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"SMALL HOMELAND" IN THE MEMORIES AND LIFE STRATEGIES OF DISPLACED PERSONS FROM THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDERLAND: SOME EXPERIENCES OF THE 40 – 50'S OF XX CENTURY

„Mała ojczyzna" we wspomnieniach i strategiach życiowych przesiedleńców z pogranicza polsko-ukraińskiego: wybrane doświadczenia z lat 40. i 50. XX wieku

Abstract. Based on eyewitness accounts of forced resettlement from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland between 1947 and 1951, the article traces reflections on the abandoned "small homelands" and their place in the further life strategies of the evicted persons. Special attention is paid to the definition of the abandoned land in the narratives of displaced persons from Western Boykivshchyna, Lemkivshchyna, and Nadsiannia. Such concepts as "Bieszczady", "homeland", "home", and "hut" are examined, as well as other words in the semantic field of the "small homeland". The aim is to trace how the memory of the land of origin and the search for a familiar socio-cultural and natural geographical space influenced the making of important life decisions, especially for those who experienced the trauma of expulsion as teenagers or young adults. In some memory narratives of those who directly experienced resettlement during Operation

Vistula in 1947 and the so-called territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR in 1951, a sense of nostalgia, and for the abandoned home, land and household are prominent. The article also analyses the visits to places of birth in the Polish-Ukrainian border, as a strategy to come to terms with the own traumatic past.

Key words: Polish-Ukrainian borderland; "small homeland"; native land; home; Operation Vistula; resettlement; memory; resettlers; memories

Streszczenie. Artykuł, oparty na relacjach naocznych świadków przymusowych przesiedleń z pogranicza polsko-ukraińskiego w latach 1947–1951, śledzi refleksje na temat opuszczonych „małych ojczyzn" i ich miejsca w dalszych strategiach życiowych osób wysiedlonych. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono opisowi opuszczonej ziemi w opowieściach osób przesiedlonych z Zachodniej Bojkowszczyzny, Łemkowszczyzny i Nadsania. Ustalono, że w swoich wspomnieniach o rodzinnych stronach nasi narratorzy używali pojęć „Bieszczady", „ojczyzna", „dom", „chata" itp. Te i inne słowa znaczące znajdują się w polu semantycznym rozumienia „małej ojczyzny" w narracjach osób przesiedlonych z pogranicza ukraińsko-polskiego. W artykule prześledzono, w jaki sposób pamięć o ziemi pochodzenia i poszukiwanie znajomej społeczno-kulturowej i naturalnej przestrzeni geograficznej wpłynęły na podejmowanie ważnych decyzji życiowych, zwłaszcza dla tych, którzy doświadczyli traumy wysiedlenia w wieku kilkunastu lub dwudziestu lat. W niektórych świadectwach osób, które bezpośrednio doświadczyły wysiedlenia podczas akcji „Wisła" w 1947 r. i tzw. wymiany odcinków terytoriów państwowych pomiędzy Polską a ZSRR w 1951 r., można zaobserwować poczucie nostalgii, a często tęsknoty za opuszczonym domem, ziemią, gospodarstwem i otaczającą „swoją" przestrzenią. Wykorzystując niektóre fakty ze wspomnień naszych narratorów, odwiedzających swoje rodzinne miejsca na granicy polsko-ukraińskiej, pokazujemy, jak osoby wysiedlone próbują pogodzić się z traumatyczną przeszłością i przemyśleć ją na nowo.

Słowa kluczowe: polsko-ukraińskie pogranicze; „mała ojczyzna"; ziema ojczysta; dom; akcja „Wisła"; przesiedlenie; pamięć; przesiedleńcy; wspomnienia

The study of forced resettlements remains a key focus of contemporary humanities research. Given the current international situation, this topic has become increasingly relevant. It is important to examine the history of forced resettlements along the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands in the 1940s–1950s. Under the pretext of post-war political border adjustments aimed at ensuring long-term peace, these processes radically reshaped human destinies, destroyed familiar surroundings, and disrupted entire local communities.

In this context, the concept of the “small homeland” takes on particular significance. Given the irreversible loss of native lands experienced by direct witnesses to forced displacements, there is a need for a deeper scholarly examination of this concept as a special socio-cultural and psycho-emotional phenomenon. The reflections of displaced persons, along with their memories of the “small homeland” from a temporal distance, serve as a valuable source for further research.

The aim of this article is to trace the place and role of the idea of a “small homeland” in the memories of resettlers from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland based on eyewitness accounts. The objectives of the study are to analyse the understanding of the “small homeland” in the light of the resettlers’ memories of their abandoned native lands along the Polish-Ukrainian border; to trace the role of the “small homeland” in shaping the future life strategies of the evicted persons; to explore their visits to places of birth in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands.

