

In 1772 the Habsburg Empire annexed the southern regions of Poland and created the province of Galicia. While Western Galicia was predominantly Polish, Eastern Galicia had a majority of Ukrainians. Following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in World War I, Western Galicia became part of newly independent Poland in 1918. In Eastern Galicia, the Ukrainians established a short-lived “Western Ukrainian Republic.” After more fighting between the Poles, the Ukrainians, and the Soviets, Poland annexed all of Eastern Galicia—made up of the provinces of Lwów (L’viv), Stanisławów (Stanyslaviv), and Tarnopol (Ternopil’)—as well as the lands of Ukrainian-dominated Volhynia (Wolyń) and Belorussian-dominated Polesie (Western Belarus) to the north. These new borders were internationally recognized in 1923, and Eastern Galicia came to be known by the Poles as Eastern Little Poland (Małopolska Wschodnia). In 1939, as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Eastern Galicia—as well as the Western Ukrainian and Western Belorussian lands to its north—was annexed by the USSR and became part of the Soviet republic of Ukraine.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Eastern Galicia was annexed to the German-ruled General Government in Poland as Distrikt Galizien. In 1944 this region was reconquered by the Red Army and again became part of Soviet Ukraine. Since 1991 the former Eastern Galicia has been part of the western region of independent Ukraine. This borderland territory stretches from just north of the regional capital L’viv (Lwów, L’vov, Lemberg) almost all the way south to Chernivtsi

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(Chernovtsy, Czernowitz, Cernăuți) in the former Austrian province of Bukovina, and it extends from the Carpathian range in the west to the Zbruch (Zbrucz) River and the plains of Podolia in the East. It is a land that has many claims to fame and infamy.

Historically, Galicia constituted the borderland between the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—which was finally destroyed by the three partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century—and the empires and marauders from the east and the south: the Tatars, the Cossacks, the Turkish Ottomans, and later, the Russians and the Soviets. It was a mixed bag of interdenominational and interethnic coexistence on the one hand, and of animosity, strife, and bloodshed on the other. Galicia was also the birthplace or breeding ground of many spiritual and political movements. Romantic Polish literature glorified the rule of Poland’s great noble houses over these lands; Shabbateanism, Frankism, Hasidism, Haskalah (enlightenment) and, finally, Zionism flourished there among the Jews; Ukrainian literary and political nationalism found a firm base there and some of its most distinguished political and cultural figures came from the province’s towns and villages.¹

Galicia was a borderland in yet another sense: situated at the edge of East Central Europe, it was imbued with Polish, German, and Austrian cultural influences, but also open to the wide plains, forests, and steppe lands of western Russia and Asia, vast territories in which Europe was but a rumor. The Galician countryside was poor, muddy, backward, and primitive. Right across the border the author S. Ansky (1863–1920) launched his ethnographic expedition of the Pale of Settlement. Ansky sought the last remnants of medieval Jewish culture in the remote shtetlach (small and predominantly Jewish

¹ For the relevant literature see the section entitled “Additional Readings.”

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towns) of Russian Podolia hidden from the reach of modern civilization, and recorded his findings just before this entire crumbling world was swept away in the battles and massacres of World War I and all the horrors that came in its wake. It was in the Pale and in Galicia that Ansky organized relief operations for Jewish communities under a brutal Russian occupation during the war. And it was his familiarity with these regions that served as the background for Ansky's masterpiece, *The Dybbuk*, a mystical tale of soul possession and love set in a pre-modern East European Jewish universe akin to the one from which the author himself had fled decades earlier.²

Galicia was also where the peasants were imagined as the carriers of an authentic Ruthenian or Ukrainian culture and tradition, and where the splendor and heroism of the Polish *szlachta* (gentry) appeared to echo in the numerous castles built to ward off foreign enemies and rebellious serfs. Indeed, while the name Galicia no longer appears on modern maps and the names of its

