal mesh that limited fresh air and light. Even if some conditions in many prisons improved (e.g., heating during cold seasons), problems with fresh air and light remained. In a 1952 document from an inspection of interrogation cells, the inspectors emphasized that cells in

²¹ Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1988).

²² Oksana Kiss, "Women's Participation in the Nationalist Underground in Western Ukraine during the 1940s and 50s," *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, no. 2 (2015): 54, 57–58.

²³ Halina Szopińska, "Powstanie warszawskie i dziesięć lat więzień bezpieki," *Nasz Los. Pismo politycznohistoryczne kombatantów więźniów politycznych* (November 2006): 9; Regina Sakowicz-Olszewska, "Wspomnienia," Ruta Czaplińska's Private Collection; and Tymochko-Kaminska, *Moya odyseja*, 207–209.

²⁴ Halina Szopińska, interview by author, March 2007, Warsaw.

Białystok did not have windows; they had small holes in the walls that were covered with pieces of cloth to stop the cold from coming in, resulting in insufficient fresh air and light.²⁵

The number of prisons and the primitive conditions with which they welcomed inmates are usually considered to be indicators of the system's cruelty. But the crude settings were not always intentional. During their first postwar general meeting, prison administrators complained about overwhelming shortages of almost everything, including firearms, beds, coal for heating, and boilers. Prison foremen struggled with securing funds for leaky roofs, destroyed sewage systems, bombed water supplies, and electricity.²⁶

Poles and Ukrainians Together (Together and Apart)

Cells gathered people of various nationalities, social strata, and ideological commitments. Members of anti-Communist groups, fighters of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Communists, and occasionally also criminals and Nazis were all held together. And out of this mixture of people, the imprisoned women were creating prison relationships in order to deal at least partially with the loss of multiple pre-prison identities (for example, that of fighters, mothers, friends, wives, daughters, and lovers) as well as the void that imprisonment created. Interviews with former prisoners point to predictable patterns in which prison relationships developed. In interviews, some women underlined that throughout their imprisonment they maintained their identity of a political prisoner as an umbrella identity that they often equated with anti-Communism. This meant that the women tended to develop relationships with those who were imprisoned for similar attitudes toward the new state or with those of the same nationality, either Poles or Ukrainians.

Poles and Ukrainians have a long history together. Throughout the interwar years, Polish authorities undertook many initiatives that aimed at polonizing eastern Poland, a part of the country with a strong presence of national minorities. But many of these policies increased antagonisms between Poles and Ukrainians. The national policy was led with premeditation that aimed at the Polonization of Ukrainians.²⁷ With time, relationships worsened. The most recent and dramatic example of the latter was an episode of ethnic cleansing in Volhynia in 1943, which began as the slaughter of ethnic Poles and continued as a bloody and violent retaliation by Poles on Ukrainians. Attitudes on both sides devolved into mistrust and hatred. The seeming inability of Poles and Ukrainians to live side by side peacefully drove post-war state policy. One of the results was Operation Vistula. "The state apparatus deliberately used the images of the Ukrainian terror in Volhynia in 1943 to fuse state policy with Polish self-defense in the minds of Polish citizens."²⁸ Continued mutual suspicion based in the memory of ethnic violence separated Poles and Ukrainians. For Poles, Ukrainians remained a group with claims to territories of the interwar Polish state. For Ukrainians, Poland remained a nation that perpetually threatened their

²⁵ Marcin Zwolski, "'Pawilony śledcze' oraz areszty podległe wydziałom śledczym WUBP w świetle inspekcji z 1952 r.," in *Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej, 1944–1989* 2, no. 4 (2006): 365.

²⁶ "Stenogram odprawy kierowników," 10–13 August 1945, in *Protokoły z odpraw, zjazdów i narad kierownictwa Departamentu Więziennictwa Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego z naczelnikami więzień i obozów pracy, 1944–1956*, ed. Marek Jabłonowski and Włodzimierz Janowski (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA, 41.

²⁷ Basil Kerski and Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Wiek ukraińsko-polski, Rozmowy z Bogdanem Osadcukiem* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie—Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2001), 11.

²⁸ Jeffrey Burds, comments on Timothy Snyder's article "To Resolve the Ukrainian Question Once and For All: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943–1947," Accessible online: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/comment13.htm>

national independence. The conversations that were taking place in many cells often engaged in the topic of the difficult Polish-Ukrainian past. The image of each other as well as the memory of a cruel past affected cell life.