This article is based on semi-structured interviews and other materisla collected during ethnographic expeditions to Poland’s northern and western voivodeships, West Pomerania and Warmia-Mazury, in 2018–2019. [1] Most of my interlocutors were displaced from the Polish-Ukrainian borderline areas (Western Boykivshchyna, Lemkivshchyna and Nadsiannia) witnin the military-political Operation Vistula in 1947. They were born

[1] The cities of Biały Bór, Kaliska, Dyminek, and Radzewo (Szczecinek County), the city of Koszalin, and the village of Skibno (Koszalin County) are located in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Meanwhile, the cities of Górowo Iławeckie and Pieniężno (Braniewo County), the village of Szymbory (Elbląg County), the city of Miłakowo (Ostróda County), the city of Lidzbark Warmiński (Lidzbark County), the village of Wojmiany (Bartoszyce County) are part of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

between 1925 and 1939 and directly experienced the tragic period of Operation Vistula. In a few cases, I also interviewed their descendants. In particular, fragments of such interviews are included in the section entitled "Return to the 'native lands' ('ridni storony')".

I have also deliberately incorporated into my analysis oral historical narratives recorded with persons originating from Western Boykivshchyna and forcefully displacement during the territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR in 1951 („Akcja H-T"[2]). Interviews with displaced persons from the former Nyzhni Ustryky Raion of the Drohobych Oblast of the Ukrainian SSR were recorded in the autumn of 2021 in the town of Dolyna, now part of the Kalush district of the Ivano-Frankivsk region, where a compact community of former residents and their descendants from the village of Chorna in the Bieszczady County (Subcarpathian Voivodeship, Poland) resides.

It should be noted that the topic of this study is not new and lies at the intersection of various humanities disciplines – ethnology, folklore studies, cultural anthropology, social psychology, etc. A significant number of researchers have already addressed it in the context of their specific thematic perspectives. Foremost, it is necessary to mention the works of Oksana Kuzmenko (2010a; 2010b; 2018), Lesia Khaliuk (2013), Yulia Artymyshyn (2019; 2023), Hałyna Bodnar (2010), Julia Buyskykh (2021; 2024), Anna Wylegała (2014; 2015a; 2015b), Natalia Kliashtorna (2006), Roman Drozd (2020), Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (2016), Daria Petrechko (2010), Juraj Buzalka (2007); Iryna Koval-Fuchylo (2021), Magdalena Zowczak (2017; 2021), Roman Kabachiy (2012; 2019), Patrycja Trzeszczyńska (2016), Nadia Pastukh (2022), Kateryna Chaplyk (2013), Maruska Svasek (2002), Timothy Garton Ash (2024) and others. An interesting interdisciplinary

[2] It is worth recalling that, according to the terms of the Polish-Soviet border adjustment treaty, signed on February 15, 1951, Poland acquired a portion of Ukrainian territory in the Drohobych Oblast, covering an area of 480 km². (35 villages from the Nyzhni Ustryky Raion, four settlements from the Khyriv Raion and three settlements from the Strilkiv Raion. The residents of these villages were resettled in four southern and eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR – Donetsk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson (Soroka 2013: 291). In return, the Soviet side received territory around Krystynopol (modern-day Chervonohrad) in the Lviv Region, an area rich in coal deposits.

study is the work of Polish sociologist A. Wylegała, in which the formation and memory space of communities of displaced Poles and Ukrainians from the cities of Krzyż Wielkopolski (Poland) and Zhovkva (Ukraine) was analysed on the basis of a comparative methodology. (2014; 2015b). I want to particularly emphasize the scholarly publications and monographic research by O. Kuzmenko, in which, among other things, the folklore concepts of "home", "homeland", "hut" and "land" in the folklore texts of people from the "small homelands" selected from the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands were analysed (2010a; 2010b; 2018). Moreover, the recent anthropological research by J. Buyskykh, focused on local communities along the Polish-Ukrainian-Belarusian border, merits attention. In this study, utilising a method of deep reflexive immersion in the field, the researcher was able to approach the anthropological understanding of the forced resettlement of Ukrainians from Poland in the 1940s in a comprehensive and multi-dimensional manner, essentially from an insider's perspective. Against this backdrop, she also traced their experience of losing their homeland (2021; 2024).

I explore the past of Ukrainians that they have not overcome to this day. When I researching this past of Ukrainians, who in the post-war decade, suffered an irreversible loss – the loss of their native land beneath their feet, their homestead, their home, and, in general, the entire familiar cultural landscape – where they were forcibly uprooted and placed into a foreign socio-cultural environment, I rely on the reflections and worldview of the witnesses themselves. From the perspective of their personal experiences of resettlement the taken native land and the entire previous "living space" represent an immense loss of something sacred, existentially valuable, and immanent, which is inherent to human nature. Accordingly, for this generation of displaced persons, the reflective experience and memory of their native places in the Zakerzonnia[3] region carries a special emotional burden, which I express with the help of the concept of "small homeland".

[3] The generalized term "Zakerzonia" is often used in scientific and popular literature to define the region of the Ukrainian-Polish ethnic borderland,. It arose from the simplification of the concept the "Curzone Line" – a demarcation line proposed by the British Foreign Secretary George Curzon in 1919 to regulate a possible armistice in the Soviet-Polish war.

This study does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of the issue. My goal is to trace specific narratives of how my interviewees perceive their "small homeland", identify the key meanings they embed in these narratives, and outline possible ways of overcoming their traumatic experiences.

