ROCZNIK PRZEMYSKI t. 57
HISTORIA z.1 (26) 2021

ANDREW KIER WISE (Amherst, NY, USA)
orcid.org/0000-0003-0501-2986

MULTICULTURAL GALICIA IN AMERICAN POPULAR MEMORY: REFLECTIONS ON THE FILM *THREE STORIES OF GALICIA*

Abstract

Wielokulturowa Galicja w amerykańskiej pamięci popularnej: Refleksje nad filmem „Trzy historie Galicji"

This article deals with 21st-century American perceptions of the multicultural history of Galicia, especially during the interwar period, World War II and the Holocaust. The author primarily examines select books, articles and films that target a broad American audience. In particular, the film *Three Stories of Galicia* (2010) is analyzed, with a focus on the ways in which American audiences helped shape the directors' creative process. The Galician stories in the film thus became "Americanized" and "universalized" models for efforts at reconciliation in other troubled multicultural societies. The author also concludes that the "myth of Galicia" featuring the peaceful coexistence of peoples resonates especially with readers and viewers who envision a "post-racial America."

Keywords: Multiculturalism, "myth of Galicia," *Three Stories of Galicia*, "post-racial" America.

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy amerykańskiego postrzegania wielokulturowej historii Galicji w XXI wieku, zwłaszcza okresu międzywojennego, czasu II wojny światowej i Holokaustu. Autor analizuje przede wszystkim wybrane książki, artykuły i filmy skierowane do szerokiego amerykańskiego odbiorcy. W sposób szczególny analizie został poddany film *Trzy historie Galicji* (2010), z naciskiem na sposób, w jaki amerykańska publiczność pomogła ukształtować proces twórczy reżyserów. Historie galicyjskie w filmie stały się w ten sposób „zamerykanizowanymi" i „uniwersalizowanymi" modelami wysiłków na rzecz pojednania w innych nękanych konfliktami społeczeństwach wielokulturowych. Autor konkluduje również, że „mit Galicji" o pokojowym współistnieniu narodów trafia zwłaszcza do czytelników i widzów, którzy pragnęliby Ameryki „postrasowej".

Słowa kluczowe: wielokulturowość, „mit Galicji", Trzy historie Galicji, „postrasowa" Ameryka.

DOI: 10.4467/24497347RPH.21.011.14734

Introduction

During the Summer Semester in 2018, I taught several courses as Visiting Professor of History at Jagiellonian University. I taught primarily in a new program – "Studies in Central and Eastern Europe: Histories, Cultures and Societies" – directed by Professor Tomasz Pudłocki, a good friend and colleague with whom I have collaborated on several projects related to Galician history over the years. Prof. Pudłocki had kindly invited me to teach at the new program for one semester, and I eagerly accepted his gracious offer.

One course that I offered was an "Academic Writing Workshop," in which students studied the basic skills of historical research and writing. For one assignment, students were required to write an essay analyzing personal accounts told in the film *Three Stories of Galicia* (2010). This documentary film features personal accounts of World War II and its lingering impact in the lands of Galicia, as told from Jewish, Ukrainian, and Polish perspectives. Students were instructed to focus on an analysis of the use of oral history as a primary source for historical research.

While students responded with a variety of astute insights about the use of oral accounts by historians and filmmakers, their commentaries often went beyond the bounds of the assignment with critical assessments of the film itself. Indeed, students regarded the film as an example of a typical "Hollywood" take on a complex historical topic, exemplifying an unduly optimistic American narrative about the possibilities of peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society and the redemptive power of singular acts of humanity.

The classroom conversation was very interesting and thought-provoking, and it lingered with me as I have researched and reflected on American perceptions of Galician history. While Americans are not generally well-versed in the history of Galicia, there have been several recent books and films about experiences during World War II in this region that have resonated with audiences in the United States. In this essay, I will focus primarily on the film *Three Stories of Galicia* and its reception in America, especially in the context of the so-called "myth of Galicia." From my vantage point in a society today (2021) bedeviled by our own contentious history of a multi-racial society, it is possible to explain American interest in multicultural Galicia as a kindred place where various peoples sought for centuries to peacefully coexist.