There are no many instances of close bonds forming between Poles and Ukrainians in prisons.²⁹ Polish and Ukrainian prisoners usually met in integration prisons, although some prisons, such as Tarnów or Jaworzno, were organized by nationality.³⁰ Most of the women viewed Ukrainians as political prisoners. However, a few dissenting voices emphasized their differences by referring to them as prisoners “of a different kind.”³¹ Those who accepted Ukrainian women as political prisoners praised them for their physical strength and their resilience during even the cruelest interrogations or for their unique skills, which made confinement with them easier. Maria Wszelaczyńska remembered that Ukrainians massaged legs well. Ewa Ludkiewicz and Ruta Czaplińska talked about their manual talents and beautiful embroidery for which other women had to pull threads from clothes.³² Interestingly, historian Oksana Kis sees embroidering as a traditional craft that the Ukrainian women engaged in as it was an easily recognizable marker of their national identity.³³ Other women, such as Irena Trzepla and Wiesława Pajdak, talked about them as well-behaved (*grzeczne*). Pajdak remembered the physical endurance of the Ukrainian women who experienced the worst interrogations. It is also said that they sang in the cells beautifully.

They are mostly remembered for their contributions to cell life, rather than for their relationships with Poles. As long as the women were able to stay away from political conversations, sharing a cell was not a problem.³⁴ However, according to Wiesława Pajdak this was not always possible. There was a geographical divide in how Polish women treated the Ukrainians: the women from the east were more, and often openly, hostile toward them, and it was very difficult to refrain from conversations about the past with them. On the other hand, as she remembers, the women from western Poland, who did not share the memory of the difficult past, often welcomed them in their *kolhozes*, a cell-based household that the women often organized to improve their daily life, for example, by sharing their resources together.³⁵ Ukrainians, however, often remembered that time as more traumatic, due to the indifference of Polish prisoners. For example, Katerina Stah recollects that after an intense interrogation, she laid half-conscious in her cell, where she was the only Ukrainian. According to Stah, it was the guard, not her cellmates, who helped her. He walked over to a different cell, in which only Ukrainians were housed, and asked for a blanket for Stah.³⁶ On the other hand, some women noted that Ukrainian prisoners were often the target of guards’ prejudices.³⁷ UPA member Anna

²⁹ “Dar Pamyati. Za rozpovidy Kateriny Vitko-Stah,” in *Vira, nadiya, lyubov*, vol. 1, ed. Maria Pankiv (Warsaw: Ukrainiskij Archiw, 2001), 44–45.

³⁰ Anna Karvanska-Baylyak, *Vo Imya Tvoje* (Warsaw: Ukrainiskij Archiv, 2000), 266.

³¹ Maria Prorok, interview by author, April 2007, Warsaw. Ewa Ludkiewicz also was not sure if they were political prisoners. Ewa Ludkiewicz, interview by author, March 2010, Gdańsk.

³² Czaplińska, *Z archiwum pamięci*, 143. Ewa Ludkiewicz, interview by author, March 2010.

³³ Oksana Kis, “Remaining Human: Ukrainian Women’s Experiences of Constructing ‘Normal Life’ in the Gulag,” in *Gender and Peacebuilding: All Hands Required*, ed. Maureen P. Flaherty, Thomas G. Matyok, Sean Byrne, and Hamdesa Tusso (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 130–131.

³⁴ Irena Trzepla-Gut, “Pamiętnik z lat 1946–1952,” 57; and Wiesława Pajdak-Śmiechowska, interview by author, April 2007, Warsaw.

³⁵ Wiesława Pajdak-Śmiechowska, interview by author, April 2007, Warsaw.

³⁶ Karvanska-Baylyak, *Vo Imya Tvoje*, 212–214, 237–238; and “Dar Pamyati,” 38–39.

³⁷ Władysława Zula Magnuszewska, interview by author, March 2009, Warsaw; Ruta Czaplińska, interview by author, 2007, Wrocław; and Janina Wasilójć-Smoleńska, interview by author, March 2008, Sopot.

Karvanska recollected that in Lublin Castle, guards chose Ukrainian women for the worst jobs, such as working in the laundry room, claiming that Ukrainian women were stronger and better equipped to perform hard physical tasks.³⁸ The image of mutual relationships between Poles and Ukrainians in a common cell is complex and it reminds us of a complex past between two groups that affected life in the cell and how the women remembered what happened there.