"Small homeland": the theoretical and methodological approaches

Exploring the analysis of the memoirs of those forcibly resettled – their individual, family, and collective memories of their homeland – we involuntary enter the realm of value-laden categories such as "ancestral land", "Motherland" and "small homeland". To what extent do the meanings embedded in these traumatic memories by their authors correspond to our understanding of these concepts? It is worth noting that, according to contemporary researchers, such an image is constructed and depends on many factors.

Thus, Ukrainian researcher Y. Artymyshyn argues that the "small homeland" is a created image in the consciousness of resettlers, simultaneously preserving the memory of the past and serving as a foundation for its interpretation. The mentality and current needs of the person constructing this image play a crucial role in this process. The creation of this image revolves around key categories that are essential to an individual, such as a settled landscape, in which the home and household, land and surrounding nature, and the community with its good-neighborly relations hold the most significant places (Artymyshyn 2023: 170; Artymyshyn 2019: 106).

Similar conclusions were reached by Ukrainian researcher L. Khaliuk, who analysed the dramatic experiences of displaced from Lemkivshchyna, Kholmshchyna, Nadsiannia and Pidliashshia. The scholar emphasized that the image of the "small homeland" in the memories of displaced persons from the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands lacks clearly defined boundaries, and the subjective consciousness of those who identify with it plays a crucial role in shaping it. The concept of the "small homeland" („mała

ojczyzna”, as termed by the author) is both a geographical and socio-cultural space as well as a symbolic place. At the same time, as the researcher asserts, this space does not necessarily correspond to the administrative-territorial boundaries of a specific settlement. Thus, for resettlers, the “small homeland” is a place of significant experiences, personal emotions, and shaping their biographies; it is a world intertwined with their lives and often tied to them by strong emotional bonds (Khaliuk 2013: 118–119).

A similar perspective is shared by Polish researcher D. Simonides, who argues that for borderland communities, the regional nature of their connection extends beyond the framework of the “small homeland” and plays a unique role – the role of an “ideological homeland” (1999: 69). Meanwhile, A. Wylegała, in her comparative study *„Przesiedlenia a pamięć: studium (nie) pamięci społecznej na przykładzie ukraińskiej Galicji i polskich «Ziem Odzyskanych»”*, considers the lands lost in the Zakerzonnia as part of the so-called ideological homeland of the displaced Ukrainians (2014: 212). In this sense, “homeland”, as a concept and perception, will always be an image created by community members (Ossowski 1946: 156).

H. Bodnar pointed out, that the image of “small homeland” in perception of displaced persons, particular from Nadsiannia, is not a unified and precise. It applies to everything related to their place of residence before the displacement, that is both the ethnic territory and a specific village, or even a household (Bodnar 2010: 125–126).

The image of the “small homeland” in the memoirs of resettlers is inseparable from the image of a home or the family nest, which, due to the pain of its loss and the distance in time, is often an idealized reflection (Kuz′menko 2010b: 214). Therefore, as Polish researchers (O. Solarz, A. Wylegała) and Ukrainian scholars (O. Kuzmenko, I. Koval-Fuchylo, H. Bodnar) aptly note, in situations where the narrator returns, in time and space, to the lost land, the native territories, they often unconsciously create a myth of a “lost paradise” or a symbolic “Arcadia of childhood” (Morozowa 2020: 248–249; Wylegała 2015a: 299; Kuz′menko 2010b: 214; Koval′-Fuchylo 2021: 88–89; Bodnar 2010: 122).

Anthropologist Maruska Svasek explores the concepts of "home" and "homeland" among Sudeten Germans through the processes of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization. As the analysis showed, these processes have no fixed meaning or moral value in themselves. Svasek analyzed how the notion and understanding of home among Sudeten Germans correlates with different types of homeland identities. The researcher concluded that even within single stories, expellees may make claims to intimate connections with the old homeland (Heimat), to feelings of homelessness, and to the idea that they feel at home in their new localities (2002: 514).

American historian Andrew Demshuk presents own viewpoint on this topic. He analyzes how collective memory developed among Germans deported from Silesia and explores the politics of memory in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1945 to 1970, identifying the territories they left behind through two interconnected concepts: "Heimat of memory" and "Heimat transformed". The first denotes a nostalgic view of their lost homeland, whereas the second captures how those areas were altered after their departure. Demshuk argues that the concept of "Heimat transformed" was shaped in relation to the "Heimat of memory", although even this latter representation was formed within the minds of its bearers. Overall, in Andrew Demshuk's study, the "Heimat of memory" represents an unchanged, timeless, past German homeland, which is experienced in memory and, depending on regional characteristics, centered around rural landscapes (fields, forests, mountains) or urban spaces (2012: 13).

In this study, I consider the concept of the "small homeland" in a broad sense. This concept refers to the land of origin, place of residence and sphere of life activities of forcibly displaced persons, which extends beyond the administrative boundaries of their native village or town along the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Our interlocutors did not use the term "small homeland" to refer to these territories; instead, they connected their lives before resettlement with categories such as "Bieszczady", "homeland", "home", "hut" and others. In the memories of those forcibly resettled from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, the "small homeland" emerges as a certain socio-cultural and natural-geographical space, which

shaped their life trajectory in the past and continues to be integral to their self-identification today.