The "Myth of Galicia"

In an album that accompanied a major international exhibition (featured in Kraków and Vienna in 2014-15) entitled *The Myth of Galicia*, Jacek Purchla posits that after the partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Galicia was "an artificial construct of Austrian diplomacy" and "primarily a distant and vast semi-colony of the Habsburg Monarchy." Purchla stresses the "oppressive nature

of the Austrian presence on the Vistula and the Dniester," and asks: "Why, then, is Galicia, still within us? . . . Where does its power and the attractiveness of its heritage come from today?"[1] In the same volume, Krzysztof Zamorski opines that the real "plethora of differences" that were ever-present in historical Galicia are now "being obliterated by the myth of the cultural polyphony of Galicia."[2] He presents us with a strikingly different perspective of life in Galicia:

> What we actually had was a territory abundant with peoples, denominations, and traditions. It is true that each of them found room for development, the more so as the days of Galicia occurred at a time of dynamic development of the new concept of the nation. Yet any conception of consonance, polyphony or primordial model of the European Union must, however, be discarded this instant. What must actually be heard in Galicia is a cacophony of traditions, intentions, and ambitions. What must be perceived is a sea of mutual accusations, more or less justified. This is a territory where Ukrainians and Poles despised each other . . . Poles were not overfond of Ruthenians nor Ukrainians of Poles; both detested Jews, who repaid them with the same. . . .[3]

Other contributors to the volume, such as Emil Brix, observe that today "Galicia is seen as an example of Central European diversity" and that "the myth of Galicia appears to lend the region an identity to this day."[4] Purchla agrees that despite losing much of its multicultural diversity due to the horrors of the world wars and their aftermath, Galicia "remains . . . as a special space for mythologisation . . . a territory where memories meet: memories of Poles, Ukrainians, Austrians, Jews, but also Czechs, Hungarians, and Armenians."[5]

In this essay I discuss the American vision of Galicia as a land of multicultural possibilities, especially as presented in the film *Three Stories of Galicia* (2010). The film tapped into an American audience that had long been interested in the region. As Jacek Purchla explains:

> the memory of a 'paradise lost' is today exterritorial. We find it not only on both sides of the San River, in Lviv and Kraków, but also, for example, in Wrocław and Vienna, in Jerusalem and Haifa, and in Brooklyn and California. The mass emigration of two million Galicians in the 19th/20th century to the United States certainly contributed to the internationalisation and spreading of Galician mythology. . . . .[6]

In our 21st century encounters with Galicia, Delphine Bechtel explains that "[t]he idyllic and nostalgic memory linked to a no longer existing cultural landscape coexists with

[1] Jacek Purchla, "Galicia after Galicia, or: On the uniqueness of the myth of the "vanished kingdom." In *The Myth of Galicia*, ed. Jacek Purchla and Wolfgang Kos (Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2014), 87.

[2] Krzysztof Zamorski, "On Galician myths," in *The Myth of Galicia*, 130.

[3] Ibid., 130-131.

[4] Emil Brix "Galicia as an 'Austrian' myth," in *The Myth of Galicia*, 100-102.

[5] Purchla, "Galicia after Galicia," in *The Myth of Galicia*, 88.

[6] Ibid.

the search for a dark past that has left wounds in personal and collective memories."[7] The film *Three Stories of Galicia* presented American audiences with this challenging history at a time when they optimistically embraced a world of possibilities for our own multicultural society. My particular focus is on dialogue between the filmmakers and audiences during previews and screenings of the film in the United States. Blog accounts provided by the filmmakers provide us with an interesting look at the way in which American viewers embraced Galicia as a proxy for helping them understand other troubled multicultural societies around the world. The film provides American viewers with a cautionary tale, as well as personal stories of hope and redemption.

Galicia in American Popular Memory

Writing in 2010 in the concluding chapter to his book entitled "Haunted Epilogue: Galicia after Galicia," Larry Wolff provides an interesting overview about the region's enduring place in popular memory.[8] While Wolff's focus is primarily on "Galician nostalgia" in Europe, he reminds us that Americans have long encountered Galician themes in the translated works of Joseph Roth, Bruno Schulz and other writers. Moreover, the 1990s saw an upsurge in important books, articles and films with Galician themes that targeted American audiences. The work of Prof. John J. Hartman and his foundation *Remembrance and Reconciliation Inc.* is well-known to residents of Przemyśl and readers of this journal.[9] In addition to his efforts to preserve the "new" Jewish cemetery in Przemyśl, Prof. Hartman was one of the editors for an important collection of memoirs dealing with the Holocaust in Galicia.[10] Many of the accounts included in the book – from Jews as well as from "the Other Side of the Ghetto" – were provided by Galicians who later emigrated to America. Although their primary focus was on their wartime experiences, the memoirists also provide insights about the Galician legacy in Przemyśl during the interwar period.

More recently, two notable memoirs about the Holocaust in Galicia appeared in English: *The Diary of Samuel Golfard* (2011) and Leon Frim's *Seasons in the Dark: The Road from Przemyśl to Nazi Hell* (2011).[11] A close reading of Frim's

[7] Delphine Bechtel, "Remembrance tourism in former multicultural Galicia: The revival of the Polish–Ukrainian borderlands," *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 16, no. 3 (2016): 206.

[8] Larry Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010): 383-419.

[9] For an overview, see John J. Hartman, "Discovering Galician History: A Personal Journey," *Rocznik Przemyski* 52, no. 1 (19) 2016: 215-226.