The Return

The majority of the prisoners began returning to freedom in the mid-1950s. In April 1956 the biggest amnesty was announced. Sentences up to five years were pardoned and higher sentences were significantly lowered. Life sentences were changed to twelve years and death sentences were changed to fifteen years of imprisonment. This amounted to the release of thirty-six thousand prisoners, including around six thousand political prisoners.³⁹ For the majority of former prisoners, life after release was far from ideal. Some did not have anyone to return to. Others found it difficult to reinsert themselves into their families. Reintegrating into society was even more challenging. Everything was a challenge, including obtaining an education, securing a place to live, and finding a job. As former prisoners, their lives were critically constrained by the limited opportunities they had but also by being misunderstood by the people around them. After the first wave of enormous enthusiasm when the novelty of clean clothes, comfortable beds, family, and friends wore off, many of them realized that the new was perilous.

In his work on prisoners from South Africa, historian Paul Gready writes that homecoming is a movement forward and backward to reassume an identity suspended at the moment of imprisonment and recovery of self. "It is an attempt to grasp the thread that spans continuity and change, the familiar and the strange, past and present/future, home and abroad; to understand the ways in which they coexist."⁴⁰ Homecoming does not imply rejection of even the most difficult past but rather pushes one to search for ways to bridge the past and present. What united the Polish and Ukrainian was an initial urge to erase their imprisonment from their lives: out of fear, shame, anxiety, and perhaps most of all confusion about what their imprisonment meant in post-1953 Poland. But over time they began weaving their imprisonment story into their life story.

Poles and Ukrainians, began the process of healing differently. Research in other contexts, for example, in the Soviet Union, shows that fellow prisoners constituted perhaps a more important support system for returnees than their families.⁴¹ However, the important difference between the Poles and Ukrainians was that for the Ukrainians, Poland had become an involuntary home. Many of them were not allowed to reunite with their families, who, after the arrest of one family member, were often deported from Poland to the Soviet Union.⁴² After their release, former prisoners were not allowed to receive a passport and hence were forced to stay in Poland, perhaps the last place most of them could imagine rebuilding a safe and normal life.

³⁸ Anna Karvanska-Baylyak, *Vo imya Tvoje* (Warsaw: Ukrainskyji Archiv, 2000), 246–247.

³⁹ Marcin Zwolski, "Amnestie lat 1945-1956 oraz ich realizacja w więziennictwie. Praktyka ogólnopolska a lokalna specyfika na przykładzie białostockim," in *Komunistyczne amnestie*, 343. See also Jarosław Utrat-Milecki, "Więziennictwo w Polsce w latach 1944–1956," *Studia Iuridica* 27 (1995): 116; and Ustawa, 27 April 1956, *Dziennik Ustaw* no. 11, position 57, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19560110057>.

⁴⁰ Paul Gready, *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile, and Homecoming from Apartheid South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 235.

⁴¹ See, for example, Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Picador: 2008).

⁴² Forexample, Irina Tymochko-Kaminska's families were deported to Siberia. Irina Tymochko-Kaminska, *Moya Odyseya* (Warsaw: Ukrainskij Archiw, 2005), 289–300.

Forced separation from friends and family widened the gulf between them and Poles, including former prisoners. Estrangement from Polish society heightened a sense of individual victimization.

Both groups functioned within the informal networks of friends from prison. Ukrainian Irina Tymochko Kaminska, released on November 15, 1955, found out that her entire family had been taken to Siberia. After leaving Fordon, she went to Wrocław, in central Poland, where Irina Stislo, a prison friend, invited her to the apartment of another prison friend, Anna Karvanska-Baylyak. For years that apartment served as home to many former Ukrainian Fordon prisoners. Not until 1958 did Tymochko Kaminska receive permission to travel to see her family in Siberia—two years after she had established the first contact with her family since her release.⁴³ Similarly, the women released in the mid-1950s from Polish prisons created tight circles of support. They remained involved in the lives of their prison friends, supplying them with food parcels, writing cheerful letters, and offering support to their families. Halina Sosnowska opened a tailor's workshop for which she hired former prisoners, especially those who were unable to find a job anywhere else.⁴⁴