It is worth noting that my research is also based on the use of concepts such as “trauma” and “traumatic memory”. According to Bessel A. van der Kolk and Rita Fisler trauma is an inescapably stressful event that overwhelms people’s existing coping mechanisms (1995: 506). A so-called “traumatic state” or “traumatic situation” arises, in which external and internal realities are considered concurrently (BenEzer 1999: 39; Kis′ 2010: 174). This is a common definition of trauma used in contemporary psychology and psychiatry. However, I use it as a cornerstone for understanding the historical trauma of forced resettlement. By the latter, I mean the irreversible destruction of the living space of both the individual and the various types of communities built by them during a certain historical period of their existence, which is comprehended by transgenerational memory. The trauma of resettlement lies in the alienation from one’s roots, the destruction of the familiar cultural landscape, the disintegration of established social ties and value systems, the profound deformation of cultural identity, and the infringement upon the spiritual-emotional and world-view-value spheres of the individual. At the same time, I share the opinion of researchers that the consequences of the historical trauma experienced are felt not only in the memories and perceptions of the surrounding reality of the direct victims of resettlement, but also in their descendants (Hirsch 2008: 106; Solarz 2018: 32). The remembrances of my interlocutors in Poland and Ukraine also fit into the notion of so-called traumatic memory. Following Barbara A. Misztal by this term I understand memory that has its origin in some terrible experience and which is particularly vivid, intrusive, uncontrollable, persistent and somatic (2003: 161; Kis′ 2010: 174).

Home in the Bieszczady Mountains

When reminiscing about their lives before resettlement, my interlocutors often employed the socio-cultural category of “home”. This concept encapsulated a key aspect of their perception of the “small homeland”,

which they were forced to abandon due to eviction. Therefore, in our research, I refer to this notion as an illustrative of the "small homeland" in its more narrow interpretation.

As is well known, inhabitants of the Subcarpathian region during the Operation Vistula (1947–1950) and the territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR in 1951 were relocated to entirely different climatic and natural-geographical conditions: in the first case, to the rolling plains of western and northern Poland, and in the second, to the dry steppes of southern and eastern Ukraine. In my opinion, the drastically different natural environments into which the forcibly resettled people from Poland were placed influenced how some of my interviewees described their place of origin. In some cases, they referred to it using the broader collective term – "Bieshchady". In this oronym, in my opinion, their love for their native village, home, estate, river, and mountain landscapes, as well as a sense of contrast with the flatlands to which these "mountain people" were forcibly relocated, were concentrated.

I first visited the town of Biały Bór, located in Poland's West Pomeranian Voivodeship, in 2018 while collecting material for my future book. I will never forget when I asked my first interviewee there (resettled from Żernica Niżna in the Lesko County, Rzeszów Voivodeship): "Where and when were you born?" She immediately smiled and replied: "A long time ago… in the *Bieszczady*" (female, born in 1937).

When describing the celebration of the most significant Christian holidays (Christmas, Easter), while recalling the traditional family customs and rituals of their native land, my narrators often referred to it using the term "Bieszczady" during our conversations. For instance, one of them from Górowo Iławeckie, who was born in the village of Rybne in the Lesko County, reminiscing about Christmas Eve in her homeland, emphasized: "*At home in the Bieszczady*, I remember my mother prepared it, and here [in northern Poland after the resettlement – O. K.] she prepared it the same way" (female, born in 1934). This means that even seventy years after the infamous Operation Vistula, the narrator continued to uphold certain family traditions in organizing Christmas Eve. In 2006, Ukrainian researcher O. Kuzmenko documented similar occurrences in

mixed families while examining the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands near Ustrzyki Dolne (Kuz′menko 2010a).

Younger witnesses who had experienced the turbulent events of 1947 as small children also used the oronym "Bieszczady" to refer to their homeland. For example, when I inquired about special ritual practices in preparation for Christmas Eve, interlocutor (born in the village of Górzanka, Lesko County) recalled the obligatory ritual washing before the festive meal: "Well, because back in the *Bieszczady*, they went to the river. But here [in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship after the resettlement – O. K.] everyone had to wash inside the house" (female, born in 1939). It is worth noting that the narrator's daughter, born in 1965, still remembers this ritual from her early years when the family, lived for some time in the village of Glądy (Bartoszyce County, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) after being resettled.

It is important to recognise that the cultural landscape of the abandoned local space along the Polish-Ukrainian border is a vital part of the perceptions and memories held by our interlocutors. The traumatic memory of its loss emotionally intensifies the prevailing narrative themes and motifs.