[10] John J. Hartman and Jacek Krochmal, eds. *I Remember Every Day . . . The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl during World War II.* Tr. Agnieszka Andrzejewska (Przemyśl, Poland: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu; Remembrance & Reconciliation Inc., 2002).

[11] See Wendy Lower, ed. *The Diary of Samuel Golfard and the Holocaust in Galicia* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011) and *Leon Frim, Seasons in the Dark: The Road from Przemyśl to Nazi Hell*, foreword by David Silberklang (New York; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, 2011). For a more thorough review of Frim's memoirs, see Tomasz Pudłocki, "Przeżyć Holocaust. Z Przemyśla do Buchenwaldu," *Rocznik Przemyski* 50, no. 3 (2014): 269-273.

lengthy memoir provides many details related to the "myth of Galicia." Born in 1892 in Lemberg (Lviv), Frim served as an officer in the Austrian army during World War I. His memoir references the physical and cultural artifacts of Galician society in his life, and also the complex and sometimes toxic relations among Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles before World War II and especially during the war and the Holocaust. Frim immigrated to the Boston area, so his memoir thus represents an important reflection by an American about his Galician experiences. The documentary film *No Place on Earth* (2012) also has an American connection. Spelunker Chris Nicola, who lives in New York City, uncovered artifacts from the Holocaust in Galicia in 1993 while exploring caves in Ukraine. The film highlights the story of the Sterner and Wexler families from the Korolówka area in Eastern Galicia. These families survived the Holocaust by hiding in caves from the winter of 1942 until April 1944. A key feature of the film is the relations of the Jews with their Ukrainian neighbors. Some provided help, while others collaborated with the Nazi occupiers. The film thus provides American viewers with another account of the complex story of multicultural Galicia.

Other recollections in English have been published in *Rocznik Przemyski* and are thus accessible for American readers. A brief memoir by Canadian Pola Histor (1921-2015) deals with pre-war Galicia (including Przemyśl), including recollections about strained Polish-Jewish relations prior to the war.[12] More expansive on these matters is the memoir of Israeli film director Alfred Steinhardt (1923-2012), who recalls his boyhood in Przemyśl. Although he had Polish friends at school, he also describes anti-Semitism that excluded Jews from some organizations and sometimes led to hostile encounters. For example, Steinhardt describes the "physical risk" that one took to attend soccer matches that pitted a Catholic club against a Jewish club.[13] Przemyśl is also the setting for *Renia's Diary*, which was first published in Poland in 2016. An English-language excerpt appeared in the *Smithsonian Magazine* in November 2018 and a full English translation was published in 2019. The documentary film *Broken Dreams* (2019) also features the story of Renia Spiegel and her sister Ariana. While the Galician setting may be different, the format of a young woman's coming-of-age memoir set during the Holocaust is familiar to many Americans, and this tragic story of "the Polish Anne Frank" has also been covered widely in media.[14]

Perhaps most notable – and more popular among American readers and viewers – are the Galician stories about singular acts of humanity and redemption

[12] See Pola Hister, "My Story. From Sanok Through Przemyśl to Canada," intro. and ed. Abraham (Avi) Schonbach, *Rocznik Przemyski* 52, no. 1 (19) 2016: 191-214.

[13] Alfred Steinhardt, "Memories of My School Days in Przemyśl, 1928-1939," preface Lenore Steinhardt and ed. Tomasz Pudłocki, *Rocznik Przemyski* 49, no. 3. *Historia* (2013): 239-248.

[14] For example, see Joanna Berendt, "Diary of Slain Jewish Girl in Poland to Be Released in English," *New York Times*, 25 September 2019. For a more thorough review of Spiegel's diary, see Tomasz Pudłocki, "Przemyski fenomen na skalę światową. Dziennik Reni Spiegel", *Rocznik Przemyski. Literatura i Język* 56, no. 2(24) (2020): 227–231.

during the Holocaust. The most prominent example is the story of the Podgórska sisters, who became broadly known to Americans in 1994 when the story of Stefania and Helena was featured in the popular magazine *Reader's Digest*.[15] Recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations" in 1979, the sisters hid thirteen Jews in the attic of their home in Przemyśl from September 1943 to July 1944. Their heroic efforts in wartime Przemyśl were also told in a made-for-television film called *Hidden in Silence* (1996), which also featured the appealing love story between Stefania and one of her Jewish friends (Munio Diament, who later took the name of Josef Burzmiński, married Stefania and immigrated to America). More recently, Sharon Cameron authored a novel (*The Light in Hidden Places*, 2020) about this episode in Galician wartime history that is aimed at young adults. Cameron based her novel on extensive research, including interviews with family and friends, a visit to Przemyśl and a close reading of Stefania's unpublished memoir.

