

The Activity of “Błyskawica” Partisans on the Polish–Slovak Borderland: Of Spisz and Orawa in the Years 1945–1947

Abstract

After the Second World War the Polish-Slovak borderland became a zone of serious tensions. Particularly controversial is the activity of the Polish partisan group “Błyskawica”, led by Józef Kuraś “Ogień”. The soldiers are responsible for takings of private property and acts of violence carried out in villages in South Poland that were inhabited mostly by Slovaks. This paper – based mainly on the query at the Archives of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance – aims to present the scale and circumstances of those activities. The work takes wider historical context into account and uses selected anthropological and sociological theories. In this perspective, it seems justified to explain the analyzed events through the mechanism of revenge, widespread in the post-war period of anomie and crisis. Sources indicate that the Polish partisans’ actions from the years 1946–1947 were not attempts to pacify the Slovak separatists (although some authors claim so) but rather repressions for the earlier actions of members of that nation.

Keywords: Józef Kuraś “Ogień”, Cursed Soldiers, the Second World War, Polish–Slovak borderland, anthropology, ethnography, history

After the Second World War the borderland area inhabited by Poles and Slovaks became a zone of serious tensions, but yet this topic was not widely disputed.¹ Even though the problem of the violent acts that took place at that time

¹ The paper presents a part of the results of the research project “Józef Kuraś «Ogień» and his subordinates in social imagination: An anthropological study of experiencing the past”. The grant no. 2016/21/B/HS3/02921 was financed by the Polish National Science Center (Narodowe Centrum Nauki). The team consisted of the researchers from the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural

was already studied by several researchers, still many issues were not discussed in detail (Andraš, Segeš 2009; Korcuć 2012b, 2015b; Kowalczyk 2003; Kwiek 1998, 2002, 2008; Majeriková-Molitoris 2013; Molitoris 2017; Wenklar 2010). Controversies focus on the activities of Polish underground units, which were still a significant force in the second half of the 1940s.

It should be added that during the Second World War Poland suffered severe losses – not only from military activities, but also from exploitation and terror of the occupation forces.² It was also the case of Nowy Targ district in Lesser Poland region, yet the armed underground operated there until the end of the war, enhancing the ethos of resistance in local society (Ney-Krwawicz 2009; Terej 1980). Later some of the soldiers decided to continue the fight – this time with the authoritarian communist regime imposed on Poland by the Soviet Union.³

One of such groups was “Błyskawica” (“The Lightning”), commanded by Józef Kuraś “Ogień” (“The Fire”).⁴ In the years 1945–1947 his subordinates (many of whom were veterans of war-time resistance) carried out a number of effective actions against the undemocratic regime: they freed political prisoners⁵, attacked

Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University: Monika Golonka-Czajkowska (coordinator), Wojtech Bagin, Kaja Kajder, Łukasz Łoziński, Dariusz Nikiel.

² Timothy Snyder referred to the territories of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Soviet Union as Bloodlands. As the historian emphasized, in those areas, especially during the Second World War, Nazi and communist violence had an unprecedented scale, resulting in deaths of over a dozen million civilians and prisoners of war (Snyder 2010). In Nowy Targ area forces of the German Third Reich also conducted brutal pacifications because of resistance activity, for example in Waksmund (on July 4 and September 28, 1943), in Nowe Bystre (on December 7, 1943) and in Ochotnica Dolna (on December 23, 1944) (Golik 2011; Korcuć 2012a: 124–140; Sikora 2014).

³ The partisans of the anti-communist underground in Poland are often called “the cursed soldiers” (Ślaski 2012).

⁴ Józef Kuraś (1915–1947) was a highlander from Waksmund (Nowy Targ district). He fought in the Polish Army in the defense war of September 1939; under German occupation was a member of a few important organizations of the resistance movement: the Union of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej), the Tatra Confederation (Konfederacja Tatrzańska) and the Home Army (Armia Krajowa). In 1944 he became a commander of one of the units of People’s Security Guard (Ludowa Straż Bezpieczeństwa), which was a military part of the People’s Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe), cooperating with the Polish Underground State (Polskie Państwo Podziemne). By the end of the war Józef Kuraś held the rank of lieutenant; in the beginning of 1945 he cooperated with the new authorities of Poland and became the deputy chief of the Department of Public Security (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) in Nowy Targ. In April that year Józef Kuraś left the service with several dozen men and established the anti-communist partisan group “Błyskawica”. Later he started using the rank of major, although there are no documents proving such nomination. He died after shooting himself during the state services’ chase of February 21, 1947 (Dereń 2000; Golik, Korcuć 2017; Korcuć 2012a; Łątka 2007).

⁵ The most important action of this type was breaking of the so-called Saint Michael jail in Kraków. On August 18, 1946, Józef Kuraś’ subordinates freed 62 political prisoners (Garbacz 2015: 259–260; Korcuć 2015b: 447–448; Pięciak 2018; Piwowarski, Salwiński 1997).

state companies and Citizens’ Militia (Milicja Obywatelska) posts,⁶ even assassinated communist officials.⁷ “Błyskawica”, in 1946 numbering about five hundred soldiers, is considered one of the most important organizations of the post-war underground in Poland. There are indications that for some time they had significant support of the inhabitants of Lesser Poland region, also when they conducted disciplinary actions, in a way replacing the state services. It should be added, however, that Józef Kuraś’ subordinates committed crimes against civilians; at least a few of the perpetrators were punished by the commander, but not all (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 42–44). Some of the criminal acts had nationality basis – the partisans’ hostile attitude towards Jews, that resulted in public threats, assaults and murders, has already been discussed (Korkuć 2015a; Kwiek 2013; Łoziński 2019: 197–198; Panz 2015; Wójcik 2016: 221–225; Zychowicz 2018: 197–223). Still the group’s demeanor towards Slovaks (inhabiting the regions they call Spiš and Orava – or Spisz and Orawa in Polish) requires further study.

One may distinguish two main perspectives, which shape narratives on this subject. It is worth analyzing them in a philological way, as some of the postmodern researchers suggested, for the kind of language that one tend to use may reveal the ideological background that shapes a vision of the past (Foucault 1971; Meyer, Wodak 2009; White 2014). Taking these conditions into account might help to avoid bias, even if absolute objectivity remains unavailable.

In the first of the mentioned perspectives, adopted *inter alia* by researchers associated with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, the post-war actions of “Błyskawica” are seen as a continuation of the partisans’ fight for freedom of the society and for an independent state. In this view taking civilians’ property is seen as justified by a higher good. That is why some historians tend to call such acts “requisitions” [*rekwizycje*] (Korkuć 2015b: 461), “confiscations” or “provisioning actions” [*konfiskaty, akcje aprowizacyjne*] (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 29, 43); all those terms belong to a relatively high register of language and connote legally valid actions. Moreover, researchers adopting such point of view generally assume that the acts of violence committed by the partisans against the Slovaks were a reaction to anti-Polish activity or other crimes – although in many cases the available sources do not allow such conclusion. Usually those facts are categorized as “combating crime”, “penalties” or “liquidations” [*zwalczanie przestępczości, kary, likwidacje*] (Korkuć 2015b: 450, 461, 464). It is also emphasized that the First Slovak Republic collaborated with the German Third Reich during the Second World War, which can be treated as an attempt to justify the partisans’ hostile attitude towards Slovaks (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 43; Korkuć 2012b). Although the researchers

⁶ At least thirty attacks of “Błyskawica” group on the posts of Citizens’ Militia may be considered well documented (Korkuć 2015b: 655–660).

⁷ Józef Kuraś’ subordinates liquidated, among others, Jan Raclawski, warden of the prison in Nowy Targ (on July 11, 1946) and two chiefs of the Department of Public Security in Rabka (Władysław Filipiak and Mieczysław Stramka in August 1946) (Korkuć 2015b: 416–417).

associated with the Institute of National Remembrance admitted that there are criminal acts in the history of “Błyskawica”, they also emphasized that Józef Kuraś disciplined his subordinates (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 24; Musiał 2002; Korkuć 2008: 230). In this type of narratives, it is usually assumed – even in controversial cases – that the motivation of the soldiers was the fight for independence of the homeland.

Another important perspective in the research on “Błyskawica” is the one presented *inter alia* by the researchers connected to the Society of Slovaks in Poland (Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku). In the publications issued by this institution the pieces of information that may lead to negative assessment of “Ogień” are usually highlighted – for instance the fact that during the war he was in conflict with his superior from the Home Army’s (Armia Krajowa) partisan unit (Majeriková-Molitoris 2012: 104; Molitoris 2010: 169–170).⁸ It was also noted that at the beginning of 1945 Józef Kuraś tried to acquire a high position in the newly created Department of Public Security (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) in Nowy Targ, which was finally prevented from him; therefore, his later struggle with the communist regime was interpreted as a result of a personal resentment.⁹ Moreover, the studies issued by the Society of Slovaks in Poland concentrate on those actions that were directed not at state officials, but at civilian inhabitants of the borderland. In this type of narrative, the partisan group is disavowed by lexical measures – the military code name “Błyskawica” is usually replaced by such expressions as “the group of «Ogień»” [*Ogňova skupina*] (Majeriková-Molitoris 2012: 104), “the people of «Ogień»” [*ľudi “Ogňa”*] (Molitoris 2010: 167) or even “the gang of «Ogień»” [*banda “Ogňa”*] (Molitoris 2010: 176). From that point of view taking civilians’ property is categorized as a criminal practice, therefore it is written for example that

⁸ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris and Ludomír Molitoris did not cover this matter in detail, so it is worthwhile to refer to other studies. On December 28, 1943, the forces of the German Third Reich captured the Home Army camp that was commanded by Józef Kuraś “Ogień” (Korkuć 2012a: 164–174; Maciaszek 2010). His superior, lieutenant Krystyn Więckowski “Zawisza”, ordered the liquidation of Kuraś, blaming him for inappropriate protection of the partisans’ hideaway (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 36). As a result, “Ogień” never returned to the Home Army unit (although in October 1944 it was announced that investigations against him were discontinued; Korkuć 2012a: 209). In the spring of 1944, he created a separate partisan group; in the autumn of that year, he established contact with the Delegation of the Government of the Republic of Poland in Nowy Targ district and from then on he was entrusted with the execution of sentences issued by the Polish Underground State’s judiciary system (Korkuć 2012a: 209–211). Thus, the conflict between Józef Kuraś and the Home Army officers was suppressed.

⁹ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris wrote: “In the case of Kuraś, it was not so much about anti-communist resistance as about his personal struggle” (Majeriková-Molitoris 2012: 104). It needs to be added that in 1945 the participation of former partisans in the power structures of the new state was recommended by the pro-democratic People’s Party, with which Józef Kuraś was cooperating (Golik, Pięciak 2016). Sources indicate that his appointment to the deputy chief of the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ was questioned due to his negative attitude towards Soviet Union’s authoritarian policy in Poland (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 7–9).

partisans “stole” something [*ukradli*] (Molitoris 2010: 177) or “robbed” someone [*vyrabovali*] (Molitoris 2010: 187). What is more, in this perspective the members of “Błyskawica” did not have any right to discipline the borderland’s society; therefore, as the authors refer to the cases of taking someone’s life, they state that the partisans “murdered” someone [*zavraždili*] (Majeriková-Molitoris 2012: 106; Molitoris 2010: 176). Importantly, the researchers connected to the Society of Slovaks in Poland emphasize the rights of civilians, pointing out that since May 1945 the partisans’ actions cannot be justified by the circumstances of war (Molitoris 2010: 174–175). The differences between this perspective and the position of researchers associated with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance may result from the assumption that the activity of “Błyskawica” was not genuinely related to independence aspirations.