Two homelands in one heart: the land of one's roots and Ukraine

It is possible to agree with researchers who argue that, for the direct generation of displaced Ukrainians from the 1940s–1950s, homeland is primarily associated with the abandoned villages and towns in the territories of Poland (Kabachiĭ 2019: 418), a perception shaped, among other factors, by the socio-political circumstances of the pre-war period (Kabachiĭ 2019: 37). However, in the memoirs of displacement from the Bieszczady or Nadsiannia that I recorded from Ukrainians in western and northern Poland, the concept of "homeland", in some cases, was explicitly associated with Ukraine. One of my interlocutors, who lives in the village of Bielica near Biały Bór, originally from the village of Holuchkiv in the Sanok County, responded to my question, "Do you remember life before the resettlement?", by saying:

> I remember everything. […] How we worked, there were such mountains there. […] It was as if I were in the mountains in Ukraine, in those Carpathians. When I arrived by bus down below, it was dark. […] There were such mountains. More than once, I don't remember which year it was, I was in *my homeland – Ukraine*. We traveled 3,000 km by bus. I toured all of Ukraine. […] And now I have family there, near Lviv... (male, born in 1935).

Researchers have repeatedly emphasized this deep love for Ukraine among the displaced Ukrainians of Western Pomerania. The Polish scholar M. Zowczak documented a strong connection between the resettled people of Biały Bór and Ukraine and its fate (2017: 32). Iu. Buyskykh observed that educators in Biały Bór nurture and pass on their love for Ukraine to their pupils, considering it their "spiritual homeland" (2024: 207). It is worth adding that members of this local community base their Ukrainian identity on their Greek Catholic faith and the traumatic memory of resettlement (Zowczak 2021: 488; Skupiński 2021: 143–144; Buyskich 2021: 359). It should be noted, that researchers have observed similar phenomena in other local communities of resettled people in south-eastern Poland (Buzalka 2007: 68).

However, it should be emphasized that for many resettlers and their descendants in Poland, being Ukrainian was the result of their conscious choice, based on the trauma of resettlement, emotional and spiritual ties to their small homelands in Western Boykivshchyna, Lemkivshchyna, Nadsiannia etc., and the natural need to survive, which in total united the forcibly resettled persons in their community of memory (Buyskich 2021: 359). In this case, the Operation Vistula became a catalyst for the formation and affirmation of the Ukrainian identity of the forcibly resettled. What the communist leadership sought to suppress in the aftermath of Operation Vistula ultimately backfired, as the external social isolation and repression of communities resettled from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland led instead to a heightened level of internal cohesion and integration (Drozd 2020: 91–92).

A significant number of the resettlers from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland were able to return to Ukraine only after it gained independence. It was not uncommon for Ukrainians who initially left their "small

homeland" voluntarily due to external circumstances[4] – and later were forcibly displaced – to experience a certain disillusionment with "Great Ukraine" (a term recorded by J. Buyskykh among resettled communities in Biały Bór (2024: 205–206)), as not everything aligned with their expectations at different stages of their lives. One of my interviewees from Biały Bór recalled her trip to independent Ukraine:

> When we left all the way to Zakarpattia, we stayed in a village. The locals received in two people, one, sometimes three for the night. But those people… somehow didn't know that we had been displaced, and they said: 'You are not Ukrainians, you are Poles! If you are from Poland, then what kind of Ukrainians are you?! Well, if you are from Poland!' (female, born in 1937).

Hearing such words directed at her, the narrator came to the conclusion: "They didn't know that we had been deported. They had never heard about it" (female, born in 1937).

The relatives of my interlocutor, originally from the Sanok region, found themselves in Soviet Ukraine. In 2018, the narrator was living in Biały Bór, where she shared her memories:

> My family came from Vilkhivtsi [polish Olchowce. – O. K.] near Sanok[5]. It's very close to Sanok. And they left from there. They were called… That was practically Lemkivshchyna… […] So, my cousin, even my friend, went there. […] When they left Vilkhivtsi, they said: *'If we're leaving, then only for Ukraine!'* Yes, yes… And that's what they did – they left. Even wealthy people left because they were going to Ukraine! […] But they suffered terribly there! There was a famine, in the areas near Lviv, somewhere in Ternopil region – it was the Holodomor [referring to the post-war famine in 1946–1947. – O. K.]. I even have a letter she wrote to me. […] She wrote that they were starving there (female, born in Sanok region).

[4] This refers to the relatively "voluntary" stage of resettlement from the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, which, according to some researchers, lasted from October 1944 to September 1945, until the state authorities used troops to speed up this process (Kabachiĭ 2019: 179; Kabaczij 2012: 121).

[5] Olchowce is now part of the city of Sanok in Subcarpathian Voivodeship.

In one such letter, dated April 30, 1964, relative of this woman describes the extremely harsh conditions of life in the village of Krovinka (also known as Krowynka) near Terebovlia in the Ternopil region:

> I wouldn't wish the life I have on my worst enemy. While I was still healthy, I worked on the collective farm, in hunger and cold. I would come home at noon, drink some water, and then go back to work. The children went to their grandmother's to eat so that I could go. It wasn't just one or two, but four of them. Evening came, I ate the Lord's Prayer and went to sleep. Because of all this deprivation, I fell ill, and to this day, I am still sick[6].

Further in the letter, the author emphasizes that after her husband's death, life became even more challenging for her, and she will not be able to return to Poland. She explains her presence in that region with the simple fact that her husband really *wanted Ukraine*[7].