Three Stories of Galicia

American interest in the documentary *Three Stories of Galicia* (2010) can thus be better understood in this broader context of films, articles and books about World War II and the Holocaust that deal with the region. The film was directed by American University graduate students Olha Onyshko (born in Lviv, Ukraine) and Sarah Farhat (born in Lebanon). The "three stories" are narratives about Aharon Weiss, Olia Ilkiv, and Father Stanisław Bartmiński. Now a historian in Israel, Weiss contextualizes his memories in an effective way.[16] For example, he provides the film with an important motif about the possibilities of coexistence and reconciliation among the peoples of Galicia as he recalls how Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian boys played soccer together in Borysław, Poland (now Boryslav, Ukraine) before the war. The Weiss family account is very compelling in this regard. Aharon and his family (8 people) were saved by Polish and Ukrainian neighbors: Poles Anna and Michał Góral; Poles Maria Potężna and her son Tadeusz; and the Ukrainian couple Yulia and Roman Shchepanyuk. These neighbors hid the Weiss family in three different locations from July 1941 to August 1944. All these neighbors are now recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations," and their actions exemplify the filmmakers' stated goal of showing the redemptive power of humanity when "ordinary people [reach] out to the other side to do what was right instead of what was easy."

[15] See Thomas Fleming, "Stefania's Choice," *Reader's Digest* (August 1994): 131-136.

[16] Prof. Aharon Weiss (b. 1928) has published several works dealing with the Holocaust in Galicia. He immigrated to Israel and became a historian at the Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research and Education. His younger brother, Shevach (b. 1935, not featured in the film), is a political scientist who also became a politician, even serving as Knesset Speaker (1992-1996) and Israeli ambassador to Poland (2001-2004).

The Weiss story is complicated by the fact that Yulia's son was a collaborator who served in the Ukrainian police squads organized by the Nazi occupiers. When Soviet NKVD officers came looking for him in 1944 after the Red Army had occupied Boryslav, the Weiss family returned the favor to Yulia by hiding her son for several weeks in the same basement where they had hidden for 16 months. As Aharon recalls in the film: "It was very similar to what happened to us when we came and asked her: 'Yulia save us!' Now she came with the same plea to my mother. And they [his parents] told her yes." Weiss asks the interviewer, and the viewer: "Do you understand our dilemma?[17] We knew what he was doing [during the war]. . . . But I think my parents did the right thing when they decided to help her [Yulia] out." Aharon Weiss thus personifies the film's message of reconciliation. In an epilogue, he is shown organizing retreats in Ukraine where Jewish, Ukrainian, and Polish youth can "discover and appreciate" the complex and intertwined histories of the peoples of Galicia.

The concluding story in the film, the account of Father Stanisław Bartmiński and his activities in contemporary Poland, also fits well with the film's focus on remembrance as a way to reconciliation. Ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1960, Father Bartmiński has long played a leading role in the historic preservation of Ukrainian and Jewish cemeteries and houses of worship in Krasiczyn and surrounding towns. The region had been devastated by Nazi and Soviet occupations during World War II, as well as the subsequent border wars among Poles and Ukrainians. Father Bartmiński emphasized in his concluding remarks that Galicia "was the motherland for three great nations. We cannot deny it. We have to remember it. We started restoring all these cemeteries to honor the land that was once culturally diverse." He even authored a story of "star-crossed lovers" (a young Polish woman and a Ukrainian man) who overcome the objections of their antagonistic families and marry. Featured in the long-running Polish soap opera *Plebania* (*Vicarage*, which ran from 2000-2012), the story's theme of reconciliation fits perfectly within the directors' vision of the film.

The other Galician story, which appears second in the film, features the recollections of Olia Ilkiv. This narrative does not really deal with the same issues as the other two stories in the film. Rather than focusing on pre-war multiculturalism, its destruction during World War II, and efforts today to keep memories of Galicia alive through historic preservation efforts, this episode highlights one woman's heroic resistance to Soviet oppression. As a member of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Olia Ilkiv resisted the imposition of Soviet power in her native Lviv, Ukraine (Lwów, Poland before the war) and the surrounding region at the end of World War II. Her husband was killed in military action for UPA, and she undertook dangerous missions, too, such as managing a village safe house for UPA commander Roman Shukhevych. Ilkiv was captured in 1949 and tortured by Soviet

[17] Interestingly, the film originally bore the title of *Land of Dilemmas*.

secret police, and she spent 14 years in prison while her two children grew up in an orphanage. This story does not deal with Jewish-Ukrainian-Polish relations in any depth; thus, it does not explore the issues of multicultural coexistence in Galicia as effectively as the other two stories.