This paper is based mainly on a query conducted at the Archive of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, confronted with the findings of historians. In the analysis and interpretation of the sources, efforts were made to keep distance from both perspectives mentioned above and to suspend the main assumptions that are connected to them. A part of the text is devoted to the characteristics of available documents, which are often problematic. There will also be presented facts that help to understand the scale and the circumstances of the partisans’ actions in Spisz and Orawa.

The research effects allow to question some of the theses from previously published studies. What is more, the reflection on the analyzed events takes into account a wider historical context, as well as anthropological and sociological theories. As a result, a hypothesis explaining the attitude of “Błyskawica” soldiers towards Slovak minority will be proposed.

Due to volume constraints of this study and in concern for methodological consistency the decision was made to focus on documents – mainly those produced in the second half of the 1940s. Another stage of research in this area could be based on memoirs (which are unfortunately rare) and memories, evoked during field research conducted in accordance with the guidelines of oral history methodology. Thanks to such sources, it would be possible to recreate, among other things, the social interpretations of the facts discussed here. One should note, however, that the vast majority of the witnesses of post-war history have already passed away. Therefore, such field research should take into account the orientation of post-memory.

Origins of the conflict

One of the main researchers of “Błyskawica” partisans’ history, Maciej Korcuć, argued the group’s actions in the areas inhabited by Slovaks should be interpreted in a broader historical context (Korcuć 2012b). Indeed, it is worth referring to

the origins of the conflict. After the First World War there was a dispute over the border lines between Czechoslovakia and Poland. On July 28, 1920, the Council of Ambassadors ordered the division of Spiš/Spisz and Orava/Orawa regions (formerly belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire) between the two newly established states (Jesenský 2014: 37–60). Most of those areas was granted to Czechoslovakia; the division left national minorities on both sides of the border.¹⁰ In the 1920s Polish officials started promoting Polishness in the north of Spisz and Orawa; some consider it a process of systemic polonization and symbolic violence (Majeriková 2007c: 59–70). At the turn of November and December 1938 the Second Polish Republic, governed by an authoritarian and interventionist movement called Sanation (Sanacja) took advantage of the difficult position of democratic Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement and forced the assignment of several border areas.¹¹ Another turning point was March 1939, when Czechoslovakia was finally liquidated. The German Third Reich started occupation of its western territories, creating Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In the same month the First Slovak Republic, ruled by the national-socialist Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova Slovenská Ľudová Strana) and subordinated to Adolf Hitler, was created. In effect in September of that year Slovak troops, acting in alliance with the German Third Reich, attacked Poland, starting the Second World War. Battles were fought *inter alia* in Nowy Targ district (Golik 2018).¹² Then, under the Slovak-German treaty, in November 1939, the disputed regions were granted to the First Slovak Republic. In other words, the Slovak occupation of northern Spisz and Orawa began. It lasted until the Soviets superseded the Axis forces in the area, between January and March 1945 (Korkuć 2010a). Even before the end of the war Polish authorities started striving to restore the borders set by the Council of Ambassadors (Kwiek 1998: 161–168). On May 20, 1945, the issue was settled by an agreement between the reestablished Czechoslovakia and Poland; however, some Slovaks found the conditions harmful.¹³ As a result, the northern areas of Spisz and Orawa – granted to Poland – became a field of conflict again.

¹⁰ Under the arrangements of 1920 and the correction of 1924, Poland was granted the following villages in Spisz: Czarna Góra, Falsztyn, Frydman, Dursztyn, Jurgów, Kacwin, Krempachy, Łapszanka, Łapsze Niżne, Łapsze Wyżne, Niedzica, Nowa Biała, Rzepiska, Trybsz. In Orawa, in turn, Poland received the following villages: Bukowina-Podszkle, Chyżne, Harkabuz, Jabłonka, Lipnica Mała, Lipnica Wielka, Orawka, Piekienik, Podsarnie, Podwilk, Zubrzyca Dolna and Zubrzyca Górna. In 1945 the mentioned areas were granted to Poland again (Kwiek 2002: 13–14; Molitoris 2010: 157).

¹¹ The areas of Spiš/Spisz (including villages Javorina and Lesnica) and Orava/Orawa (including villages Hladovka and Suchá Hora) that were annexed by Poland in 1938 had about five thousand residents (Molitoris 2017: 66; Olejko 2012: 113).

¹² Józef Kuraś took part in the 1939 defensive war as a soldier of the 1st Podhale Rifle Regiment [1. Pułk Strzelców Podhalańskich] – a unit that fought both German Army and and Slovak Army (Korkuć 2012a: 63).

¹³ Paweł Jacek Michniak wrote: “In Trstená (Slovak Orava) major Milan Polak, deputy chairman of the local Slovak National Council, and representatives of Nowy Targ district signed the protocol of transferring administrative control over North Orawa and North Spisz”. The historian

A significant part of the inhabitants of those regions identified themselves as Slovaks and opted for a change of borders in favor of Czechoslovakia. The reasons for this attitude were complex. Probably in part it was a reaction to the aforementioned symbolic violence by the pre-war Polish state. The memory of improving economy in the First Slovak Republic era also played a role, as well as the national-socialist, anti-Polish ideology promoted by the president Jozef Tiso and his officials (Korkuć 2010a). It should also be emphasized that the Third Czechoslovak Republic – from the announcement in April 1945 until the communist coup in February 1948 – could be seen as a continuation of the pre-war, democratic state (with Edvard Beneš as the president and Jan Masaryk as the foreign minister; Jesenský 2014: 109–128). At that time in Poland, governed by communist politicians subordinate to Joseph Stalin, restrictions and repressions already began (and affected the upper and middle classes, political opposition, members of the clergy, ethnic minorities and other groups). In sum the views of the Slovaks from Spisz and Orawa could have been a result of nationalist ideology and the experience of injustice, but a pragmatic striving to maintain material status and civil liberties also seems to be an important motivation.¹⁴

“An uprising was plotted”

The Czechoslovak option in Orawa and Spisz was expressed through a series of demonstrations, having place especially from spring to autumn of 1945.¹⁵ Some insight into the situation was provided by Władysław Filipiak, head of the 3rd Section of the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ.¹⁶ On November 29, 1945, he reported the findings of an inspection in Spisz villages:

In all churches services and chants are held only in Slovak, people who in 1939 felt completely Polish, nowadays, as a result of five years of agitation by Slovak priests, have disowned Polish language and Polishness. In Niedzica, for example, former Polish women, Helena Twomcowa and Maria Iwańczak, next to a caricature of a Polish soldier drawn on a wall, wrote: “Polish soldier – a picture of poverty” and “Polish gang go to Poland, we do not need thieves”. [...] At

noted, however, that “the takeover of those areas by Poland caused an avalanche of dissatisfaction among the local community”, which resulted *inter alia* in manifestation in Jabłonka on May 20, 1945 (attended probably by about three thousand people; Michniak 2013: 180; see also Andráš 2009: 60). The end of the conflict was sanctioned by an international agreement in 1958 (Umowa między Polską Rzeczpospolitą Ludową a Republiką Czechosłowacką o ostatecznym wytyczeniu granicy państwowej, podpisana w Warszawie z dnia 13 czerwca 1958 r.; Dziennik Ustaw 1959 nr 25 poz. 159).

¹⁴ I would like to thank the reviewer who suggested discussing this issue.

¹⁵ In the post-war period most of the inhabitants of Spisz and Orawa were Slovaks – some estimate even 90 percent but there is no conclusive data (Kwiek 2002: 29).

¹⁶ The Department of Public Security (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) was the political police of post-war Poland, established *inter alia* to fight anti-communist underground (Cenckiewicz 2014).

school in Kacwin signs with Slovak emblems and inscriptions were not removed at all, and, in addition, in the parsonage there was also a Slovak state flag not removed from the pole. [...] Seeing such attachment to Slovak priests and Slovak language in almost all Spisz villages, as a result of the anti-Polish agitation conducted by Slovak priests, we instructed politely all priests of those villages to be gracious to leave Polish territory within two-three days. The action of catching more Slovak agents is being carried out.¹⁷

It must be noted that Filipiak's thesis – that several years of Slovak propaganda had a decisive influence on the identity of Spisz residents – seems highly doubtful (Kwiek 2002: 29–32; Majeriková-Molitoris 2012: 103–106; Molitoris 2012: 116–117). On the other hand, a number of fragments of the report – like those concerning the role of Slovak priests – are confirmed in other, credible sources. It is known that Father František Můš, who worked in Nowa Biała and Krempachy, encouraged the inhabitants to resist the Polish administration, arguing that Spisz should belong to Czechoslovakia (Kwiek 1998: 174–175; Molitoris 2010: 173).¹⁸ In May 1945, the commander of the underground Home Army Inspectorate in Nowy Sącz major Adam Stabrawa “Borowy” wrote to one of his subordinates:

In Nowa Biała there is a Slovak priest, Franciszek Mos, a famous chauvinist and Pole-eater. I am enclosing a tiny excerpt from a brochure he wrote in 1944. It proves the mentality of this gentleman. [...] Maybe killing Mos would be a radical and non-propagandistic move, but other arguments, including his expulsion abroad, would be advisable.¹⁹

It is significant that two conflicted sides – the communist authorities and the resistance movement – took a similar position in the case of the priest from Spisz. On November 16, 1945 Father Můš was arrested by law enforcement “for spreading propaganda against Poland and for publishing a brochure against Poles” (a copying machine with matrices and other accessories was found in the parsonage in Nowa Biała).²⁰ The circumstances of this intervention were described by the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ: “When we were trying to arrest the priest, the people of the entire village started attacking us with stones and threatening us, insulting in various ways, so we responded with machine gun shots in the air; then the people moved away, however a few stones fell on our

¹⁷ IPN Kr 023/1/2, k. 12, Sprawozdanie kierownika III Sekcji PUBP w Nowym Targu, November 29, 1945.

¹⁸ In Polish sources one can find alternative versions of the priest's surname: Mosz, Moś or Mos. He signed his texts as František Můš.

¹⁹ ANKr 1319/O, t. 6, k. 61, Rozkaz mjr. Adama Stabrawy „Borowego” do por. Feliksa Perekładowskiego „Przyjaciela”, May 26, 1945. I am grateful to the reviewer who brought this document to my attention.

²⁰ IPN Kr 023/1/2, k. 9, Sprawozdanie PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, November 20, 1945. František Můš was acquitted by the Special Criminal Court (Specjalny Sąd Karny) in Kraków in 1946 and then emigrated to Czechoslovakia (Ciągwa 2013: 241–246; Ciągwa, Majeriková-Molitoris 2011; Kwiek 1998: 174–175; Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 136–137; Molitoris 2017: 146–147).

car".²¹ As Father Móś was taken into the vehicle, one of the locals opened fire with an automatic weapon. The officers fled with the arrested priest, not taking any consequences towards those who obstructed the intervention. Significant evidence was left on the spot, including the copying machine.²²

In the same year there were even more serious incidents within the reestablished Polish borders. In March 1945 Jan Sral (then the commander of the militia post in Łapsze Niżne, later a partisan of "Błyskawica") reported attacks by armed Spisz residents (Wenklar 2010: 56–57). At that time there were no killings, although in the following months the conflict worsened. In spring and summer Slovaks from Nowy Targ district, sometimes supported by units from Czechoslovakia, committed a few major attacks against Polish officials: there were beatings, injuries and several murders. Michał Wenklar reconstructed, *inter alia*, the events of April 1945:

A Slovak unit, allegedly numbering about three hundred people, entered the Polish Orawa; on April 10, they disarmed the Citizens' Militia post in Jabłonka and headed towards Podwilk. There they were turned back by the Polish militiamen, reinforced by a unit from Czarny Dunajec, with participation of three Soviet soldiers. [...] Four days later, on April 14, Slovaks attacked the Citizens' Militia post in Chyżne; an officer of the Department of Public Security in Zakopane, Marian Kwapien, was killed; then the disarmed militiamen were taken to Trstená, in Slovak Orava, and severely beaten (Wenklar 2010: 57).²³

Michał Źarski, a Citizens' Militia officer who coorganized the post in Podwilk, claimed that a leading role in the region was played by the former members of Hlinka's Guard (Hlinkova Garda). It was a paramilitary organization operating in the years 1938–1945, which supported the National Socialist regime of the First Slovak Republic. According to Źarski, the propaganda spread by local leaders caused the fact that many residents avoided paying taxes to the Polish state, believing that their territories would be finally annexed to Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the officer explained, "an uprising was plotted to separate this part of the lands".²⁴

After spring incidents the Polish administration took steps to strengthen its power in the region (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 91). On July 2, 1945, eighty militiamen from Nowy Targ took the post in Podwilk and went to Jabłonka, where they exchanged fire with Slovak militia. The Poles withdrew to Nowy Targ, leav-

²¹ IPN Kr 023/1/2, k. 9, Sprawozdanie PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, November 20, 1945.