A distinguishing feature of another part interviews with those, who were displaced during Operation Vistula, is a feelling of nostalgia for their ancestral land and the lost familiar surroundings. The land of their origin, the soil where they were born and raised, their family home – this was their "small homeland". Through painful memories, a fiery love, longing, and an indestructible remembrance always pulled them back to it. The absence or complete disappearance of their home takes on the tone of deep loss, a pain which has not faded to this day: "Of course, I remember… Oh-oh, such houses there were [points to a book. – O. K.], just like the house in our village… Now, there's nothing left; you can't even tell where the house used to be. Nothing remains" (female, born in 1937). According to researchers, the longing for the abandoned native land is a typical emotion explicitly found in women's biographical narratives of displacement – an often impossible emotion to overcome (Vylȉehala 2015b: 317; Kuz′menko 2018: 163).

In the memoirs of resettlers from the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, the land of their birth, childhood, or youth is often referred to as "homeland",

[6] Private archive of the author, page 1.

[7] Private archive of the author, page 2, 4.

reflecting their worldview – one that should be known and remembered by future generations. This is precisely how such memories emerge in the words of one of my interviewees, when she speaks about the village of Bystre in contemporary Bieszczady County:

> And we were there – we traveled there, like to our own house. Our house is still standing. [Optimistically. – O. K.] […] Yes, yes! […] Our was very old, with a tin roof and everything, the house. And it's still standing, that house, everything. Still standing. […] I traveled there with my husband. […] Yes, we traveled there recently! I think, maybe… fifteen years ago… And my daughter traveled with us. We took her along. Yes. And my daughter is a teacher. She lives over there in Zahiria [in Ivano-Frankivsk region. – O. K.]. Yes, yes, we went there. To the *homeland*. Now, Poles live in our house (female, born in 1930).

Return to the "native lands " ("ridni storony")

As is known, a decade after Operation Vistula, Ukrainians were allowed to return to the abandoned lands in the Bieszczady region (resolution of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, adopted in April, 1957). However, this process was closely controlled by a special commission (the so-called Tkachev Commission), which, in reality, aimed to prevent the Ukrainian population from returning (Drozd 2020: 167–170).

The opportunity to return to one's native home was, in practice, not an easy matter. In March 1958, law was enacted stipulating that individuals whose households had been transferred to state ownership could reclaim them solely through repurchase (Drozd 2020: 172). Furthermore, local officials frequently obstructed obtaining ownership rights to one's former property.

A similar issue was encountered by the family of the previously mentioned one of my interviewees, who sought to return to her native village of Rybne, formerly part of Lesko County. As she recounted:

> My husband's father had a brother-in-law there [who served as the village head (polish „sołtys") in Rybne. – O. K.]. And my father-in--law wrote there, requesting a signature to confirm that we intended to return. The sołtys signed that no, we had no right to return. My father, my father-in-law – they had no right to return (female, born in 1934).

The narrator concluded: "They didn't want [us there. – O. K.]... They took our field, and took our field – that's all, the end. But many of the ones who got a signature managed to return!" (female, born in 1934).

For other resettlers affected by Operation Vistula, such returns were relatively successful and often shaped the trajectory of their subsequent lives. One eyewitness, born in 1931 in the village of Bukowiec, Lesko County, and currently residing in Lidzbark Warmiński in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, was actively involved in similar efforts to reclaim to ancestral land. The case of his relatives illustrates that young individuals often demonstrated the resilience and inner resolve necessary to traverse hundreds of kilometers to reach the places where they grew up:

> My wife's sister also arrived there – she was a young girl, perhaps around 14. Later, she met a Polish man in Bukowiec, our home village, and married him. Their children were born there, and she continues to reside there. Yes, she is still alive – she is now 82 years old. My wife's borned sister. And we were living there for a full week. […] My wife's sister has children there – four sons and one daughter. The daughter has built her own house there. And she resides there. […] together with her mother (male, born in 1931).

Young people, in particular, often struggled to reconcile to their new residence and, at the first opportunity, made every effort to return to their homeland, despite the villages where they were born and took their first steps in life could no longer exist. Such was the case for Anna from the village of Bereżki, formerly in Lesko County. In 1957, she moved from Western Pomerania to Stuposiany, a village near her birthplace, where she took up seasonal work mowing meadows. However, she constantly felt

drawn to the familiar landscapes, hoping to find the ruins of her burned-down home:

> I just wanted to stand in my yard again, visit the cemetery, sniff the air of my homeland – even though it smelled exactly the same as in Stuposiany. And I wanted to tell my mother all about it, who stayed in north (Potaczała 2019: 280–281).

A relative (a cousin) of one of the displaced persons also returned to her "small homeland" as a permanent resident, born in Myczkiw, Lesko County. She later visited her native village with her family, only to find that her family home no longer existed:

> It was torn down... It stood for a while, but later, they demolished it, and someone else built a new house there. Someone else built on that spot. […] Yes, we went there. My cousin was there, and there were some Poles living. We we went there. And now she calls – she calls from Myczkiw. Everyone is there. There are people in Myczkiw (female, born in 1930).