Rather, the filmmakers present Ilkiv's story ultimately as a vindication of faith in humanity. In 1963, she finally agreed to write an appeal for clemency as a way to gain freedom and see her children. As it turns out, one of Ilkiv's Soviet interrogators had sent her a holiday card each year while she was in prison. Aged 90 at the time of filming, Ilkiv explains her emotional journey: "I used to think that KGB were not humans. That they didn't have feelings. My hatred was so great that I could only look down on them with disgust. But now, looking back, I see that some were humans and some even felt things very deeply." Ilkiv's account also exemplifies another key theme in the film: outside forces (Nazi and Soviet occupiers) exacerbated preexisting societal tensions and drove men and women to acts of violent hatred. In this narrative, outsiders bear a great deal of responsibility for failed Galician attempts at peaceful coexistence. As the filmmakers emphasize, the peoples of Galicia had been victimized by outside powers Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as they fueled "ethnic conflicts among Ukrainians, Poles and Jews in order to advance their own political interests."[18]

Three Stories of Galicia as an "American" Film

A native of Lviv and a graduate from the University of Lviv, Olha Onyshko moved to America in 2002. In 2006 she was pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts in Film and Electronic Media at American University, where she met Sarah Farhat. The creative process for making *Three Stories of Galicia* began in 2006, when Olha Onyshko went back to her hometown "[w]ith a digital camcorder in hand, and an interest in hearing people's stories."[19] Initially, Onyshko's focus was primarily on her hometown, because "it is one of the rare cities in Europe that was characterized by such an extreme multi-cultural diversity from medieval until modern times."[20] This mix of peoples and cultures in Lviv was radically altered by the world wars. As Larry Wolff notes, "Habsburg Lviv was, before World War I, 50 percent Polish, 27 percent Jewish, and 20 percent Ruthenian. After World War II, the population of Soviet Lviv was 60 percent Ukrainian, 27 percent Russian, 4 percent Polish,

[18] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2008/video-installation-to-be-displayed-as-part-of-artomatic-exhibit/ (accessed 9 February 2020). Unfortunately, this blog is no longer active and the site is not accessible. However, a Facebook site can still be accessed.

[19] UNIAN Information Agency, https://www.unian.info/society/193824-land-of-dilemmas-would-you-risk-your-life-to-save-your-enemy.html (accessed 9 February 2020).

[20] *Three Stories of Galicia* http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2008/lvivs-mental-map/(accessed 9 February 2020).

and 4 percent Jewish."[21] The transformational impact of World War II and the Holocaust – not just in Lviv, but in Galicia as a whole – would quickly become the focus of Onyshko's film project.

Onyshko later reflected on the origins of the film in an interview in May 2010 with the BBC at the Cannes Film Festival, where *Three Stories of Galicia* was one of the Ukrainian entries. She emphasized that the film grew out of her interest in what the peoples of Galicia as a whole had experienced in World War II. Her interviews in Lviv in 2006 had focused on that time period, and she began to form a narrative for the film:

> I heard the story of Aaron Weiss, the hero of our first story. He spoke about his childhood, about the city where Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish families lived. . . . . It struck me so much that I wanted to talk about it. . . . It seems to me that Ukrainians, especially in Galicia, are very concerned with history and often get hung up on suffering and their own indifference, having been in a position of social injustice for a long time. However, I wanted to show that there are also other views, other worlds – there were also Poles and Jews.[22]

Onyshko and Farhat presented a video installation of their work-in-progress in early 2007 in Lviv and in the United States, where it was well-received. A year later, they traveled to Ukraine and Poland, where they recorded more than 150 hours of interviews and related footage.[23] They also started an on-line blog and a Facebook page to update people about the creative process. Their entries include accounts of their filming in Galicia, screenings of the film abroad and in the United States.

My attention was drawn to blog entries that recorded the reactions, insights and commentary from American viewers who screened the film at various stages of the creative process. Discussions after screenings often related to the "myth of Galicia" and the possibility of peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. Curiously, viewers did not draw comparisons to American society and the difficult episodes of racialized hatred in American history. Nevertheless, in many ways the film became a proxy – an opportunity – for American audiences to discuss problems in other multicultural societies around the world.

In April 2008, the documentary in progress (at that time called *Land of Dilemmas*) was screened in Washington, D.C. at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation. The filmmakers explained to curious audience members how they became so interested in a project about Galicia. Onyshko explained that only after leaving her childhood home of Lviv did she

[21] Wolff, *Idea of Galicia*, 408.

[22] *BBC News*, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/world/2010/05/100512_khomenko_cannes_1_sp.shtml (accessed 9 February 2020).

[23] UNIAN Information Agency, https://www.unian.info/society/193824-land-of-dilemmas-would-you-risk-your-life-to-save-your-enemy.html (accessed 9 February 2020).