²² This version of events was confirmed by Wojciech Kuraś (commander "Ogień's" brother) in his memoirs: "The population of Nowa Biała, at the sound of the church bells, ran as if to a fire, to defend the priest taken out of the village. They took everything that could be useful for defense. And what would be the consequences of this defense, if not for the rush of the soldiers, would there not be a massacre?" (Kuraś 1982: 452).

²³ Amazingly, Michał Wenklar did not refer to the studies by Julian Kwiek, who discussed the same topic earlier (Kwiek 1998: 162).

²⁴ IPN Kr 07/938, k. 8, Protokół przesłuchania Michała Źarskiego, March 7, 1948.

ing a group of thirty officers in Podwilk (Wenklar 2010: 58). Some inhabitants of Orawa accused Polish militia of terrorizing the region (Molitoris 2017: 141); as a result a group of several dozen residents attacked the post in Podwilk (Kwiek 2002: 16-17). One of the Slovaks, Ján Zonzel from Podsarnie, was shot, probably by one of the Polish militiamen (Molitoris 2017: 142). That was an impulse radicalizing social mood in the region, which led to the culmination of events (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 93). On July 4, 1945 a serious shooting again took place in Podwilk, as the Citizens' Militia post was attacked by a large group of Slovak militiamen and local civilians (documents mentioned several hundred attackers; Wenklar 2010: 58). The Poles surrendered after a few hours, as they ran out of ammunition. Then the Slovaks humiliated the disarmed officers – three of whom, including the commander Józef Wrona, were beaten to death (Kwiek 1998: 167; Wenklar 2010: 59).²⁵ The further course of events was reported by officer Żarski:

I was taken prisoner with the rest of the crew and then I was beaten to the loss of consciousness. Three of my ribs were broken and I received several cuts on the head. When the Citizens' Militia Command in Nowy Targ found out about the attack by the Slovak gang, the Border Protection Troops headquarters in Jabłonka was asked to help us, so we were actually recaptured in Lipnica Wielka and then transported to Nowy Targ to hospital.²⁶

An investigation was carried out in Podwilk, during which Vendelín Kuš, a farmer of Slovak nationality, was accused of leading the revolted crowd.²⁷ He admitted being a member of Hlinka Slovak People's Party and Hlinka's Guard and cooperating with the German Third Reich as a village mayor at the time of war. However, Kuš did not plead guilty to the attack on Citizens' Militia post, and presented his own version of the causes of national tensions in Podwilk:

Initially [in the spring of 1945 – ŁŁ], the militiamen started to show a rough attitude towards the Slovak population, which I drew attention to several times. [...] I received a reply from the commander of the post, Żarski Michał, that the rule of the Slovaks was over and if they did not submit, then everyone would be locked in jail.²⁸

Eventually the investigation was closed without charge but certainly the whole incident influenced the attitude of Polish militiamen towards Slovaks. In the following months in Nowy Targ district there were brutal interventions, that raised doubts even among the Polish officials, as indicate documents cited by Milica Ma-

²⁵ Ludomír Molitoris also cited the relation of Mária Smiechová from Podwilk, according to which three Polish officers died as a result of combat wounds (Molitoris 2017: 143). This statement is contradicted by the testimony of Alojzy Śmiech, a militiaman who was sent to Podwilk to collect the bodies of the dead: "It turned out that the shot did not cause the death of our commander, but the injuries inflicted by Slovaks with a stick used for grinding grain" (Garbacz 2015: 119).

²⁶ IPN Kr 07/938, k. 9, Protokół przesłuchania Michała Żarskiego, March 7, 1948.

²⁷ In Polish sources one can find alternative versions of the suspect's surname: Kus, Kuś or Kusz. He signed himself as Vendelín Kuš.

²⁸ IPN Kr 07/938, k. 19, Protokół przesłuchania Wendelina Kusia, March 6, 1948.

jeriková-Molitoris (2013: 98–99).²⁹ Such determination of the Polish law enforcement could be one of the factors that led to reduction of Slovak demonstrations. And in the end of 1945 national tensions seemed partially pacified – at the time the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ did not record such attacks that could be compared to the aforementioned events.³⁰

It has to be underlined as well, that the international situation of the region has become more stable and the danger of the Polish-Czechoslovak war, which seemed real in June 1945, was finally dismissed (Jesenský 2014: 109–128). An important process was also the strengthening of the Polish border posts network – at first by the forces of the so-called people's army and later, at the turn of 1945 and 1946, by the specialized Border Protection Troops [Wojska Ochrony Pogranicza] (Prochwicz 2016). As a result, a significant part of Slovak militiamen and activists emigrated from Spisz and Orawa, probably assuming that the incorporation of those areas to Czechoslovakia is unlikely; they also might have feared being pursued by the Polish law enforcement (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 95). All this does not mean that the security services of the Polish state already had full control in the region. The "Błyskawica" group gained strength then and became a very significant force. And due to its increased activity – between the spring of 1946 and the winter of 1946/1947 – one can speak of another period of escalation in Spisz and Orawa.

The problematic sources for the history of "Błyskawica"

The scale of the appropriations conducted by "Błyskawica" in Orawa and Spisz is a very controversial issue.³¹ The pioneering works by Milica Majeriková might be

²⁹ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris gave numerous examples of beatings and other abuses of power, done by the Polish security services in Spisz and Orawa (2013: 97–98). Apart from them it is worth mentioning the intervention of Polish militiamen and soldiers in Niedzica conducted in September 1945: "Gielata Maria of Slovak nationality was beaten with a rubber boot by ensign Wiśniewski for resisting. Gielata Michał, the brother of the aforementioned, was hit in the chin with a fist by ensign Wiśniewski. [...] Anna Kaszycka of Slovak nationality was arrested for stealing windows from the government building in Niedzica and while she was being brought to the Citizens' Militia post, shots were fired in the air to disperse the crowd that wanted to take her off" (Protokół Komisji do zbadania zajść i sytuacji narodowościowej na Spiszu, September 26, 1945; Kwiek 2002: 90). Tensions in Niedzica continued in the following months (IPN Kr 023/1/2, k. 11, Sprawozdanie PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, November 25, 1945).

³⁰ Among later incidents, Julian Kwiek mentioned three cases when small groups of Slovak soldiers entered the Polish territory in the spring and the summer of 1946 (Kwiek 2002: 35). In the same year Polish soldiers also happened to cross the southern border, as reported Milica Majeriková-Molitoris (2013: 101–102).

³¹ The fact that the appropriations done by Józef Kuraś' subordinates remain vivid in the collective memory of Nowy Targ district was recently proven through the field research conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University (Łoziński 2019).

a good example. The historian reported that Józef Kuraś' subordinates carried out about a hundred actions in the borderland regions (Majeriková 2007a: 9). What is more, she cited documents estimating that the partisans took about 200 horses, 700 cows, 400 pigs and 200 sheep that belonged to Slovaks (Majeriková 2007b: 7).³² However, those numbers raise serious doubts, as some of them are based only on declarations made by former inhabitants of Poland who emigrated to Czechoslovakia after the war. It should be remembered that there were numerous criminal groups operating in Nowy Targ district – some of them may have presented themselves as partisans, using the well-known “Ogień” pseudonym to confuse victims and, in consequence, law enforcement as well (Garbacz 2015: 77; Korcuć 2012a: 213). Therefore, the mentioned declarations would require confirmation in other sources – which, at many times, seem impossible to be found. Undoubtedly a certain group of Slovaks fled their homes in Spisz and Orawa because of “Błyskawica's” threats – such cases are evidenced by various documents and testimonies.³³ On the other hand, the suggestion made by one of the Slovak officials, cited by the researcher – that it was Józef Kuraś' terror, what caused the emigration of several thousand Slovaks from Poland – has not been sufficiently argued.³⁴

It must also be stated that the numbers given in Majeriková's early works seem to be high, considering they refer to rather unwealthy and not very populous regions (Kwiek 2002: 37).³⁵ More careful calculations were proposed by Ludomír Molitoris, who specializes in the history of Orawa and Spisz as well. According to him, the partisans conducted 86 actions in Spisz and Orawa, where they took away at least 132 horses, 130 cows, 60 pigs and 186 sheep, as well as other goods

³² The figures given by Milica Majeriková were quoted in one of the papers by Matej Andráš (2009: 69), and repeated in an essay by Jerzy S. Łątka (2007: 82).

³³ It is known that on the night of April 15/16, 1946, during the partisans' attack, František Brodovský and Dominik Kalata escaped from Nowa Biała, taking refuge in Czechoslovakia (András 2009: 65; Majeriková 2007b: 6). Štefánia Tyborová, who was ordered to leave Jurgów under the threat of death “for cooperation with Slovakia”, did the same (the document is dated on August 8, 1946, and signed by Józef Kuraś; Molitoris 2010: 188). Of course, there were more forced displacements, but little is known about their causes (András 2009: 68; Molitoris 2010: 189–190).

³⁴ Milica Majeriková based her calculations, *inter alia*, on the report of September 10, 1946, written by Jozef Matiašovský, who was a delegate of the American Liberation Committee for Spisz and Orawa, an association of Slovak emigration in the United States. On September 2–9, 1946, Matiašovský visited Slovakia, where he talked with migrants from Polish territory. The delegate wrote about fourteen killed and several hundred wounded Slovaks, and therefore appealed to Czechoslovak authorities to intervene and conduct a plebiscite to determine the belonging of the northern parts of the borderland regions. His statements may be interpreted as suggesting that several thousand Slovaks emigrated from Poland mainly because of “Błyskawica” group's activity (András 2009: 62; Majeriková 2007b: 7).

³⁵ There is no conclusive demographic data on Spisz and Orawa from the years 1945–1946. The number of inhabitants of Slovak nationality given by various authors ranges from 10,387 to 26,526 people (Kwiek 2002: 29).

(Molitoris 2017: 155).³⁶ However, those figures also raise questions, because some parts of Molitoris' list are based on modest information from uncertain sources (Molitoris 2010: 176–188).

The researcher reported, for example, that on September 17, 1946, "Błyskawica" attacked the inhabitants of Frydman, taking their horses, cows and a wagon. However, the only source referenced is a copy of the alleged Józef Kuraś' notebook (the original is lost; Molitoris 2010: 182). The document consists of brief notes, which may be interpreted in different ways, and because of that researchers usually use it only as an additional source (Golik, Korcuć 2017: 39–40; Panz 2015: 35). Looking at the verse Molitoris referred to, it actually seems to be dated on October 8. Moreover, in the document by the day September 17 there is an annotation of "refusal".³⁷

Fortunately, there are sources that shed more light on that question. According to the report of the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ, on September 18, 1946, there was an investigation in Frydman. The officers found out that on the previous day the partisans had taken cattle and "half a meter of flour" from three inhabitants.³⁸ However, the victims' names do not match those in the notebook and there is no mention of horses and wagon. In turn, in the main files of "Błyskawica" there is a document called *The Last Reminder* with "Ogień's" signature and the seal of his group, dated on October 4, 1946.³⁹ It confirms that Józef Kuraś' subordinates were in Frydman on September 17 and ordered five residents to pay the amount of 50 000 zlotys each. Importantly, the money was not taken and "Ogień" decided that farmers should bring five head of cattle to his camp. It is unknown if the animals were finally taken.

