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Introduction

IMAGINE A DISTANT place, barely within a traveler's reach, "where once there was forest upon forest and marshes and moors,"¹ and "beautiful highlands [...] with narrow and wide river beds, dark forests, also with flourishing villages and friendly towns." The deeper you travel into this breathtaking landscape, the more you forget the busy streets of Europe's capitals, and "the more wonderful the magic of this small Carpathian world" seems.² This was how the authors of the *Kronprinzenwerk*, an encyclopedia of the Austro-Hungarian lands commissioned by the Crown Prince and published between 1886 and 1902, described Bukovina, a place most readers would not have been to or known. A few might have learned about it from reading Karl Emil Franzos's travel sketches, published in May 1876 under the title *Aus Halb-Asien*, "From Half-Asia."

Though born into a German-speaking Jewish family in the Galician town of Czortków, Franzos was not an outsider in Bukovina. Shortly after his father's death, the young Karl Emil had moved to Czernowitz, then Bukovina's provincial capital, to study at the city's German-language *Gymnasium* (secondary school; plural *Gymnasia*). Here he finally felt "like a German among Germans."³ He read Goethe and Heine and became deeply enamored of German humanism. He dreamed of studying philosophy, but he was poor, and would have had to convert to Christianity to be eligible for a government stipend. Franzos ultimately decided to follow in his father's footsteps and study law in Vienna. He returned to Czernowitz in the summer of 1868 and wrote his first novella, *Das Christusbild*, about a Jewish ghetto.⁴ A few years later, he gave up law to continue writing, despite being repeatedly rejected by publishers.

In 1874 he had a breakthrough: the *Neue Freie Presse*, Austria's most prestigious newspaper, began publishing his travel sketches of the monarchy's easternmost territories and south Russia and Romania, the borderlands he called "Halb-Asien." Little did Franzos know what staying power that name would have. Bukovinans would come to think of themselves and their province as balancing uneasily between worlds, always on the verge of sliding out of Europe and back into the presumed backwardness of the East.

In *Aus Halb-Asien*, Franzos painted the portrait of Bukovina as a traveler approaching by train would have seen it. From a compartment window, the province would have appeared neat and charming. After many hours of travel through Galicia's dark and muddy expanses, Bukovina gave Franzos the impression that he was "in the West, where *Bildung*, good manners, and white tablecloths could be found" once more.⁵ It looked like a flourishing little piece of Europe, like a mirage "in the middle of the Half-Asian cultural desert." In this "blessed land," Franzos wrote, "the soil is better cultivated and the cottages are friendlier and cleaner." More astonishingly, people here "wore the clothing and spoke the language [. . .] customary between the Kinzig and Neckar" in Germany.⁶

But the mirage lasted just fifteen minutes, the time it took to descend from Czernowitz's center into the lower city. In the so-called Judenviertel, the city's oldest quarter, the Western-looking cafes and hotels gave way to "small and pathetic houses" inhabited by "people in caftans and women with curious headgear." Here the city reminded Franzos of a "Podolian ghetto"—not a term of endearment, for he was an acerbic critic of life in Eastern Europe's Jewish ghettos.⁷ A few streets on, the city changed faces yet again, with onion-domed Orthodox churches replacing the synagogues, and Russian baths and straw-covered huts surrounded by corn fields, brown heathlands, and forest. One could be forgiven for thinking oneself in the middle of Ukraine, although, as Franzos reassured the reader, "we are still in a district of the city of Czernowitz and still a good distance from its boundary."⁸

Atop the hill called Habsburgshöhe, the visitor would come face to face with one of Czernowitz's most prominent and awe-inspiring edifices: the Greek-Oriental archbishop's residence. Built in Moorish style, decorated with colorful mosaics and crenelated towers reminiscent of minarets, the *Residenz* transported viewers to Spain, the Arab lands, or the Byzantine empire. Farther down, along the shores of the Prut river, Czernowitz morphed again, now evoking the landscapes of industrial Britain with "stone buildings and smoke coming out" of its factories, the "air heavy with coal smoke." At the city's farthest end, by the Austriaplatz, the urban landscape gave way to the "uninhabited steppe which stretches for miles upon miles." Here Bukovina resembled the American prairie, untamed by pioneers.⁹