> realize that Ukrainians were not the only ones living in that part of the world and that there were other communities who suffered [during World War II] as well. She also became aware of the fact that the young people of today should get a better understanding of the different versions of history in this part of the world in order to be able to reach tolerance and understanding.[24]

Sarah Farhat confessed that when she first met Onyshko in the fall of 2006, she did not know much about Galicia. However,

> she quickly became fascinated by the stories of people who were able to show such courage in the midst of tremendous hardship. She also took this matter to heart since her home country Lebanon was torn by horrific religious and ethnic conflicts during a civil war that lasted for fifteen years. She also started to realize that the ethnic conflicts fueled by the interests of big powers in Galicia-Halychyna were not so different from those that led to the war in her country.[25]

Indeed, in the BBC interview from 2010, Onyshko explained more fully her partnership with Farhat and how they both envisioned the universality of the film's key themes:

> She [Sarah] is from Lebanon – something very similar to what happened in Galicia during World War II is happening there now [2010]. . . That is why she was attracted to Ukrainian stories – they are very similar. These are stories of the victory of the spirit, stories of how to go beyond rejection. . . . their problems are largely common to all.[26]

In their blog entries the filmmakers emphasized that American viewers "were very enthusiastic about this difficult topic and very supportive of the idea of the film."[27]

Although the film clearly establishes the specific historical context for the film, Onyshko and Farhat simultaneously came to view Galicia as a case study for better understanding the possibilities for reconciliation in other multicultural societies. They hoped that their film would "foster a dialog around issues that are still very sensitive today."[28] Their three stories featured people who "refused to be caught up in the general hatred derived from inter-ethnic conflicts and risked everything in order to save the life not only of strangers, but also of members of an ethnic or religious group perceived to be their enemy."[29] Onyshko and Farhat clearly believed that "the film represents more than just a specific ethnic and religious conflict. . .

[24] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2008/first-community-building-event/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[25] Ibid.

[26] *BBC News*, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/world/2010/05/100512_khomenko_cannes_1_sp.shtml (accessed 9 February 2020).

[27] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2008/first-community-building-event/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[28] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2008/video-installation-to-be-displayed-as-part-of-artomatic-exhibit/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[29] Ibid.

This film will remind us that even under the worst circumstances, human beings are fundamentally the same regardless of race, ethnicity or religion."[30]

This process of "universalization" of the three stories from Galicia is evident throughout 2009, as the directors continued to shape their film in light of feedback from American audiences. In mid-March, they previewed part of the film at George Washington University. Over 50 people attended the screening of a 15-minute clip about Ukrainian-Polish relations. In early April the filmmakers benefited from a private fundraising event for *Land of Dilemmas* (as the film was still called at that time). They blogged that the event was "very fun, informative and fruitful. We screened a 20-minute segment that we have edited so far as well as the trailer and held a Q&A discussion afterwards" with the audience of more than 25 people. They emphasized that "the discussion held after the screening allows us to see how the audience responds to our work, which makes them active participants in creating the film. We benefit a great deal from this because we can see which themes resonate better with the audience and what issues we should emphasize on."[31]

Thus, while filming took place on location in Galicia, the editing and shaping of the narrative was completed in the United States. And this process integrated feedback from American audiences, who were very receptive to the "universality" of the themes of reconciliation and redemption that became central to the film. Increasingly, audiences began to view the filmic stories from Galicia as a sort of proxy for Americans to better understand problems in other multi-ethnic societies, too. This "Americanization" – and subsequently, the "universalization" – of the film was clearly evident at the American premiere of the final version at Landmark's E Street Cinema in Washington, D.C. on 10 May 2011. After the screening, a discussion was moderated by Nadia Diuk of the National Endowment for Democracy. In her opening remarks, Diuk commented:

> For anyone involved in supporting democracy there is another valuable lesson contained in this film. In any situation where ethnic, religious or national groups are in conflict, even though reconciliation may seem unlikely and impossible, and the experts claim that "centuries of hatred" prevent dialogue, the first step almost always comes on the basic level of simple humanity. There will always be people who choose to follow their conscience and go against the tide to do the right thing, to connect to positive, human values, as opposed to what is expected or what is easy.
>
> We are already one or two generations away from the three stories told in this film about people who lived through one of the most devastating periods of history. But these stories are not unique to either time or place. We have seen similar situations more recently in former Yugoslavia, Africa, and the Middle East. By presenting these stories, the filmmakers remind us that there is always the light of hope in every

[30] UNIAN Information Agency, https://www.unian.info/society/193824-land-of-dilemmas-would-you-risk-your-life-to-save-your-enemy.html (accessed 9 February 2020).