In total, there are nine points at which Molitoris referred only to the copy of Józef Kuraś' notebook. In addition, the historian often based on the Characteristics No. 12, a set of documents for the "Błyskawica" history, elaborated by the Provincial Headquarters of Citizens' Militia in Kraków in the years 1973–1974. It is definitely an important source, but sometimes the information turns out to

³⁶ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris, in her more recent work *Vojna po vojne*, complied with the more careful calculations by Ludomír Molitoris (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 106).

³⁷ The cited entry in Polish, original notation: „17.IX.Nr.125.127.128.129.130. Frydman – odmowili. / Będner Jakub, Ganczar Stefan, Wadowski Andrzej, Prelich Jan / Brynczka Jozef 8.X. konfiskat.2.konie , 2.krowy,woz.” (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 25, k. 8, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”).

³⁸ The names of the victims are Andrzej Bednarz, Ignacy Myśliwiec and Jan Pryla. It is worth mentioning that on September 18, 1946 four inhabitants of the same village were arrested. Among them were "Dwornicki Wojciech, a Slovak" and "Gonciar Stefan, who spread hostile and anti-state propaganda against Poland among the Slovaks living in Frydman". (IPN Kr 06/1 t. 15, k. 107, Raport starszego oficera śledczego PUBP w Nowym Targu Jana Molendy, September 24, 1946).

³⁹ The names of the farmers ordered to give their cattle are Jakub Bednar, Józef Brynczka, Stefan Ganczar, Jan Prelich and Andrzej Wadowski (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 7, k. 4, Ostatnie upomnienie, September 4, 1946).

be incorrect.⁴⁰ There were cases that the officers of the Citizens' Militia attributed some acts to Józef Kuraś' subordinates, not indicating convincing evidence.⁴¹

Among the most valuable sources for the post-war history of violence in the Polish-Slovak borderland are court files. When analyzing the sequence of testimonies and confronting them with the information collected elsewhere, one can limit the risk of assigning an act wrongly. Unfortunately, not all events were documented in such detailed sources. That is because in the first years after the war the law enforcement of Nowy Targ district was highly ineffective (Golonka-Czajkowska 2019). The Protocol of the Commission to Investigate the Incidents and the National Situation in Spisz of September 26, 1945 stated that supply shortages were a very serious problem then: "The material provision and equipment of the Citizens' Militia and public security organs in this area is bad, which strongly affects the performance of duties" (Kwiek 2002: 92).⁴² Equally serious problems were related to the capabilities and attitude of the staff (similar conclusions were presented by Milica Majeriková-Molitoris; 2013: 101). A special report of May 12, 1946, written by Stanisław Trokało, chief of the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ, gives an insight into the morale of the officers working in Spisz:

On May 11 at 10 p.m. the gang disarmed the Citizens' Militia post in Łapsze Niżne. [...] The bandits came to the post, they did not find anyone except two rifles and one light machine gun, they took the mentioned weapons and went to the village, they started looking for militiamen, they found two, drunk in a restaurant, and the rest in some houses. They gathered the militiamen, led them to the post, disarmed and, after disarming, they beat them. They said: "Here is your place, not in the restaurant".⁴³

Such documents may partly explain, why in many cases Citizens' Militia and the Department of Public Security did not conduct extensive investigations. In effect, the files often contain only a report of an assault, which is not followed by

⁴⁰ An example of mistakes from the Characteristics No. 12 can be the card concerning the killing of Michal Kužel from Niedzica, that took place on November 12, 1946 – in the document there was wrongly stated that the man's name was Michał Kuźba, who lived in Łapsze Niżne (IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 539, Charakterystyka nr 12; see the note 73). The information was corrected by Ludomír Molitoris (2010: 186).

⁴¹ In his list of "Błyskawica" group's actions Ludomír Molitoris included the assaults that were attributed to Jan Grzybek "Klara" (Molitoris 2010: 177). However, his relationship with "Błyskawica" is questionable (see the note 67). In addition, Molitoris (after the Characteristics No. 12) attributes an attack on the Citizens' Militia post in Łapsze Niżne, that took place on May 11, 1946, to Józef Kuraś' subordinates. In fact, it is uncertain, who carried out this action (see the note 43).

⁴² The committee was composed of delegates from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Kraków Province, the Command of the Military District of Kraków and the Provincial Department of Public Security in Kraków (Kwiek 2002: 93).

⁴³ IPN Kr 023/2/1, k. 142, Raport specjalny do WUBP w Krakowie, May 12, 1946. The act was attributed to "Błyskawica" soldiers (both in the Characteristics No. 12 and in the list made by Ludomír Molitoris), although there is no evidence of their participation (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 20, k. 55, Materiały pomocnicze dotyczące historii bandy „Ognia”) (Korkuć 2015b: 402).

documentation of further operational activities. Moreover, even in those cases when the perpetrators were found, the fairness of court proceedings is questionable.⁴⁴ It is well known that torturing of arrested partisans was a common practice and the communist regime had an interest to charge them with the most serious accusations. Therefore, each of the sources generated by the state apparatus should be treated with high criticism and confronted with other documents.

"Living in constant fear"

Despite the reservations that were made above, it is worth analyzing the interrogation protocols to gain a closer look at the *modus operandi* of Józef Kuraś' subordinates. Antoni Wąsowicz "Roch", former commander of the 3rd Company of "Błyskawica", gave detailed information about his unit⁴⁵. He listed both actions of strictly political nature (including killings of regime's authorities) as well as provisioning expeditions.⁴⁶ In 1946, "Roch" took part in attacks on railway cash desks in Chabówka and Rabka (several thousand Polish zlotys were taken), on a delivery truck in Obidowa (200,000 cigarettes and a large amount of food were taken) and on the Municipal Savings Bank (Komunalna Kasa Oszczędnościowa) in Rabka (around 200,000 zlotys were taken).⁴⁷ These testimonies confirm the thesis already known from historical works, that attacks on state institutions and businesses were a significant source of income for the soldiers of "Błyskawica" (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 27–29; Korkuć 2015b: 452; Musiał 2002). However, one should not

⁴⁴ Amazingly, some of Józef Kuraś' subordinates were sentenced for alleged robberies, even though the victims were never found. Antoni Wąsowicz "Roch" was convicted, *inter alia*, for the fact that "on February 10, 1947, he gave an order to gang members to make a robbery against an unknown farmer in Zubrzyca, so his clothes and food were taken". Adam Domalik "Kowboj" was also sentenced for participation in this action (IPN Kr 111/875, k. 31, 34, Wyrok w sprawie Adama Domalika, Edwarda Supergana, Antoniego Wąsowicza, December 18, 1947).

⁴⁵ Antoni Wąsowicz "Roch" (1922–1948) in the spring of 1945 deserted from the communist-controlled Polish Army and got involved in the resistance movement. In the summer of 1946, he joined the "Błyskawica" group and was assigned to the 3rd Company. In August that year he became deputy commander, and in November he took command of the Company. In May 1947 he was taken over by the communist security apparatus. The Military District Court (Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy) in Kraków sentenced him to death (Golik 2019).

⁴⁶ One of the most the most important actions conducted by the 3rd Company took place in August 1946, when Antoni Wąsowicz "Roch" executed the death sentence on Władysław Filipiak, former chief of the Department of Public Security in Rabka. During the event an accidental victim – a driver of the local fire brigade – was also killed (Korkuć 2015b: 416–417).

⁴⁷ It is known that Antoni Wąsowicz "Roch" was tortured during the investigation (Musiał 2005, 299), but his testimony at many points is consistent with other sources (see the information on the actions in Chabówka, Obidowa and Rabka: IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 6, 24, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 06/01, t. 3, k. 260–262, Protokół przesłuchania Jana Wajdy, September 19, 1946; IPN Kr 111/875, k. 46–48, Wyrok w sprawie Adama Domalika i Antoniego Wąsowicza, February 20, 1948).

underestimate the appropriations of private goods, that were done in the villages of Nowy Targ district. According to the protocol of interrogation, in November 1946 “Roch” took part in an assault in Orawa – the soldiers of the 3rd Company took property of high value, including several horses, cows and pigs, from the inhabitants of Podsarnie.⁴⁸ In February 1947, the unit went to Orawa again (according to the court, the incident happened in Zubrzyca). “The wardrobe and underwear material were taken there, which »Kowboj« sold for 36 000 zlotys and delivered me the money” – said “Roch”, explaining that the funds were used to buy food.⁴⁹ He further testified about the assault that took place in March of that year, when Vendelín Kuš from Podwilk, probably considered a Slovak nationalist, was deprived of one horse and two cows.⁵⁰ In Podsarnie two bicycles, some wardrobe and a sewing machine were taken from two houses.⁵¹ Finally, in April 1947, partisans took Omega watch from the owner of a sawmill in Zubrzyca.⁵² In conclusion, Antoni Wąsowicz’s testimonies show that at the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947 the expeditions to Orawa were a key source of the 3rd Company’ income and, overall, an important part of the group’s activity (although it has to be underlined that the last appropriations took place after the death of Józef Kuraś).

Another important set of sources are the testimonies of Józef Dyda “Czarny”. Initially he belonged to the staff group, commanded by Józef Kuraś himself, and later was sent to the 1st Company, where he held the responsible function of a light machine gun operator.⁵³ Józef Dyda took part in several skirmishes with the forces of

⁴⁸ The verdict mentions five horses, six cows, three pigs, two wagons with accessories and pieces of wardrobe (IPN Kr 111/875, k. 29, Wyrok w sprawie Adama Domalika, Edwarda Supergana, Antoniego Wąsowicza, December 18, 1947; see also IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 526, Charakterystyka nr 12). In his testimony, Antoni Wąsowicz “Roch” stated that there were “three horses, five cows, three pigs, clothes and other things” (IPN Kr 06/1 t. 4, k. 278, Wyciąg z protokołu przesłuchania Antoniego Wąsowicza, August 4, 1947). The action in Podsarnie is mentioned in other publications (András 2009: 69; Korcuć 2015b: 577).

⁴⁹ IPN Kr 06/1 t. 4, k. 279, Wyciąg z protokołu przesłuchania Antoniego Wąsowicza, August 4, 1947.

⁵⁰ The victim was the mayor [Polish: *sołtys*] of Podwilk (IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 625, Charakterystyka nr 12; IPN Kr 111/875, k. 30, Wyrok w sprawie Adama Domalika, Edwarda Supergana, Antoniego Wąsowicza, December 18, 1947).

⁵¹ “From this robbery [Edward] Supergan is wearing a suit and shoes. [...] One bike was taken by [Adam] Domalik” – added Antoni Wąsowicz “Roch” (IPN Kr 06/1 t. 4, k. 280, Wyciąg z protokołu przesłuchania Antoniego Wąsowicza, August 4, 1947; see also IPN Kr 06/1 t. 4, k. 147, Protokół przesłuchania Adama Domalika, August 7, 1947).

⁵² The court established that the victim’s surname was Litwiak, but it was not stated, if he lived in Zubrzyca Dolna or Zubrzyca Górna (IPN Kr 111/875, k. 30, Wyrok w sprawie Adama Domalika, Edwarda Supergana, Antoniego Wąsowicza, December 18, 1947).