Some families displaced by Operation Vistula from the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands have not returned to their ancestral lands but continue to hold strong emotional connections to the abandoned areas in the Subcarpathian region. These places are deeply ingrained in their family memories. For these families, visits to their homeland have transformed into a ritual or commemorative practice, involving not just those who experienced the displacement firsthand but also their children and younger generations. This phenomenon, which emerged in the 1970s, has been described by Ukrainian researcher J. Buyskykh as a form of "roots pilgrimage". It encompassed visits to former family residences, homesteads, cemeteries, and religious sites[8] (Buĭs′kykh 2024: 199). It is interesting that, in some cases,

[8] A similar phenomenon M. Głowacka-Grajper traced regarding the former inhabitants of the so-called Borderlands (Kresy) – eastern voivodeships of the already non-existing Second Republic of Poland, that were incorporated into the USSR (the territories of contemporary Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, and south-eastern Lithuania), and there people were repatriated to Polish People's Republic in 40-50s of the XX century. The author called this phenomenon "tourism of longing". In Głowacka-Grajper's

similar return to (un)forgotten paths to one's native home serves as a marker of Ukrainian identity within those families of displaced persons who were resettled during Operation Vistula (Skupinski 2021: 144).

One descendant of a displaced family, Andriy, while researching the history of his genus, notes that after the deportation in 1947, his great-grandfather and great-grandmother spent their entire lives dreaming of returning "domiv" (home), however, they never realized this dream and were buried in Wilczęta, in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship of Poland. In contrast, their children, as well as their maternal and paternal grandparents, were able to move to the city of Przemyśl in the 1990s to feel closer to their homeland. Later, from there, they, with a whole family, frequently visited the abandoned homeland in the Bieszczady region until the last breath of that first generation of resettled (Fil 2014: 116).

Now, the locations of left settlements are preserved as a nature reserve amid the forest. However, paradoxically, the image of the settlement continues to live on in the family memory of subsequent generations of displaced persons. This image is inseparable from the spiritual center of any settlement – its local church. My interlocutor, a second-generation deportee (born in 1950s), recalls how the image of her homeland was being ruined before her mother's eyes: "Overall village, they hadn't even left yet; they were heading toward mount Tworylnianska as if going over the mountain, and the village was already burning... The village was burning. Yes. The village was burning before their eyes" (female, born in 1950s).

The church she had never seen in her mother's native village of Zawoja, this woman searched in various photo albums and scholarly works. However, she was unable to find a single photograph of it. In contrast, the Greek Catholic church from her father's neighboring village, the locals dismantled immediately after the eviction, built a barn in its place over time. "And then, as people tell, – says my interviwee, – the perun (lightning)

mind, "tourism of longing" is relevant to all persons with familial ties to these areas. This is a primary search for material elements contributing to personal identity narratives. "Tourists of longing" seek even the slightest traces of their family home, as well as objects, landscapes, and impressions remembered from the stories of their parents and grandparents (Głowacka-Grajper 2016: 201).

struck that stable […]" (female, born in 1950s). This very motif – the "destruction" of the sacred site in the taken away "small homeland" – dominates, according to researchers, in poetic works about the eviction, where the church occupies a central place (Kuz′menko 2010b: 217).

Narrating the traumatic past in the biographies of forcibly displaced persons helps them thereby perceive how the present distinguishes itself from the past without, however, losing the past as a piece of their own life (Rosenthal 2003: 927). I believe that the presence of a surviving family home, its homestead, and the familiar pathways that children or adolescents once travelled provides narrators with extra strength to cope with the trauma of their youth. Y. Artymyshyn notes that this therapeutic effect helps individuals feel once again "at home, on their land", offering psychological relief (2023: 179). The story of my interviwee from Dolyna in Ivano-Frankivsk exemplifies how one's homeland, the paths walked, and the family home come together in the spatial identity and family memories of forcibly displaced individuals region. This city in western Ukraine, which was known for its oil production in the 1950s and 1960s, was home to many oil workers from Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Some of the displaced also moved here to be in more familiar climatic conditions and closer to their abandoned home in the Bieszczady Mountains (Petrechko 2010: 363–364). The relatives of this interlocutor were once repressed and exiled to Siberia. Her husband was forcibly resettled from Western Boykivshchyna during the final settlement of the border between Poland and the USSR in 1951. Almost a quarter of a century later, the couple decided to cross the same Soviet-Polish border to visit the land of husband's birth. In 1975 the couple and husband's father visited the village of Chorna, formerly in the Lesko County, whose residents were evicted in 1951 to the Steppe Ukraine, and later some of them moved to Dolyna. My interlocutor recalls how her husband felt during his visit to his "small homeland", from which he had been displaced at 10:

> If I tell you that he walked barefoot, you won't believe it... […] my husband took off his shoes: 'I walked those paths barefoot to school – now I walking those paths'. He went... He went to the

> well, to the garden, to his house. Then, you know, a Polish woman lived there... […] Because his father was with us, you know. And his father was with us, so he even picked some grass from the garden, something that doesn't grow here. 'I'll bring you, K. (because the grandmother was named K.). I'll bring you our grass'. The grandfather was picking that grass. And the grandmother said: 'Just go, I., there behind the rafters – I buried the icons there'. However, I. did not find the icons hidden in the rafters of his native house, where a Polish family now lived. Just as 73 years ago, the icons still protect the house, but the current residents are unaware of their presence (female, born in 1948).