[31] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2009/more-updates/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

> desperate situation, and that faith in the basic courage and decency of ordinary people will always prevail in the end.[32]

This screening and others in the Washington, D.C and Baltimore areas were transformational for the filmmakers, as their own perceptions of the film increasingly reflected audience responses about the "universality" of the stories from Galicia. Indeed, Onyshko and Farhat wrote in their blog in May 2011 that

> [u]p until last week, we couldn't help but feel that we were just two foolish idealists. Reconciliation? Building bridges? Starting a dialogue among communities who still feel the pain of the past? Those concepts that were the starting point of our film started to feel like empty clichés that we were almost ashamed to say out loud.
> It all changed over the course of last week. On May 10th, 11th and 12th, *Three Stories of Galicia* had its US Premiere with three showings at Landmark Theaters in the DC and Baltimore area. It was an absolute success that went beyond our expectations. The three showings were packed and at the same time very emotional. People were crying and laughing, and for us, the filmmakers, that was a fantastic reward. But even more gratifying were the audience's comments during the post-screening discussion.[33]

Commentary from audience members thus confirmed the filmmakers' vision about human nature, and the capacity for people to reach out to "others" during times of crisis. For example, at a screening on 12 May 2011 in Bethesda, Maryland, a Jewish Survivor from Boryslav (the hometown of Aharon Weiss) shared that she was placed by her parents in the care of "an illiterate Ukrainian woman who adopted her and saved her from an almost certain death. . . . That was an incredibly moving story, at the end of which we all had tears in our eyes."[34] At that same screening, a Jewish Survivor from Lviv explained the film's impact on him. He was the only wartime survivor in his immediate family and he had immigrated to the United States after the war to live with an uncle. The man said that he still found it

> very hard to forgive Ukrainians because a part of them sided with the Germans during the War . . . He then told the audience that watching the film was very much like a healing process; he was able to see that there were other Ukrainians as well, those were people who were brave, who were kind and who risked their own lives to save someone else even if they were from an ethnic or religious group perceived to be as the 'enemy.'[35]

In November and December 2011 the final version of the film was also shown at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and in Chicago. One screening was organized by the Kyiv and Warsaw Committees of Chicago Sister Cities International and drew a crowd of nearly 300 persons. The filmmakers recall that

[32] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2011/introductory-remarks-at-the-landmark-e-street-showing/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[33] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2011/three-stories-of-galicia-u-s-premiere-in-dc-baltimore/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

> The audience of Chicago was very generous and emotionally involved. Towards the end of the film, people were laughing very hard in all the places we expected them to and even in places that we didn't think people would find funny. The emotions even spilled over during the discussion and there was a moment where we thought that people might actually start a fight. We think that the film does bring up a lot of painful memories and sometimes people need to let all those emotions out that were boiling inside of them for quite a long time. But as things calmed down, we got very hopeful, seeing that most of the audience members were able to accept each other's pain and continue the discussion around those very sensitive topics.[36]

In subsequent screenings, such as one sponsored by Columbia University's Harriman Institute in New York City in October 2012, the conversation about reconciliation became more explicitly universalized. The audience at this screening was especially diverse, the directors noted, "both in terms of ethnicity and also age groups. And maybe because of that diversity, the discussion went from the specifics of Ukrainian--Jewish-Polish relations into the broader question of what is redemption, how soon can redemption happen after tragic events occur and if it can happen at all."[37]

Conclusion: America and the "Myth of Galicia"

Three Stories of Galicia presents American audiences with an opportunity to learn about the horrific events of World War II and the Holocaust and their aftermath. The three stories of individuals provide firsthand accounts of the will to survive and the struggle to cope with memories of the past. The personal accounts highlight moments of heroism and humanity that seemingly provide a hopeful vision of multicultural amity. Embracing the "universality" of these core issues in *Three Stories of Galicia* was a key reaction at early American screenings of the film. This notion was emphasized in later public screenings in Europe, too. In 2013, a "European Tour" brought the film to 10 cities, including the "Galician" cities of Przemyśl (31 May) and Kraków (2 June). But first, the film was shown at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw on 29 May. There the discussion was moderated by two Polish journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Konstanty Gebert and Paweł Smoleński), who emphasized "the film's upbeat, positive, and healing message" and "the universality of the film and how its lessons and messages could be so easily and constructively applied to the Middle East, Africa, Asia, etc."[38]

The American filmmakers and American audiences clearly perceived an element of truth in the "myth of the cultural polyphony of Galicia."[39] Moreover,

[36] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2011/amazing-chicago-two-screenings-and-a-panel-discussion/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[37] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2012/columbia-university-screening/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[38] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2013/beginning-of-the-european-tour-screening-at-the-jewish-history-museum-in-warsaw/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

[39] Zamorski, "On Galician myths," 130.

the possibilities for reconciliation and redemption presented by the three stories seemingly provided exemplars for troubled regions around the world. Indeed, the filmmakers even delivered presentations in 2009 at the U.S. Department of State for American foreign service officers preparing for work in Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic States. Onyshko and Farhat were especially interested in that opportunity, since they wanted to use the film for "different educational purposes."[40] This is understandable and laudable, since *Three Stories of Galicia* is an intelligent, well-crafted and provocative film, and it can be an effective tool for teaching about World War II and the Holocaust in Galicia.