⁵³ Józef Dyda “Czarny” (1924–1947) deserted from the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ in November 1945 and joined the “Błyskawica” group. In 1946 he was assigned to the 1st Company. As he testified, during the entire period of his “stay in the gang” he was “carrying out sentences”. On the night of May 2–3, 1946 he participated in the murder of thirteen Jews near Krościenko (IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 43, Protokół przesłuchania Józefa Dydy, February 6, 1947). In January 1947 he was

the communist regime, but many fragments of his testimonies concern the appropriations of private goods.⁵⁴ In October 1946, with about ten other soldiers, he took two horses from a farm in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁵ On November 12, 1946 Józef Dyda, in a group of about eighteen partisans, came to Spisz villages of Kacwin and Niedzica, where two horses, four cows, two pigs, wool and clothes were appropriated.⁵⁶ Soon the 1st Company came to Kacwin again, to take away two horses, two cows and a pig. Finally, in December 1946, Józef Dyda appropriated 85,000 zlotys from a tax collector, also in Kacwin. It has to be noticed that during his trial the partisan canceled some parts of his testimonies, explaining they had been forced by beating (therefore the charges from which he was cleared are not mentioned in this paper).⁵⁷ However, most of his statements are consistent with other sources (although sometimes there are discrepancies regarding dates and numbers of goods taken).⁵⁸ Overall, it is safe to acknowledge that the testimonies of Józef Dyda show that in the second half of 1946 the appropriations of private goods in Spisz were a key source of income for the 1st Company and also an important part of the unit's activity.⁵⁹

taken over by the communist security services. The Military District Court in Kraków sentenced him to death (IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 189–192, Wyrok w sprawie Józefa Dydy, October 13, 1947).

⁵⁴ On May 12, 1946, Józef Dyda "Czarny" took part in the attack on the Citizens' Militia post in Szczawnica, and on November 4, 1946, in the attack on another post in Krościenko (IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 189–192, Wyrok w sprawie Józefa Dydy, October 13, 1947; Korkuć 2015b: 402, 412).

⁵⁵ As Józef Dyda "Czarny" testified, nine partisans took part in the expedition, led by the group's chief, Józef Sral "Smak": "At night our liaison, Franciszek Buła from Sromowce Wyżne, led us to the Czechoslovak territory and there, near the border, we took two horses at a manor house; I stood on position with a light machine gun; at the same night we returned to the Polish side, going to our camp with the horses" (IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 64, Protokół przesłuchania Józefa Dydy, March 27, 1947).

⁵⁶ Those events were confirmed in another set of documents – the case against the partisans Jan Ciacma and Marian Warzecha. They were both sentenced by the Military District Court in Kraków for the appropriations in Kacwin and Niedzica that took place on November 12, 1946 (IPN Kr 110/1076, k. 188–191, Wyrok w sprawie przeciwko: Jan Ciacma, Marian Warzecha, March 29, 1947).

⁵⁷ IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 189–192, Wyrok w sprawie Józefa Dydy, October 13, 1947.

⁵⁸ See the information about the actions of the 1st Company in Czechoslovakia, Kacwin and Niedzica (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 22–23, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 074/2, k. 429–430, 507, 509, Charakterystyka nr 12).

⁵⁹ Apart from Spisz and Orawa, there were also appropriations in the villages of Gorce and Pieniny mountains. Józef Dyda "Czarny" testified that in the winter of 1945/1946 he took two pigs from a farmer in Koszary Harkłowskie, then he took part in the appropriation of three horses and six pigs from a miller in Leśnica; in the spring of 1946 he took three cattle from a farmer in Czorsztyn; in the summer of the same year he participated in the capture of horses and cattle in Jaworki (IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 38–47, Protokół przesłuchania Józefa Dydy, February 6, 1947; IPN Kr 110/1892, k. 53–70, Protokół przesłuchania Józefa Dydy, March 27, 1947). See also the entries concerning Koszary Harkłowskie and Leśnica under the dates of winter 1945/1946 (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 11–12, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”).

It is probable that “Błyskawica” carried out many more similar actions, though only a part of them was well-documented.⁶⁰ It is worth mentioning a few more events, for, even though the identity of perpetrators is not certain, more than one source indicate the participation of Józef Kuraś’ subordinates. For example, according to materials made by the Polish law enforcement, in April 1946 the partisans attacked several farmers in Spisz, depriving them of property of considerable value.⁶¹ The document most likely concerns the events that took place on April 16 in Nowa Biała, when partisans appropriated some goods and abducted four Slovaks: Jozef Chalúpka (born in 1904), Ján Krak (born in 1892), Ján Lapšanský (born in 1914) and Ján Ščurek (born in 1899).⁶² They were all killed. The event is known from the state documents of that period as well as from later relations (Majeriková 2007b: 6; Molitoris 2010: 176). Some indicate that the behavior of the partisans was brutal and showed radical contempt for Slovaks. For example, on May 6, 1946, Matej Andráš, who was a referent in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sent a note to the Polish Embassy in Prague, including information given by migrants from Spisz. One of them was Dominik Kalata from Nowa Biała, who presented the partisans’ action of April 1946 as follows:

In the evening I was disturbed by the noise from the street and, as I was living in constant fear of Polish authorities, ran through a window to the yard and there hid. Then I watched through the open window as Polish soldiers entered the room and reviled my wife with the words: Where is the son of a bitch, fled to Slovakia? My wife said that I went to the mill. The soldiers began beating her with whips and kicking with their heavy boots. Then they ran around the house and took a large amount of underwear, some pieces of wardrobe, 20 kilograms of lard and 60 meters of linen. Then they broke into the barn, smashing the door, and led the horse with a harness, attached it to the wagon, which they loaded with the stolen things, and left, taking two cows as well (Andraš 2009: 66).

In the following weeks, according to different sources, “Błyskawica” carried out further expeditions to Spisz and Orawa: on May 3, 1946 the soldiers allegedly took

⁶⁰ It is worth noting, that former soldiers of the 2nd Company of “Błyskawica” mentioned smuggling and appropriations in Czechoslovakia, but the information is not detailed (IPN Kr 010/9989, k. 209–210, Protokół przesłuchania Stanisława Zagaty, May 16, 1951; IPN Kr 010/9989, k. 213–214, Protokół przesłuchania Stanisława Figusa, May 16, 1951; IPN Kr 110/1076, k. 181–186, Protokół rozprawy w sprawie przeciwko: Jan Ciacma, Marian Warzecha, March 27, 1947).

⁶¹ The document mentions six horses, ten cows, four pigs and three wagons (IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 157, Charakterystyka nr 12). In the alleged Józef Kuraś’ notebook by the date of April 16, 1946 there is an entry: “confiscation of horses” (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 12, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”).

⁶² According to Ludomír Molitoris, the bodies of the murdered inhabitants of Nowa Biała were buried near the camp of “Błyskawica”, in the hills over Ostrowsko, and they were found in May 1947, when a former partisan revealed the place (Molitoris 2017: 151). As stated František Ščurek, son of Ján Ščurek, the autopsy carried out at that time showed that Jozef Chalúpka was hanged, Ján Lapšanský was shot, while Ján Krak and Ján Ščurek died from being hit with a blunt object (Ščurek 2001: 15).

twenty-four horses, sixteen cattle, six pigs and a golden watch from Krempachy;⁶³ on May 19 of the same year they appropriated some goods from the farmers of that village again;⁶⁴ on July 11, 1946 in Zubrzyca Górna they took two horses, two pigs and some garment.⁶⁵ What is more, in May in Nowa Biała someone has taken some tinware, grain, flour, linen and clothes (it should be emphasized, however, that the culprit is uncertain).⁶⁶ An important sequence of events, that also needs to be recalled, took place in Frydman in May 1946 and was reconstructed by Milica Majeriková:

On May 28, 1946, at eleven at night, about a hundred Poles in uniforms entered Frydman and robbed two Slovaks: Jozef Brinček and Andrej Organiščák. They took everything from them – clothes, shoes, money, savings books, groceries, horses, pigs and the means of transport on which the stolen goods were taken. Andrej Organiščák was brutally beaten with rifle butts. Three days later Frydman faced an even greater disaster – about one hundred and twenty men in Polish military uniforms robbed nine Slovaks there. [...] They took their clothes, shoes, food, pigs, cows and horses (Majeriková 2007b: 6).

The historian added that on May 31, 1946, in Frydman partisans beat the inhabitants with rifle butts, calling them "Slovak sons of bitches". Majeriková relied here on the situation report to the Headquarters of the Slovak 10th Infantry Division in Košice of June 7, 1946. The assault in Frydman was also documented by Polish security services, according to whom there were eight horses, seven cattle,

⁶³ In the alleged Józef Kuraś' notebook by the date of May 3, 1946, there is an entry about the appropriation of horses and cattle in Krempachy (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 12, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”).

⁶⁴ Sergiusz Mańkowski, chief of the Department of Public Security in Nowy Targ, informed: "On May 19, 1946, at 11 p.m. unknown individuals in Polish Army uniforms armed with automatic weapons and rifles stormed the inhabitants of Krempachy and robbed eleven cattle, two oxen and four horses" (IPN Kr 023/2/1, k. 148–149, Raport do WUBP w Krakowie, May 23, 1946). In a later document only eight cattle and four horses were mentioned (IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 193, Charakterystyka nr 12).

⁶⁵ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 11–14, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 06/1, t. 16, k. 104, Raport PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, July 19, 1946; IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 247, Charakterystyka nr 12.

⁶⁶ IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 203–205, Charakterystyka nr 12. The information about the robbery was attributed by the Polish law enforcement to "Błyskawica", specifically to Jan Grzybek "Klara". At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s he became a member of a smuggling group. It is uncertain, if he belonged to "Błyskawica" network before, however sources indicate his contacts with some of the partisans. On the other hand, relations from Grzybek's home village, Łopuszna, as well as documents suggest that in 1946 he was in conflict with "Ogień" and might have acted on his own (Golik 2012; IPN Kr 009/34, k. 66, Meldunek do PUBP w Nowym Targu, March 22, 1947). No sources indicating that Grzybek was tried on charges of robbery in Nowa Biała have been found.

four pigs and four wagons taken.⁶⁷ It should be noted, however, that the numbers of partisans who allegedly participated in the actions may be overestimated.⁶⁸

It happened that partisans, during their expeditions, injured or killed the inhabitants of the borderland. On July 12, 1945, in the Podhale village of Łopuszna, the men connected with Józef Kuraś units assaulted a citizen of Czechoslovakia – his identity was not established, but witnesses claimed that he was a Slovak. His wagon and two horses were taken. According to testimonies, the man did not pose a threat to the perpetrators, yet he was shot and thrown from a bridge to the Dunajec river (Łoziński 2019: 209).⁶⁹ It is also assumed that Józef Kuraś subordinates killed Paweł Bizub (born in 1899), a miller from Trybsz (Molitoris 2017: 148–149).⁷⁰ The incident took place in January 1946; the miller's son Jakub was also shot. In the alleged Józef Kuraś notebook by the date of January 24, there is an entry: "Trybsz – mill – one killed, one wounded, they tried to grab a gun, taken his parabellum, shotgun, six pigs, two horses, lard".⁷¹ Milica Majeriková cited the relations of witnesses, who claimed the assault was accompanied by threats related to Slovaks' national identity (Majeriková 2007b: 6). According to Józef Ciągwa, in 1945 Paweł Bizub went to Kraków to intervene in the archbishop's curia in the case of arrested Father František Můš, who also came from Trybsz; it is unknown whether that fact was related to the assault in any way (Ciągwa 2013: 242). Apart

⁶⁷ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 20, k. 56, Materiały pomocnicze dotyczące historii bandy „Ognia”; IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 201, Charakterystyka nr 12.