The "fragments" of homeland memories manifest through objects and elements from nature that resettlers attempt to carry with them, which clearly take on a sacred significance. These items enhance and deepen the visual and cognitive representation of loss, providing a sense of hope for both a tangible and spiritually symbolic link to their native home and land.

Visits to one's native lands within the territory of Poland in such narratives are, in my opinion, not coincidentally accompanied by descriptions of the natural landscapes of the abandoned village or town. This is simultaneously an inseparable part of the narrator's past living space, a metaphorical "point of support" in constructing the image of one's "small homeland" (Artymyshyn 2023: 179), without which "roots pilgrimage" would be simply impossible. Through these memories, a part of the "wounded" identity of the resettlers also speaks, manifested in the realization of the "taken" childhood or youth years. However, alongside this, the incorporation of narratives about observing the surrounding nature, the landscapes dear to the heart, can also be seen as a separate temporal segment in which a person attempts to overcome the personal trauma of losing all of this. Renowned American psychiatrist James Gordon emphasizes the incredibly strong role of nature in an individual's efforts to rid themselves of past psychological shocks. According to him, it is precisely in nature that a person begins to understand that "the trauma that once overwhelmed us is not with us forever" (Gordon 2023: 208).

The researchers trace the deeper meanings of such journeys back to their roots, using the example of the Sudeten Germans. A visit to the place of their youth enabled the expellees to symbolically reinforce their roots and, as such, reinforce their territorialized identities. At the same time, many expellees realized or confirmed that “home” was not necessarily connected to the Sudetenland, and that they were actually more “at home” in their new German homeland. As such, the experience of being in the homeland also strenghtened their reterritorialized identities (Svasek 2002: 511).

Another common motif in the accounts of resettlement from Polish-Ukrainian borderland is the nostalgic narrative about the lost fields and households in the homeland. Such themes appear, in particular, in the recollections of Ukrainians from Western Boykivshchyna who were resettled to Steppe Ukraine: “… In my memory of the native village, there are fields. Everything was cultivated, sown. And now? Overgrown with forest, weeds…” (Kli͡ashtorna 2006: 84); “… Now my village is barren land, there is nothing. I often dream that I am at home. Before my eyes stands all our household. The land, planted, sown. And when I wake up, there’s nothing. When I dream like this, it feels like I can see everything, that I am there, and that all the household are there. But when I wake up in the morning, it feels light, joyful...” (Kli͡ashtorna 2006: 86). As Ukrainian researcher N. Pastukh aptly notes, the longing for one’s native land in the folklore narratives about resettlement is not based on the extraordinary fertility of the soil (especially since the mountain slopes of Bieszczady region were not so fertile – O. K.) but on the connection that arises during the interaction between a person and their land (2022: 421). That is why, in the biographical narratives of displaced Ukrainians, their household, the land on which it was established through years of tireless, hard, and sometimes thankless labor, the native home, and the surrounding “own” neighborhood space are embedded in the concept of “family land” (Wylegała 2014: 139).

Conclusions

Inhabitants of the Subcarpathian region during the Operation Vistula (1947–1950) and the territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR in 1951 were relocated to entirely different climatic and natural-geographical conditions. Different natural environments into which the forcibly resettled people from Poland were placed influenced how some of my interlocutors described their place of origin. In some cases, they referred to it using the broader collective term – "Bieshchady". The use of "Bieshchady" as a locative construction reflects the notion of a "small homeland" in the accounts of my interviewees. Some narratives of resettled people trace a certain association between the concept of "homeland" and Ukraine. Some of these eyeweetnee were able to visit Ukraine during the years of independence. However, their experiences did not always align with their feelings about their ethnic homeland.

For a large part of the resettled people, the land of their origin, the soil where they were born and raised, and their family home – all of this constituted their "small homeland". The memories of their "small homelands", reflected in the narrators' accounts, are crucial to the lives of those who witnessed the resettlement from their "small homelands" along the Polish-Ukrainian border from 1947 to 1951. While the depiction of deserted homes, farms, and familiar community spaces in Western Boykivshchyna, Lemkivshchyna, or Nadsiannia may be romanticized, these images play a vital role in the individual and collective family memories of the displaced and serve as a profound expression of their identity. The latter, in particular, in the case of those evicted during Operation Vistula in 1947, is often based on the traumatic memory of resettlement and long-persecuted religion. The abandoned homeland in the memoirs of our narrators takes on different forms, but very often, they are united by a strong sense of nostalgia, which in some cases turns into a longing for their "small homeland." Speaking about the lost land of their origin, resettlers from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland tend to idealize it. The semantic field for its designation includes various generalized and narrower categories used by our narrators: "Bieszczady", "homeland", "home",' "hut", etc.

A distinctive feature of the traumatic experiences of those displaced from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland in both 1947 and 1951 is that throughout their lives, they often tried to retrace the paths to their (un)lost “small homelands”: some of them returned to their native land for permanent residence, some made the so-called “roots pilgrimage”, some moved to a more familiar climatic and natural geographical area that was relatively close to their place of birth.

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