² S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I*, ed. and trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), esp. xi–xiv. Originally published in Yiddish as An-Ski, *Der yidisher khurbn fun Poyln, Galitsye un Bukovine (fun tog-bikh TRED-TREZ—1914–1917)* (Wilno: Farlag An-Ski, 1921). Thanks to Delphine Bechtel for her help with this reference and other matters concerning Ansky. See further in David G. Roskies, introduction to S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, trans. Golda Werman (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), xi–xxxvi; Delphine Bechtel, “D’Images d’un voyage en province (1891) de Peretz à *La Destruction de la Galicie* (1917) d’Anski: Représentation des confins juifs entre expédition statistique et littérature,” *Cultures d’Europe centrale*, 3: *Le voyage dans les confins*, ed. Delphine Bechtel and Xavier Galmiche (Paris: CIRCE, 2003), 57–76. Ansky was born Shloyme-Zanvl ben Aron Hacohen Rappoport in Vitebsk, a stronghold of Orthodox Judaism with a significant Hasidic presence. Vitebsk was also where Marc Chagall (1887–1985) was born a quarter of a century later, and it served as a model for the painter’s depictions of what has become the stereotypical image of the shtetl.

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towns and cities, as well as the identities of its rulers and inhabitants, have changed many a time, it remains the site or object of prejudice, legend, and myth, of nostalgia and regret, loss and oblivion. To be called “a Galitsyaner” (or Galitzianer) was for long not much of a compliment for its Jewish inhabitants: it denoted folksy backwardness and at times also a petty mercantile mentality and moral shiftiness. The Galitsyaner was someone who either spoke of leaving or had already left for better places (Vienna, Prague, Berlin, America—also known as the *goldene medine* [golden state] where money grew on trees and a Jew could make a living). Increasingly he or she came under the influence of Zionism and either dreamed of going to Eretz Israel or actually ended up in the Promised Land, discovering that it had very little to offer save for more hopes and dreams. But Galicia was also the land of great rabbis and yeshivot (religious colleges), of miraculous tales and vibrant community life, beautifully depicted in the writings of its great son, Yosef Shmuel Agnon (1888–1970), who recreated his hometown of Buchach as a microcosm of East European shtetl life, and given plastic expression in the paintings of Maurycy Gottlieb (1856–79) of nearby Drohobych (Drohobycz).³

³ On the growing strength in the interwar period of modern Jewish national politics in Eastern Galicia, represented by the rival camps of Zionism and the anti-Zionist Bund (which sought to create a secular Jewish national life in Poland based on Yiddish culture), the waning fortunes of Agudes Yisroel (Agudat Israel) as the representative of Orthodox Jewry, and the crisis of Jewish-Polish politics in the 1930s, see Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 19, 50–51, 54–55, 68–83; Yisrael Gutman et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 16–19, 24–25, 114–15, 123 (contributions by Ezra Mendelsohn, Gershon C. Bacon, and Antony Polonsky). For studies on the emergence of Polish nationalism and on Polish-Galician Jewish economy, emigration, and Zionism, as well as for memoir and travel literature on Galicia, see “Additional Readings.”

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Contemporary Germans, for their part, speak in terms of a rustic idyll about the former ethnic German population of Galicia, expressing a nostalgia documented in numerous recent books that must reflect disenchantment with the crowded modernity of the West and is all the easier to elaborate as the passage of time transforms memory into fantasy.⁴ But German scholars have also recently reconstructed the destruction of the Jewish population in these regions.⁵ For Austrians, a vaguely romantic view of their long-vanished great empire coincides with vicarious memories of what used to be its most backward province. Now a young Austrian historian has shown that this familiarity with the land and its people also facilitated the involvement of Viennese policemen in mass murder during World War II.⁶ For Ukrainians, this western edge of their newly independent land—which, but for brief periods, had never been part of the Russian-controlled Territories of central and east Ukraine on either side of the Dnieper before the Soviet

See also the references there to the novels of the popular nationalist-romantic author Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916); the works of the German-writing Jewish-Galician author Joseph Roth (1894–1939); Agnon’s writings and biography; and Gottlieb’s life and art.

⁴ For studies of ethnic Germans in Galicia, Ukraine, and the USSR, see “Additional Readings”.