⁶⁸ According to experts, the “Błyskawica” group in 1946 could include up to 500 soldiers, but they were divided into a staff group, nine companies and four other groups, located in the area reaching from Kraków to Tatra mountains (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 18–24). In the regions of Spisz and Orawa operated mainly the staff group and three companies: the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd. Analyzing the main set of the “Błyskawica” group's files, it can be assumed that at various times these units numbered from a dozen to several dozen people (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 7–9, Banda „Ognia”. Kryptonim „Ogień”).

⁶⁹ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 25, k. 4, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 110/4656, Akta w sprawie Władysława Kolasy. For the killing of the unknown Czechoslovak citizen Władysław Kolasa “Zemsta” was sentenced to prison. He defended himself, stating that the one who shot the victim was Jan Goleniowski “Lech” (a partisan killed by the order of Józef Kuraś for criminal acts in 1946). In this way Władysław Kolasa admitted his complicity. It is not certain, if the perpetrators were formally Józef Kuraś subordinates at that time, but testimonies indicate that the Slovak's goods were taken for “Błyskawica” group's benefit. It should be noted that Władysław Kolasa “Zemsta” was a trusted companion of Józef Kuraś from the war-time resistance units (like his brother Jan Kolasa “Powicher”, later considered the deputy commandant of “Błyskawica”) (Korkuć 2012a: 102).

⁷⁰ Before the war Paweł Bizub was a member of the Main Board of the Association of Spisz and Orawa Highlanders (Związek Górali Spisza i Orawy), a patriotic Polish organization led by Father Ferdynand Machay (Trajdos 2008: 18). Because of that in this paper his first name is written in Polish, although in other works one may find its Slovak version: Pavol. It can be assumed that his family had a complex identity, for his brother Valent was a member of American Liberation Committee for Spis and Orava, an association of Slovak emigration in the United States (Molitoris 2017: 149).

⁷¹ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 11, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 06/1, t. 20, k. 168, Materiały pomocnicze dotyczące historii bandy „Ognia”.

from the killing of four Nowa Biała residents, which has been discussed before, yet another event must be recalled. In Niedzica, in the evening of November 12, 1946, a Slovak farmer Michal Kužel (born in 1889) was abducted by partisans (they also took his family's properties; Korcuć 2015b: 464).⁷² Later he was found dead. In the supposed Józef Kuraś notebook, there is an annotation by the name "Michał Kuziel": "Gestapo informant".⁷³ As stated the man's wife, Anna Kuželowa, he was murdered because of Slovak nationality (Molitoris 2017: 154-155).⁷⁴ According to the law enforcement documents, on the same day the partisans also deprived of property, abducted and finally killed a Pole, Franciszek Madej, head of the primary school in Kacwin (Majeriková 2007b: 6).⁷⁵ His name appears in the notebook too, but without any explanation.⁷⁶ It has to be added, that during the same expedition, there were also appropriations that may have been related to accusations of pro-Slovak activity. In the alleged Józef Kuraś notebook, next to the name of Jan Pojedyniec from Niedzica, there is an annotation: "Slovak agent";⁷⁷ a similar note can be found by the appropriation in Kacwin.⁷⁸ There are more similar entries in the document, but none explains for what exactly and on what basis such repressions were imposed. During the query no further information about the alleged separatist activities of the aforementioned people was found. It is worth recalling that in 1945 the most aggressive actions of the Slovak community of Poland took place in Orava; therefore, it is hard to suppose that the physical and economic violence imposed on Slovaks from Spisz in 1946 was aimed at the perpetrators of the events from another region, situated a few dozen kilometers away.

⁷² IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 539, Charakterystyka nr 12. In Polish sources one can find alternative versions of the killed man's surname: Kuziel or Kuźba. According to the declaration of his wife, Anna Kuželowa, the partisans deprived the family of a horse with a harness, two cows, a few pieces of wardrobe, two pairs of footwear and 5 kilograms of wool (Molitoris 2017: 154–155). Security services attributed the assault to Jan Ciacma "Sojka", Wincenty Sobolewski "Przemysnik" and Marian Warzecha "Wrona", but they were not convicted for that killing (Musiał 2008: 66; IPN Kr 010/1076, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Jan Ciacma, Marian Warzecha). The same expedition was mentioned by Józef Dyda "Czarny".

⁷³ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 22, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”.

⁷⁴ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris suggested that another act of violence can be attributed to Józef Kuraś subordinates: the killing of Jan Kovalčík, a Slovak from Łapsze Niżne, that took place on November 8, 1945. In that case the sources are not detailed though (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 106).

⁷⁵ IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 537, Charakterystyka nr 12.

⁷⁶ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 22, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”.

⁷⁷ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 23, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 538, Charakterystyka nr 12. According to the militia records, Jan Pojedyniec was deprived of two horses, three cows and jewelry of considerable value. Probably he was the same farmer from Niedzica, who was elected to the Main Board of the Association of Spisz and Orawa Highlanders in 1936 (Łukuś 2009: 33; Trajdos 2008: 18).

⁷⁸ IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 23, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 074/12/2, k. 527, Charakterystyka nr 12. According to files, the victim was Ján Hasaj, from whom a horse, a wagon, a harness, a pig and jewelry were allegedly taken (Molitoris 2010: 186). The action was mentioned by Józef Dyda "Czarny".

Moreover, it was well proved that Józef Kuraś demanded collective contributions from the inhabitants of Spisz (Molitoris 2010: 178–179). This happened mainly in the summer of 1946, when the commander ordered large sums of cash and other goods. The best documented cases are those concerning the villages of Czarna Góra,⁷⁹ Krempachy⁸⁰ and Trybsz.⁸¹ None of these communities, however, fulfilled the orders (according to Ludomír Molitoris only Dursztyn, in July 1946, provided the partisans with the requested contribution, that is 6,000 zlotys; Molitoris 2010: 178–179).⁸² Nevertheless, those cases are noteworthy because they indicate that Józef Kuraś used collective responsibility against Slovaks; importantly, he never applied this kind of punishment to villages dominated by Poles. Maciej Korkuć wrote that those contributions were imposed on “the population supporting the annexation of Polish Spisz and Orawa to Slovakia”; in fact, the financial losses would also be suffered by the local Poles and the indifferent population (Korkuć 2015b: 462). The researcher stated that “Krempachy were particularly known for anti-Polish demonstrations”, but gave only one example: the tearing of a flag and an emblem of Poland from the school building in August 1945 (Korkuć 2015b: 276). The link between this fact and the nearly year later summoning of the entire community to pay a large amount of money has not been argued.

⁷⁹ On July 22, 1946, the mayor of Czarna Góra, Jakub Heldak, received a document signed with the pseudonym “Ogień”: “Based on an interview and evidence by the Polish partisan unit all the residents of Czarna Góra are sentenced to pay 200 000 zlotys. [...] In case of failure to perform the prescribed activities all residents will be prosecuted by the Quick-Execution Commission” (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 81, Odpis wezwania Józefa Kurasia do mieszkańców Czarnej Góry, July 21, 1946; see IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 13, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 06/1, t. 16, k. 108, Meldunek PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, July 28, 1946; IPN Kr 074/12, t. 2, k. 265, Charakterystyka nr 12). The Quick-Execution Commission of “Błyskawica” was responsible, *inter alia*, for death sentences (Golik, Korkuć 2017: 19); therefore, the last sentence of the document can be interpreted as a threat to pacify the village (Łątka 2007: 78).

⁸⁰ On July 25, 1946, the mayor of Krempachy, Józef Bizub, received a document signed with the pseudonym “Ogień”: “On the basis of an interview and evidence of the Polish partisan unit all the residents of Krempachy are sentenced to give 100 kilograms of bacon, 100 kilograms of beans, 50 kilograms of peas, 100 kilograms of bread, 100 meters of linen cloth, 2 cattle and 300 000 zlotys. In case of failure to perform the prescribed activities all residents will be prosecuted by the Quick-Execution Commission” (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 80, Odpis wezwania Józefa Kurasia do mieszkańców Krempach; see also IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 13, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 06/1, t. 16, k. 108, Meldunek PUBP w Nowym Targu do WUBP w Krakowie, July 28, 1946; IPN Kr 074/12, t. 2, k. 277, Charakterystyka nr 12).

⁸¹ In July 1946, the mayor of Trybsz received a document signed with the pseudonym “Ogień”, demanding a contribution of 300,000 zlotys (IPN Kr 06/1, t. 16, k. 111, Meldunek MO w Nowym Targu do Wydziału Specjalnego MO w Krakowie, August 1, 1946; see also IPN Kr 06/1, t. 14, k. 13, Odpis dziennika „Ognia”; IPN Kr 074/12, t. 2, k. 266, Charakterystyka nr 12).

⁸² The information concerning Dursztyn seems uncertain, as it is based solely on a mention in the memoirs of Stanisław Wałach (1919–1999), who in the post-war period, as the chief of the Department of Public Security in Limanowa, took part in the actions against “Błyskawica” (Wałach 1978: 472).

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the activity of “Błyskawica” in Spisz and Orawa was significant. As the appropriations are concerned, the testimonies indicate that in the areas inhabited by Slovaks, the 1st and 3rd companies carried out more such actions than in the villages dominated by the Polish population. In Spisz and Orawa, according to reliable sources, the “Błyskawica” partisans took at least several dozen horses, several dozen cattle, several dozen pigs, as well as other goods – such as wagons, harnesses, clothes and watches. On the other hand, there is not enough data to justify as high figures as provided by Milica Majeriková (2007b: 7) and Ludomír Molitoris (2017: 155). Moreover, given the quality of the sources, attempts to propose more accurate estimates seem risky.

It has to be added that Józef Kuraś’ soldiers appropriated some goods also across the southern border. As one of the researchers noted, the partisans treated Czechoslovakia as a hostile territory (due to Slovakia’s war-time collaboration with the German Third Reich and its post-war territorial claims; Korcuć 2015b: 451).⁸³ One may observe that Józef Kuraś’ subordinates acted in a similar way in those areas of Spisz and Orawa that were returned to Poland. Entries in the analyzed sources, which suggest that the assaults were aimed at Slovak activists, are rare and usually uncertain. It seems unlikely that the partisans, when carrying their actions in the borderland, would target only people suspected of anti-Polish deeds. More probably the property of the entire population of Spisz and Orawa was treated as a resource that the partisan group could use.

The cited sources describe the methods of obtaining supplies, but they do not explain why the civilians from the Polish-Slovak borderland were killed or beaten. The laconic entries in the notes and orders by Józef Kuraś are not conclusive.⁸⁴ Several historians emphasized that the post-war resistance acted in accordance with the high standards developed by the Polish Underground State [Polskie Państwo Podziemne] during the Second World War (Golik, Korcuć 2017: 24; Korcuć 2010b: 52; Musiał 2002). However, there have not been found any detailed documents proving that the men killed by the partisans in Spisz were engaged in anti-Polish activities – which could justify a death sentence, at least from the units’ perspective. On the contrary, according to Ludomír Molitoris, Ján Lapšanský from Nowa Biała in September 1939 fought in the ranks of the Polish

⁸³ As Maciej Korcuć stated, the livestock collected in Czechoslovakia – mainly cattle and horses – was usually sold in Poland (Korcuć 2015b: 452). It is confirmed by a number of documents (IPN Kr 009/4999 t. 2, k. 50, Doniesienie informacyjne, April 15, 1953; IPN Kr 110/3636, Akta Bolesława Byrdaka i innych).

⁸⁴ Maciej Korcuć referred to Michał Kužel as an example of a person killed for collaborating with Gestapo, although the only source indicating it is the alleged Józef Kuraś’ notebook (Korcuć 2015b: 567).