However, the majority of the women did not talk about their past and prison experience outside of intimate conversations with their prison friends. In the late 1980s, former prisoner Barbara Otwinowska brought a voice recorder to one of their meetings and the women refused to be recorded. It was not until the mid-1990s that the Polish women began to speak. In the late 1990s, Maria Pankiv began collecting the Ukrainian stories. Interestingly, my reading of the oral interviews and memoirs suggests that the Polish women saw their prison past differently than their Ukrainian counterparts. While the Ukrainian women see that time period as a continuation of their national struggle that nevertheless shattered their private lives, the Polish women did not see their imprisonment as a “completely wasted time”.⁴⁵

Polish historiography tends to see imprisoned Polish patriots as a symbol of injustice and suffering or an extension of the struggle for independence. But rather than seeing their experience through the prism of national suffering, the Polish women used the term *postawa* to describe their life in prison as life that was led in dignity. *Postawa* comes from the word *stać* (standing). It means remaining loyal to previously held values, but it also means getting a grip on the reality at hand, regardless of what that reality may be. Czaplínska stated in the same radio interview: “In prison we did not focus on survival; we tried to create a deeper meaning or to survive it in a way that gave us a chance to leave prison and enter freedom as normal or even richer people. This was not wasted time; it was time that made us richer. We lost a lot . . . , but nobody will take away from us those contacts, experiences, friends.”⁴⁶ “This was not completely wasted time,” said Irena Bukowska. “Nobody should think of us as martyrs (*męczennice*),” adds Otwinowska.⁴⁷ What stands out here is that the Polish women did not necessarily perceive their imprisonment as a continuation of their struggle, something that Kenney sees as a modern phenomenon and one that defines political prisoners. Rather than that they saw their imprisonment through the prism of individual empowerment and enrichment. Obviously, the women developed this interpretation – one that focuses on the friendships that they developed in

⁴³ Ibid. The secret police monitored Irena Tymochko since her release. “Notatka,” 1 August 1958, Warsaw, Tymochko's file: 0296/159, vol. 3, BU IPN.

⁴⁴ *Nike* 4 (1993), 14–15.

⁴⁵ Irena Bukowska in: Maciejowska and Żółtowska, “Czas nie stracony.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Maciejowska and Żółtowska, “Czas nie stracony.”

prison or things they learned there – decades after their release. Nevertheless, it served them well in the process of integrating their past with their present.

The Ukrainian women took a different approach. In conversations with me or Maria Pankov, or even in their memoirs, they emphasized that imprisonment affected them tragically. Such stories as those of Irena Timochko or Katerina Vitko-Stach follow a similar pattern: they found life in Poland after prison unbearable and in that context saw the prison years as ones that ruined their lives: their youth, health, and future plans. This sense of tragedy is mitigated only by the sense of their individual or group contribution to the struggle for Ukrainian independence. While narrating her integrations in her memoir, Anna Karvanska said this about the men from her UPA unit who were imprisoned at the same time: “It is difficult to name the feeling that life in a death cell gave me. It was fear mixed with sympathy, protest against the cruelty of fate, and faith that the idea of freedom is indestructible. Now they were locking our boys in this cell. (...) Since that moment, they were sitting in this cell with a death sentence. They were still waiting for the sentence to be enforced. They were still fighting (Jeszcze czekali na wykonanie wyroku. Jeszcze szli do boju).”⁴⁸ For Karvanska, prison was not the end of the struggle. Even in the death cell, Ukrainian patriots were still fighting: personal dignity and devotion to Ukrainian independence was the cause that was driving them. Maria Pankiv, who recorded hours of conversations with the women prisoners, titled her book: *Faith, Hope and Love*. She explains that all of these notions described the ideas that the women were fighting for before prison, but also during and after imprisonment: faith in and love for Ukraine and a hope that it would be free one day.

The reason for the difference in how the Polish and Ukrainian women remember their imprisonment are manifold. Some of the reasons are certainly related to the fact that their post-war situation was perhaps even more difficult than that of the Polish women. The lack of a family and home to return to denied them a space for healing. Also, soon after their release they were often followed by the Polish secret police. The feeling that the secret police was breathing down their neck is more prevalent in Ukrainian women’s stories than in Polish women’s accounts. Both men and women Ukrainian former prisoners were seen as still nursing anti-Polish feelings, but they were also seen as more vulnerable. It was not uncommon to see secret police officers asking them ‘for favors’—which meant some form of cooperation in exchange for a passport.