For American audiences who screened *Three Stories of Galicia* in 2008 or 2009, or who watched the film after its release in 2010, the personal accounts from the lands of old Galicia also intersect with a more universalized narrative about the possibilities of reconciliation. This film's message resonated with audiences who were optimistic about a "post-racial" America heralded by the election of Barack Obama as President. However, as one reconsiders the film in 2021, in an America bedeviled by racial tensions, polarized by "culture wars" and challenged by "post-truth" politics, it is easier to understand my Jagiellonian students' contentions in 2018 that *Three Stories of Galicia* perpetuated a mythologized view of the past and an unduly optimistic vision of the future. Today, the film – and the "myth of Galicia" – appear in a different light. Galicia's history reads more like a cautionary tale about the unravelling of communities torn by internecine strife. In the American case, however, there are no outside powers – Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, for example – who can be blamed for inflaming old hatreds and manipulating jealousies into violent action. Instead, the peoples in multicultural America will need to acknowledge responsibility for the current crisis and responsibly deconstruct their own historical myths as a way toward redemption and lasting reconciliation.

[40] *Three Stories of Galicia*, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com/2009/more-updates/ (accessed 9 February 2020).

Bibliography

Memoirs:

Frim, Leon. *Seasons in the Dark: The Road from Przemyśl to Nazi Hell*. Foreward by David Silberklang. New York; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, 2011.

Hartman, John J. "Discovering Galician History: A Personal Journey," *Rocznik Przemyski* 52, no. 1 (19) 2016: 215-226.

Hartman, John J. and Jacek Krochmal, eds. *I Remember Every Day . . . The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl during World War II.* Tr. Agnieszka Andrzejewska. Przemyśl, Poland: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu; Remembrance & Reconciliation Inc., 2002.

Hister, Pola. "My Story. From Sanok Through Przemyśl to Canada," intro. and ed. Abraham (Avi) Schonbach, *Rocznik Przemyski* 52, no. 1 (19) 2016: 191-214.

Lower, Wendy, editor. *The Diary of Samuel Golfard and the Holocaust in Galicia*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011.

Spiegel, Renia "Hear, O Israel, Save Us." Translated by Anna Blasiak and Marta Dziurosz *Smithsonian Magazine* 49, no. 7 (November 2018): 46-63.

_____. *Renia's Diary*. Preface, Afterword, and Notes by Elizabeth Bellak with Sarah Durand. Foreword by Deborah E. Lipstadt. Translated by Anna Blasiak and Marta Dziurosz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019.

Steinhardt, Alfred. "Memories of My School Days in Przemyśl, 1928-1939." Preface Lenore Steinhardt and edited by Tomasz Pudłocki, *Rocznik Przemyski* 49, no. 3. *Historia* (2013): 239-248.

Films:

Broken Dreams. Directed by Tomasz Magierski. 70 min. Smoking Mirror Productions, 2019.

Hidden in Silence. Directed by Richard A. Colla. 90 min. Hearst Entertainment Productions et al., 1996

No Place on Earth. Directed by Janet Tobias. 83 min. Magnolia Pictures, 2012.

Three Stories of Galicia. Directed by Sarah Farhat and Olha Onyshko. 86 min. Sense Film, 2010.

Websites:

BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/

Three Stories of Galicia, http://www.threestoriesofgalicia.com

UNIAN Information Agency, https://www.unian.info/

Other Sources:

Bechtel, Delphine. "Remembrance tourism in former multicultural Galicia: The revival of the Polish–Ukrainian borderlands." *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 16, no. 3 (2016): 206-222.

Berendt, Joanna. "Diary of Slain Jewish Girl in Poland to Be Released in English." *New York Times*. 25 September 2019.

Brix, Emil. "Galicia as an 'Austrian' myth." In *The Myth of Galicia*, edited by Jacek Purchla and Wolfgang Kos, 97-103. Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2014.

Cameron, Sharon. *The Light in Hidden Places*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2020.

Fleming, Thomas. "Stefania's Choice." *Reader's Digest* (August 1994): 131-136.

Pudłocki, Tomasz. "Przemyski fenomen na skalę światową. Dziennik Reni Spiegel", *Rocznik Przemyski. Literatura i Język* 56, no. 2(24) (2020): 227–231.

_____. “Przeżyć Holocaust. Z Przemyśla do Buchenwaldu,” *Rocznik Przemyski. Historia* 50, no. 3 (2014): 269-273.

Purchla, Jacek. “Galicia after Galicia, or: On the uniqueness of the myth of the “vanished kingdom.” In *The Myth of Galicia*, edited by Jacek Purchla and Wolfgang Kos, 87-91. Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2014.

Wolff, Larry. *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Zamorski, Krzysztof. “On Galician myths.” In *The Myth of Galicia*, edited by Jacek Purchla and Wolfgang Kos, 129-133. Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2014.