Army (Molitoris 2010: 176);⁸⁵ in turn, Paweł Bizub from Trybsz in 1940 cooperated with the Polish Underground State, leading general Władysław Sikorski's wife and daughter across the border (Molitoris 2017: 148–149). At this point it is worth recalling one of the last orders of Józef Kuraś, dated February 19, 1947. The document, addressed to the commander of the 2nd Company, orders the execution of two death sentences and the imposition of large financial contributions on fourteen people from Czarna Góra and Jurgów in Spisz.⁸⁶ There is no information in the files of security services that the order was carried out (as a result of the action of February 21, 1947, “Błyskawica” was disintegrated; Korcuć 2015b: 635–641). Assuming that such a large group of people from the borderland conducted anti-Polish activities, one should expect a firm reaction from the state apparatus – which, after Józef Kuraś' death, significantly strengthened its position in the region.⁸⁷ However, there is no trace in the analyzed files that the mentioned persons were brought to justice or even investigated, which raises further doubts.

Considering the causes of numerous actions in Spisz and Orawa, it should be noted that it was in the interest of “Błyskawica” soldiers, usually camping near Polish villages, not to expose their hosts to economic losses (Korcuć 2015b: 452; Musiał 2002). In this situation the expeditions to areas inhabited by Slovaks were a pragmatic solution, however, there are reasons to assume that the issue of nationality also played an important role here. Julian Kwiek wrote that after the war a deep division between Poles and Slovaks was revealed in Nowy Targ district (radicalized especially by the assaults that took place in Orawa in 1945; Kwiek 2008: 248). Relations on threats and insults directed at residents of Spisz by the partisans seem to confirm this. In spite of the cultural closeness of Poles and Slovaks from the borderland – including dialects, customs and values – the distinction between the Known and the Strangers was given a fundamental meaning (Gellner 2007). In the light of anthropological and sociological studies, such situations are conducive to escalation of violence, especially in conditions of anomie and crisis. At the same time perpetrators may feel indifferent or even justified, for the rules of their group do not apply to the Strangers (in other words, those, who are categorized as different, are excluded from the “universe of obligation”; Fein 1993). Harald Welzer called that phenomenon an effect of “particular morality”

⁸⁵ In September 1939 František Brodovský from Nowa Biała also fought in the ranks of the Polish Army. In the night of April 15/16, 1946, the partisans deprived him of some belongings; he fled to Czechoslovakia in fear of his life (Molitoris 2017: 150).

⁸⁶ According to the document, Józef Kuraś sentenced two men from Czarna Góra (Jan Wojtyczka and Waclaw Józef Antoszek) to death by hanging. What is more, fourteen people from Czarna Góra and Jurgów were listed, on whom contributions ranging from 20,000 zlotys to 100,000 zlotys were imposed. There is a laconic explanation next to it: “Slovak agitators” (IPN Kr 010/9989, k. 233–234, Odpis rozkazu „Ognia” do dowódcy 2. kompanii, February 19, 1947).

⁸⁷ Some researchers may disagree with this – for example Maciej Korcuć stated that there was some pro-Slovak activity in Czarna Góra and Jurgów, but the only evidence he gave was the Józef Kuraś order of February 19, 1947 (Korcuć 2015b: 462).

(Welzer 2009). In the study *Perpetrator: How normal people become mass murderers* [Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden], analyzing the participation of German society in the crimes of the Second World War, he argued that widening the intergroup distance makes violence easier to explain to oneself. Similar processes took place in Poland at the time of war and later and resulted, *inter alia*, in violence against Jews. That issue was insightfully analyzed by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (2017) – in the work *Pogrom Calls* [Okrzyki pogromowe] she gave many examples from the history of partisan units operating in Kielce region (central Poland). Such studies show that, as members of minorities are excluded from the circle of people to whom the usual morality apply, radical violence becomes possible – especially when there are other stimuli involved. As already mentioned, crimes against Jews were also committed by the "Błyskawica" soldiers. It is necessary to recall the massacre that took place on the night of May 2/3, 1946, near Krościenko – then a "Błyskawica" patrol assaulted defenseless civilians. After the partisans found out those people were Jews, they started shooting at them. The wounded were shot to kill. In sum, thirteen victims were murdered – men, women and children; their belongings were stolen (Korkuć 2015a; Panz 2015). It was the most tragic, but not the only crime committed by the members and cooperators of "Błyskawica" against the Jews. In the same year some of the perpetrators of the massacre in Krościenko – including Józef Dyda "Czarny" – carried out a series of actions in Slovak-dominated villages. It is highly probable that the effect of particular morality, justifying violence against the Strangers, was shaping also the attitude towards the people from Orawa and Spisz.

As Maciej Korkuć emphasized, the activity of Józef Kuraś' subordinates in the borderland should be seen as the aftermath of the entire Polish-Slovak conflict.⁸⁸ This postulate is difficult to reject, but it must be emphasized that in 1946 there was basically a one-sided clash, as well-armed partisan units stood against increasingly disintegrated Slovak communities.⁸⁹ Importantly, Maciej Korkuć admitted that the situation in Spisz and Orawa calmed down in the second half of 1945 (Korkuć 2015b: 277; see also Latowska 1987: 42). Therefore – on the contrary to that historian's suggestions – the actions of "Błyskawica" from the years 1946–1947 can hardly be considered as attempts to pacify the revolted Polish citizens of Slovak

⁸⁸ Maciej Korkuć said in an interview for the Polish Press Agency: "After the year 1945 the Slovaks tried to keep the borders that were set after September 1939, in agreement with Hitler. The conflict revived there with new force. At that time there were also Poles killed in Slovaks' actions. Even later Slovaks conducted anti-Polish agitation in these areas. «Ogień» fought it consistently. There was one case when several Slovak peasants were killed by the «Ogień»'s group in mysterious circumstances, but it was the aftermath of the entire conflict" (Korkuć 2012b).

⁸⁹ In 1945 the remnants of Slovak administration in Nowy Targ district were liquidated; Slovak priests and teachers were removed from their posts (Kwiek 1998: 168–188). In the second half of that year, as already mentioned, many Slovak activists and militiamen fled Poland (Majeriková-Molitoris 2013: 95).

nationality.⁹⁰ Those appropriations and acts of violence were rather postponed repressions against the Strangers than a reaction to an ongoing separatist activity. In other words, it seems the partisans punished the Slovaks from Spisz and Orawa for the earlier deeds of some members of that nation (although it cannot be excluded that some of the actions were targeted at individual “agitators” or “confidants”, it is certain that collective responsibility was also imposed). Paradoxically, this hypothesis may be supported by the memories of the “Błyskawica” commander’s brother, Wojciech Kuraś, who used the term “repressions” himself. Explaining the partisans’ actions in Spisz, he generalized the attitude of Slovaks: “And here you have to ask if they were in order with everything? Who was up against Poland? Whose priest did everything to detach Spisz from Poland?” (Kuraś 1982: 452). Symptomatically, Wojciech Kuraś referred here mainly to the incidents in Nowa Biała, which culminated in the aforementioned arrest of Father František Mós, in November 1945.⁹¹

In Nowa Biała there was a fight and long lawsuits over singing in Slovak language, and several Polish families live there as if they were on some volcano. The authorities did not really want to help the Poles, they were happy with the hatred, because it is easier to rule then. Could »Ogień« bear it? Those relations? Why did he conduct such severe repressions? At first he tried with persuasion, then with a warning, and finally with punishment, and he applied the same things as the [communist] party, the Department of Public Security or the Internal Security Corps troops applied to him (Kuraś 1982: 453).⁹²

In conclusion, the practice of imposing high collective contributions, as well as the scale of individual appropriations and the accompanying acts of violence indicate the partisans’ hostility towards the Slovak minority. Perhaps those actions can be partially explained by the mechanism of trauma and revenge, described by Lech M. Nijakowski (2013: 294). In a study *The Delight of Revenge [Rozkosz zemsty]* the researcher analyzed, *inter alia*, cases of repressions imposed on Germans in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War and

⁹⁰ Maciej Korcuć wrote: “In the years 1946–1947 the partisans consistently fought against separatist tendencies among the Slovak population” (Korcuć 2015b: 461; see also Golik, Korcuć 2017: 43).

⁹¹ Wojciech Kuraś (1900–1986) was a local activist and an employee of the Łopuszna commune office. When discussing “Ogień’s” attitude towards the people of Spisz, he also referred to the case of Jakub Długi from Nowa Biała, who was sentenced to two years in prison for the fact that “from September 9, 1947 to September 12, 1947 in Nowa Biała, Nowy Targ district, he stored without permission explosive materials and other devices, that is 50 grams of gunpowder, 6,5 meter of Bickford rope and 16 detonating caps” (IPN Kr 110/1986, k. 81, Odpis wyroku w sprawie Jakuba Długiego, October 28, 1947). Jakub Długi declared that he needed explosives to obtain rocks for construction purposes; “that explanation was good for children” – wrote Wojciech Kuraś (1982: 452). The event, however, took place more than half a year after the “Błyskawica” was disintegrated, so it has little importance for the subject.

⁹² No credible sources have been found confirming that Józef Kuraś was trying to alleviate tensions in Nowa Biała with verbal persuasion.

later. Killings, beatings, robberies and expulsions were not uncommon then, as many reacted to the earlier violence of the Third German Reich (Halicka 2015; Zaremba 2012). It is considered obvious that such acts on that scale would not be possible without widening the intergroup distance and the feeling of hatred provoked by the Nazi terror (Borodziej, Lemberg 2000). And probably a similar phenomenon occurred in the Polish-Slovak borderland. Many Poles could have seen the Slovaks as enemies, for their state was a part of the criminal alliance that killed several millions of Polish citizens. In delayed reaction to the aggression of the First Slovak Republic and the assaults of 1945, the Strangers from Spisz and Orawa were repressed. As the collective responsibility was imposed, the persons, whose nationalist attitude or other offenses are not indicated by the analyzed sources, suffered as well. And although it cannot be proven that it was the activity of "Błyskawica" that caused the mass emigration of Slovaks from Poland, it would also be illogical to assume that it remained without influence. The news of murders, humiliations and repeated appropriations spreading between the villages must have been a signal for many that there was no place for the Strangers in Nowy Targ district. In this perspective it is not hard to understand the Slovak opposition to the positive image of Józef Kuraś and his subordinates that is being popularized, *inter alia*, by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance. However, "Błyskawica" was not merely a gang, but a military group, organized on a war-time model and conducting an unconventional fight with the authoritarian regime. Still, it should be remembered that the economic repressions and acts of violence in Spisz and Orawa are a part of the group's history.

Bibliography

Literature

Andráš M.

2009 *Československo-poľské vzťahy v rokoch 1945–1948* in: M. Andráš, D. Segeš (eds.), *Susedstvo v čase prelomových zmien. Vybrané aspekty československo-poľských vzťahov v rokoch 1943–1948*, Bratislava, pp. 53–72.

Andráš M., Segeš D. (eds.)

2009 *Susedstvo v čase prelomových zmien. Vybrané aspekty československo-poľských vzťahov v rokoch 1943–1948*, Bratislava.

Borodziej W., Lemberg H.

2000 *Od redaktorów* in: W. Borodziej, H. Lemberg (eds.), *Niemcy w Polsce 1945–1950. Wybór dokumentów*, vol. 1, Warszawa, pp. 5–23.

Cenckiewicz S.

2014 *Oczami bezpieki. Szkice i materiały z dziejów aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL*, Warszawa.