⁵ Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996); Thomas Sandkühler, “*Endlösung*” in *Galizien: der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996).

⁶ Thomas Geldmacher, “Die Beteiligung österreichischer Schutzpolizisten an der Judenvernichtung in den galizischen Städten Drohobycz und Boryslaw, 1941 bis 1944” (master’s thesis, Vienna University, 2001); Geldmacher, “*Wir als Wiener waren ja bei der Bevölkerung beliebt.*” *Österreichische Schutzpolizisten und die Judenvernichtung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2002).

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occupation of 1939–41 and after 1944—is both an example of greater western sophistication and a somewhat foreign and suspect region. Its Ruthenian farmers still till the black earth as their forefathers did, but as the different names of its cities and towns indicate, urban culture blends an assertive Ukrainian nationalism, traces of a rich Polish and Jewish past, and all the external trademarks of a spreading globalized modernity, even as many locals still refer to themselves as Galicians.⁷ In all these respects, Galicia is a true borderland, the meeting place of numerous cultures, religions, and ethnicities, which is at the same time located at their periphery, a site where identity is all the more vehemently asserted precisely because of its often tenuous and fluid nature.⁸

Today's inhabitants of the former Eastern Galicia have little memory of its complex, rich, and tortuous past. This land is in the throes of creating a single national narrative of events, people, institutions, culture, and politics, an undertaking of massive simplification that not only distorts its past but threatens to impoverish its future. In a certain sense, this region exemplifies a larger trend that can be identified in much of the rest of Europe, claims to the contrary notwithstanding and despite differences in style and approach. The prewar world of Galicia is no more. But its past, and the denial of that past, is more

⁷ “Forum: A City of Many Names: Lemberg/Lwów/L'viv/L'vov—Nationalizing in an Urban Context” (essays by Harald Binder, Anna Veronika Wendland, and Yaroslav Hrytsak), *Austrian History Yearbook* 34 (2003): 57–109; John Czaplicka, ed., “Lviv: A City in the Crossroads of Culture,” special issue, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 24 (2000).

⁸ For more on Galicia as a site of competing nationalisms, and the research project “Borderlands,” see “Additional Readings.” More generally on post-Soviet cities, see Elena Trubina, “Post-Soviet City: The Public, the Monuments, the Intellectuals,” in *Lost in Space*, ed. Augustin Ioan (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2003), <http://www.nec.ro/fundatia/nec/publications/lost.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2006).

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visible than in many other parts of Europe, thanks to neglect, indifference, and forgetfulness. Western Europe has rapidly modernized, and has thereby covered the traces of destruction with concrete and rhetoric.⁹ Eastern Galicia was left on the margin, a borderland territory between the West and the East, with little development and investment under Soviet rule, and a seething nationalism that kept up resistance to the “liberators” of this land well into the 1950s.¹⁰

Since the early 1990s, the Soviet distortion of the past has been rapidly replaced by, or combined with, the previously suppressed nationalist narrative. But in many parts of the land these cosmetic changes have had little effect on the general condition of ignorance and abandonment, dilapidation and oblivion. Here the Galician past is still bare, indifference still glaring, prejudices and denials and fierce loyalties still almost entirely bereft of the comforting West European glaze of sophistication. The ghosts of the past still roam freely in the hills and valleys, clutter the unpaved streets, and congregate in synagogues transformed into garbage dumps and in cemeteries grazed by goats. And the inhabitants walk among the ruins and the ghosts, awakened to their presence only when asked by a stranger and forgetting them just as soon as he leaves. It is a region suspended in time, just for a little while longer, before it too will be swept with the tide of modernization and globalization, commemoration and apology. Sooner or later, the people of Western Ukraine’s Galicia too will become aware of what they had lost and forgotten, but by then they will have destroyed these last material traces of the

⁹ For the most recent example, see Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

¹⁰ John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Littleton, Colo.: Ukrainian Academic Press, 1980), 290–321; Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209–30.

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past in their rush to catch up with the present and will have to recreate another past, one capable of more conveniently accommodating the spirit of tolerance and nostalgia that befits the modern temperament forged in the incinerators of difference and memory.