When I visited Chernivtsi (as Czernowitz is now called) in the fall of 2013, the journey was as long and arduous as Franzos's had been over a century earlier. Traveling there, whether by bus from Kyiv or Lviv, or Kishinev in neighboring Moldavia, or by train from Bucharest or Moscow, feels like journeying to the end of the world. When you get off the train and make your way into the old Austrian-built railway station, you think you have arrived in the middle of an ordinary Central European town, no different from Graz or Linz. But as you



FIGURE 0.1. Czernowitz's formerly majestic synagogue (see Figure 2.4), located in the city center, is now a cinema. Locals call it the "kinahoha" in jest. Photo by author, 2013.

walk up the hill, into the city proper, you are greeted by apartment buildings that seem to have been lifted straight out of interwar Bucharest or Paris.

Walk past the city hall, and you come upon an imposing building painted white and pale blue with a large clock above its entrance. On either side of the door posters advertise Hollywood's latest productions, which you can watch there. Once a synagogue with a cupola and imposing towers in Moorish Revival style, the building now looks strangely incomplete without them. The Soviets converted it into a cinema (*kinoteatr*), and locals call it "kinahoha." Further out, this Austro-Romanian city becomes a Soviet provincial town, with ornate administrative buildings and residences giving way to Khrushchev-era prefabricated apartments, lined up like rows of matchboxes. Just feet from a prominent monument to Bukovina's liberation by the Soviets is a life-size statue of Emperor Franz Joseph, who has a new lease on life these days as young Ukrainian residents look to Chernivtsi's Habsburg imperial past to distance themselves from Russia.

A patchwork of architectural styles and symbols, Bukovina bears the marks of repeated regime change. Successive attempts to remake the province, from its emergence as a self-standing entity in the late eighteenth century to its

partition during World War I and again in 1944–45, have created a confusing yet marvelously complex landscape that seems to inhabit multiple epochs and spaces simultaneously. Caught in successive geopolitical transformations, Bukovina was repeatedly annexed and lost by different states. Again and again, it found itself in the middle of disputes for regional supremacy between competing empires or their successor states: at first Poland, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire; then Romania and Ukraine, then the Soviet and Nazi empires. Handed from one polity to another, Bukovina underwent several revolutions and counterrevolutions, becoming, as historian David Rechter writes, “a conduit for transmitting all manner of ideas, goods, and people between Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and even between Europe and Asia.”¹⁰

This book tells the story of the successive attempts to integrate Bukovina into different polities, remaking it in the process, and of the people who lived there amid transformation and reinvention. The chapters to come explore how state officials, urban elites, and villagers in Bukovina made sense of the ideologies handed down from the centers of power, and how they participated in and were shaped by changing governance practices.

Bukovina may seem like a “faraway country” inhabited by people “about whom we know nothing”—as Neville Chamberlain said of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Arguing for its significance is less difficult today, when the war in Ukraine has once again focused the world’s attention on Eastern Europe. Through the little-known story of Bukovina, this book seeks to explain how Eastern Europe got to such a point, and what might come next. Moreover, however small or insignificant Bukovina may seem, its story is also very much the story of many other contested borderlands across the globe, from Kashmir and Manchuria to the Bay of Bengal, and from the Caucasus to Alsace-Lorraine.¹¹ These regions have been laboratories of experimentation with different forms of statehood, governance, and ideologies, from imperialism, to nationalism, to socialism. They have experienced multiple attempts to reimagine not only the world, but time itself. This book invites readers to view the past three centuries from the perspective of a European periphery whose story highlights how central competition is to modern statehood, the endurance of empires and their legacies, and the unexpected convergence of the various ideological projects that shaped the modern world.