- Ciągwa J.
2013 *Slovenskí kňazi v krakovskej arcidiecéze v rokoch 1920–1945*, “Z Dziejów Prawa”, vol. 6, pp. 233–255.
- Ciągwa J., Majeriková-Molitoris M.
2011 *Slovensky kňaz z Tribša František Móš*, “Z minulosti Spiša”, no. 19, pp. 31–41.
- Dereń B.
2000 *Józef Kuraś „Ogień”*. Partyzant Podhala, Warszawa.
- Fein H.
1993 *Genocide. A sociological perspective*, London.
- Foucault M.
1971 *L'Ordre du discours: Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris.
- Garbacz K.
2015 *U boku „Ognia”. Relacje i wspomnienia ludzi i żołnierzy Józefa Kurasia „Ognia”*, Kraków.
- Gellner E.
2007 *Nations and Nationalism*, Chicester.
- Golik D.
2011 *SS-Kampfgruppe „Matingen”*, “Prace Pienińskie”, vol. 21, pp. 93–112.
2012 *Trzy ucieczki „Ryśka” Ostaszewskiego* in: T. Balbus et al. (eds.), *Żołnierzowi Niepodległej. Księga dedykowana śp. gen. Mieczysławowi Huchli*, Rzeszów, pp. 125–147.
2018 *Wrzesień 1939 w dolinie Dunajca. Bój graniczny i walki nad górnym Dunajcem między 1 a 6 września 1939 roku*, Kraków.
2019 *Adam Domalik „Kowboj”*, Antoni Wąsowicz „Roch”, Kraków.
- Golik D., Korcuć M.
2017 *Józef Kuraś „Ogień” i zgrupowanie partyzanckie „Błyskawica”*, Kraków.
- Golik D., Pięciak K. (eds.)
2016 *Wytyczne Komendanta Okręgu AK Kraków płk. Przemysława Nakoniecznikoffa „Kruka 2” na okres po rozwiązaniu AK oraz opracowane przez podziemie informacje o metodach pracy NKWD*, “Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u”, no. 44, pp. 217–229.
- Golonka-Czajkowska M.
2019 *Anatomia konfliktu. O możliwościach wykorzystania dokumentacji lokalnego aparatu bezpieczeństwa w badaniach nad współczesnymi wyobrażeniami o Józefie Kurasiu „Ogniu” i jego podkomendnych*, conference paper, *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w perspektywie antropologii władzy i antropologii organizacji*, Kowary, 22 II 2019.
- Halicka B.
2015 *Polski Dzik Zachód. Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe oswajanie Nadodrza 1945–1948*, trans. A. Łuczak, Kraków.
- Jesenský M.
2014 *The Slovak–Polish Border, 1918–1947*, London.
- Korcuć M.
2007 *...o Orle w koronie. Zgrupowanie partyzanckie „Błyskawica”*, Kraków.
2008 *Ludność Podhala wobec podziemia niepodległościowego 1945–1947* in: R. Kowalski (ed.), *Wokół legendy „Ognia”. Opór przeciw zniewoleniu*, Nowy Targ, pp. 215–242.
2010a *Słowacki udział w wojnie. Okupacja polskiego Spiszu i Orawy*, “Biuletyn IPN”, no. 1–2, pp. 24–30.
2010b *Zgrupowanie „Ognia”*, “Biuletyn IPN”, no. 1–2, pp. 46–55.
2012a *Józef Kuraś „Ogień”. Podhalańska wojna 1939–1945*, Kraków.

- 2012b „Ogień” walczył o Polskę niepodległą, „Dzieje”, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/dr-korkuc-z-ipn-ogienwalczy-l-o-polske-niepodlegla> (access: 12.05.2019).
- 2015a *Zbrodnia pod Krościenkiem 2/3 maja 1946 roku*, „Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u”, no. 42, pp. 77–122.
- 2015b *Zostańcie wierni tylko Polsce... Niepodległościowe oddziały partyzanckie w Krakowskim (1944–1947)*, Kraków.
- Kowalczyk J.
2003 *Spisz podczas II wojny światowej i w pierwszych latach powojennych* in: R. Gładkiewicz, M. Homza (eds.), *Terra Scepusiensis*, Levoča, pp. 905–925.
- Kwiek J.
1998 *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w województwie krakowskim w latach 194–1949/50*, Kraków.
2002 *Z dziejów mniejszości słowackiej na Spiszu i Orawie w latach 1945–1957*, Kraków.
2008 „Ogień” wobec mniejszości narodowych in: R. Kowalski (ed.), *Wokół legendy „Ognia”. Opór przeciw zniewoleniu*, Nowy Targ, pp. 243–258.
2013 *Zabójstwa ludności żydowskiej w Krakowskim w latach 1945–1947. Fakty i mity*, „Kwartalnik Historii Żydów”, no. 4, pp. 679–695.
- Latowska H. (ed.)
1987 *Oddali życie w walce o nową Polskę*, Warszawa.
- Łątka J.S.
2007 *Bohater na nasze czasy? Józef Kuraś „Ogień” z Waksmundu – porucznik czasu wojny*, Kraków.
- Łoziński Ł.
2019 *Kontrowersje wokół Józefa Kurasia „Ognia” i jego podkomendnych. Narracje historyków oraz mieszkańców Podhala*, „Rocznik Antropologii Historii”, no. 12, pp. 191–226.
- Łukus E.
2009 *Prezydent II Rzeczypospolitej Ignacy Mościcki na Spiszu*, „Na Spiszu”, no. 3, pp. 33.
- Maciaszek M.
2010 *Od „Orła” do „Zawiszy”. Gorce 1943*, Nowy Targ.
- Majeriková M.
2007a *Protislovenský zápal „Ognia”, „Život”, no. 5, pp. 8–9.*
2007b *Protislovenský zápal „Ognia”, „Život”, no. 6, pp. 6–7.*
2007c *Vojna o Spiš. Spiš v politike Poľska v medzivojnovom období v kontexte česko-slovensko-poľských vzťahov*, Kraków.
- Majeriková-Molitoris M.
2012 *Gdzie zniknęli Słowacy z Górnej Orawy w 1910 roku?* in: M. Majeriková-Molitoris (ed.), *Tajne dzieje Górnej Orawy*, Kraków, pp. 103–106.
2013 *Vojna po vojne. Severný Spiš a horná Orava v rokoch 1945–1947*, Kraków.
- Meyer M., Wodak R. (eds.)
2009 *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, London.
- Michniak P.
2013 *Kilka uwag nad problematyką Górnego Spiszu i Górnej Orawy w latach 1945–1947*, „Dzieje Najnowsze” no. 2, pp. 175–186.
- Molitoris L.
2010 *Postoj Jozefa Kuraša „Ogňa” ku slovenskej národnostnej menšine na Spiši a Orave v rokoch 1945–1947* in: M. Majeriková (ed.), *Nepokojná hranica*, Kraków, pp. 157–196.
2012 *Okupacja Orawy?* in: M. Majeriková-Molitoris (ed.), *Tajne dzieje Górnej Orawy*, Kraków, pp. 115–122.

- 2017 *Dejiny Slovákov v Poľsku do roku 1961*, Kraków.
- Musiał F.
2002 *Mity i prawda*, „Dziennik Polski”, <https://dziennikpolski24.pl/mity-i-prawda/ar/2136784> (access: 17.11.2018).
2005 *Polityka czy sprawiedliwość? Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Krakowie (1946–1955)*, Kraków.
2008 *Skazani na karę śmierci przez Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Krakowie w latach 1946–1955*, Kraków.
- Ney-Krwawicz M.
2009 *Siły Zbrojne Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego*, Warszawa.
- Nijakowski L.
2013 *Rozkosz zemsty*, Warszawa.
- Olejko A.
2012 *Niedoszły sojusznik czy trzeci agresor? Wojskowo-polityczne aspekty trudnego sąsiedztwa Polski i Słowacji 1918–1939*, Rzeszów.
- Panz K.
2015 „Dlaczego oni, którzy tyle przecierpieli i przetrzymali, musieli zginąć?” *Żydowskie ofiary zbrojnej przemocy na Podhalu w latach 1945–1947*, „Zagłada Żydów”, no. 11, pp. 33–89.
- Pięciak K. (ed.)
2018 *Wykaz więźniów zbiegłych z więzienia św. Michała w Krakowie w latach 1945–1949*, „Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u”, no. 47, pp. 140–143.
- Piwowski S., Salwiński J.
1997 *Rozbicie więzienia św. Michała w Krakowie 18 VIII 1946 r.*, Kraków.
- Prochwicz J.
2016 *Powstanie Wojsk Ochrony Pogranicza. Wrzesień–grudzień 1945 r.*, „Studia z Dziejów Wojskowości”, vol. 5, pp. 215–242.
- Sikora Z.
2014 *Krwawy ślad. Nieznani bohaterowie Podhala*, Zakopane.
- Snyder T.
2010 *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York.
- Ślaski J.
2012 *Żołnierze wyklęci*, Warszawa.
- Ščurek F.
2001 *Vpád banditov do Novej Belej*, „Život”, no. 9, pp.15.
- Terej J.
1980 *Na rozstajach dróg. Ze studiów nad obliczem i modelem Armii Krajowej*, Wrocław.
- Tokarska-Bakir J.
2017 *Pogrom cries: Essays on Polish-Jewish history, 1939–1946*, Frankfurt am Main.
- Trajdos T.
2008 *Związek Spisko-Orawski i Związek Górali Spisza i Orawy w dokumentacji urzędów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, „Orawa”, no. 46, pp. 11–26.
- Wałach S.
1978 *Był w Polsce czas*, Kraków.
- Welzer H.
2005 *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*, Frankfurt am Main.

Wenklar M.

2010 *Na flankach Podhala. Trudny powrót Spiszu i Orawy do Polski po II wojnie światowej*, "Biuletyn IPN", no. 1–2, pp. 56–62.

White H.

2014 *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore.

Wójcik J.

2016 *Oddział. Między AK i UB. Historia żołnierzy „Łazika”*, Warszawa.

Zaremba M.

2012 *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947*, Kraków.

Zychowicz P.

2018 *Skazy na pancierzach. Czarne karty z epopei Żołnierzy Wyklętych*, Poznań.

Law Acts

Umowa między Polską Rzeczpospolitą Ludową a Republiką Czechosłowacką o ostatecznym wytyczeniu granicy państwowej, podpisana w Warszawie dnia 13 czerwca 1958 r., Dziennik Ustaw 1959 nr 25 poz. 159.

Sources from the Archive of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance

IPN Kr 009/34, Bolesław Byrdak –teczka personalna agenta ps. Wesoly.

IPN Kr 009/4999, Stanisław Bryja –teczka personalna informatora ps. Klucz.

IPN Kr 010/9989, Akta w sprawie Jana Kolasy.

IPN Kr 023/1/2, Sprawozdania, raporty i meldunki specjalne Referatu III PUBP w Nowym Targu z lat 1945–1950.

IPN Kr 023/2/1, Meldunki i raporty Referatu III PUBP w Nowym Targu z lat 1945–1947.

IPN Kr 06/1, Banda „Ognia”. Kryptonim „Ogień”.

IPN Kr 07/938, Wendelin Kuś –sprawa ewidencyjno-obszewacyjna.

IPN Kr 074/12, Charakterystyka nr 12. Nazwa organizacji: Oddział Partyzancki AK „Błyskawica”.

IPN Kr 110/1076, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Jan Ciacma, Marian Warzecha.

IPN Kr 110/1892, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Józef Dydą.

IPN Kr 110/1986, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Jakub Długi.

IPN Kr 110/3636, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Bolesław Byrdak i inni.

IPN Kr 110/4656, Akta w sprawie Władysława Kolasy.

IPN Kr 111/875, Akta w sprawie przeciwko: Ludwik Baliński, Adam Domalik, Edward Supergan, Antoni Wąsowicz.

IPN Kr 683/3, Wojciech Kuraś, Wspomnienia o mojej wsi Waksmund oraz własne od czasów zamierzchłych aż do dnia dzisiejszego, maszynopis niepublikowany, 1981–1982.

Sources from the National Archive in Kraków

ANKr 1319/O, Zespół 1. PSP AK.