This happened to Ukrainian Halina Lebedovych, who was monitored from the moment of her release in 1958. Lebedovych worked as an inspector of education in Peremyśl (in eastern Poland) but considered leaving for the United States where she had family. In the file collected by the secret police was, for example, correspondence between Ukrainian children in Peremyśl and Ukrainian children in Canada. After learning about her contacts, the secret police tried to recruit her as an informant. At first she showed a willingness to cooperate in return for obtaining a passport to the United States. She promised that when she reached the United States, she would write reports about the Ukrainian nationalist circles there. Prior to leaving for the States, however, she was asked to provide some evidence of her loyalty to Communist Poland. She probably refused, since her file documents many more unsuccessful attempts to obtain a

⁴⁸ Anna Karwanska, „W imię Twoje (haftowane przez życie),” *Nowa Ukraina. Zeszyty historyczno-politologiczne* 1–2/2007, 77.

passport. The last attempt dates from 1962. She was also fired from the school where she worked when the secret police discovered that she had been making contact abroad.⁴⁹

Another potential reason for the difference in how the prison past was being viewed was the time and place that the oral interviews were collected. Some of Pankiv's interlocutors managed to leave for Canada, which is where she interviewed them. After making it abroad, many of them managed to start families, get a job, even finish school, which certainly helped them recover their sense of individual worth and find their place in society. Those that made it abroad were also able to engage in various organizations that promoted Ukrainian history and culture, such as the Committee of the Canadian Ukrainians or the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women.⁵⁰ This was the first forum to tell their stories and it was certainly a forum that in addition to celebrating personal successes related to past misfortunes, prompted the women to provide their lives with a larger metanarrative, which imbued their life with epic qualities. Ukrainian nationalism and its ultimate victory in 1991 was certainly something that brought a culmination to their lives and life efforts. This is how Teofila Stachiv ends her story: "This life of ours is full of surprises. On the 24 of August this happened. My dear Ukraine – free. May God give us a better life. I thought my life is just about to end and suddenly I feel resurrected in my memoirs. There is a price to pay in life. Did I pay mine?"⁵¹

At the end of this paper, instead of a conclusion, I would like to consider one more reason that may play a role in the difference between how the Polish and Ukrainian women integrate imprisonment into their past. This is a hypothesis at a very early stage, but perhaps it is worth considering the difference in the role that underground life played in the lives of both groups of women. In the case of the Ukrainian women, their entry into the underground was marked with a rite of passage – a ritual of receiving a new underground name that many of the women used later in life. Gaining entry into the underground usually started by participating in various cultural organizations (such as Prosvita); friendships usually led the young people into OUN and later UPA. Even though marriages in the underground were discouraged, many of the women entered into romantic relationships that led to an underground marriage. Maria Savchyn (aka Marichka), who was recruited to UPA at the age of 14, married the UPA North commander, "Orlan" Vasyl Halasa. As a gift for the new life, they received – a pistol Walter.⁵² This rite of passage not only marked a new stage in life, but a new life altogether – a common destiny and sealing one's life with Ukraine. The consequent arrests or death was considered almost to be a parting from the beloved and hence a personal tragedy. The personal life is seen and interpreted through the collective. In that context, life becomes a story of a commitment, where Ukraine is the main hero. The public values epitomized in the attachment to independent Ukraine are mixed with personal fulfilment.

I am not ready to say the role that rite of passage played in their lives, but it was certainly something they recall as a defining moment. This is in stark contrast to how Polish underground handled the entry of people into the Home Army or almost any other underground Polish organization. The women had to pledge an allegiance to the cause of Polish independence, and

⁴⁹ "Notatka z przeprowadzonej rozmowy z kandydatem Haliną Lebedowicz," 24 and 25 November 1960, Warsaw, p. 44, Lebedovych's file: 0_1224/1953, vol. 5, BU IPN. "Notatka służbowa," 5 March 1960, p. 16, Lebedovych's file: 0_1224/1953, vol. 5, BU IPN.

⁵⁰ Teofila Stachiv, *Vira*, 73

⁵¹ Teofila Stachiv, *Vira*, 73 "Dar Pamyati. Za rozpovidyu Kateriny Vitko-Stah," in *Vira, nadiya, lyubov*, vol. 2, ed. Maria Pankiv, 73.

⁵² Maria Savchyn, *Tysiacha dorih (spohady)*, vol. 28 (Toronto: Litopys UPA, 1995).

they even received underground alias names, yet their stories pay very little attention to this ceremony. The structures of both underground movements were very different—the obligations and expectations imposed on its members, the ‘structure of feelings’ (Raymond Williams) that the underground created affecting the individual with different inner dynamics, and hence, creating diverse effects on their later life stories.