A Multivalent History

The following pages aim to offer an overarching, perhaps even, in a sense, a “total” history of Bukovina, constituting the first *longue durée* study of the province in the English language. The narrative does not, as one might expect

from Fernand Braudel's use of that term, extend past human memory or trace changes in climate, landscape, or environment over the long term.¹² But it does look at one region over the course of almost two centuries. This extended temporal perspective has two main advantages. First, it sheds light on mutual influences and connections between regimes and polities separated not only by different ideologies, but by time. The reason for these connections, I argue, is that the different states and political actors in Bukovina ended up shaping each other through competition, emulation, and absorbing each other's legacies.¹³ Second, a long-term perspective allows us to better understand a region profoundly shaped by polities that left complex cultural and intellectual legacies. The long view lets me underscore the asynchronous nature of change in the East European borderlands, where the end of a state's political existence rarely meant the end of its cultural and institutional life. At the same time, state-led projects often remained unfinished, or were carried out halfheartedly and on the cheap.¹⁴

This is a history decompartmentalized across not only time, but space. It follows in the footsteps of Gaëlle Fisher, Mariana Hausleitner, Kurt Scharr and other historians whose works combine the histories of rural and urban populations in Bukovina in one narrative.¹⁵ Some of the richest literature on Bukovina focuses on Jewish urban life, and especially on its provincial capital, Czernowitz. In part, this is because urban Jews left behind more written sources and are more visible than other communities in newspapers, memoirs, and institutional archives, especially from the Austrian period. They were deeply involved in municipal affairs and unusually powerful economically and politically, particularly before World War I.¹⁶ They helped transform Czernowitz into an urban center with great ambitions—if not plentiful resources. They were the city's coachmen, merchants and store owners, and professionals. Their stores—bearing their owners' names, “Leon Fuhrmann,” “Ehrlich,” “Leon Wagner”—lined Czernowitz's main street, the Hauptstrasse, which connected the train station to the city center dominated by the elegant *Rathaus* with its tall clock tower.

Descendants of Czernowitz Jews still visit Chernivtsi today and participate in projects to preserve the memory of Bukovinan Jewish life, such as the rehabilitation of the Jewish cemetery and the foundation of a Jewish museum in the city center. Marianne Hirsch, a literary scholar and descendant of a Jewish family from Czernowitz, wrote with Leo Spitzer one of the best books on the city: *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (2011), a mélange of history and memoir with ruminations on nostalgia and homecoming. But though Czernowitz looms large in memory and imagination, it was actually a small part of the province. Most Bukovinans lived in the countryside—a perpetual source of fear and fascination for city dwellers who



FIGURE 0.2. Postcard (1910) showing the main street in Czernowitz, Hauptstrasse, featuring the *Rathaus* (city hall) in the background, and Jewish shops. Public domain.

struggled to draw sharp limits between their city and the surrounding villages.¹⁷ Bukovina's Romanians, Ukrainians, and Germans were predominantly rural.

In merging Bukovina's rural and urban histories, the present volume also seeks to overcome the ethnic fragmentation that prevails in the existing literature on the region. In Bukovina, as elsewhere, history writing was central to the forging of competing nationalisms.¹⁸ From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Ukrainian and Romanian historians worked to prove that their respective ethnic and national groups had settled Bukovina first and were therefore entitled to the territory. More recently, a new generation of historians from the region have begun questioning nationalist myths and traditional interpretations of the region's history. Even so, a Romanian-authored two-volume encyclopedia of Bukovina published in 2000 barely mentions any non-Romanians. The tendency is still either to focus on one's own national group or, at the other extreme, to sentimentalize Bukovina's multicultural past to demonstrate the Europeanness of its present-day inhabitants. By contrast, this book portrays Bukovina as a site of entanglements and interactions between different ethnic groups, without taking sides or uncritically depicting it as a kind of multinational paradise lost.¹⁹

To do so, the book draws on a vast and diverse body of materials in a variety of languages (Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, German, French, Yiddish), mined from archives and libraries in six different countries. Since the administrations and people who came to and went from Bukovina often took pieces of its past with them, researching the region's history is a painstaking process akin to reconstructing a broken glass pane from hundreds of shards scattered across the world. The only sensible approach to studying Bukovina's tangled past is transnational and comparative, since traditional historiographical boundaries do not adequately represent Bukovinans' experiences. Bukovina's most prominent late nineteenth-century historian, Raimund Friedrich Kaindl (1866–1930), knew this: “we will have to go first to the east and north, and then back to the west and across the Danube to the south to gather all the historical facts which concern our Bukovina, which influenced it and continue to do so. No local history can be separated from the history of neighboring regions and this is all the more so in the case of Bukovina's history.”²⁰

Since this state of affairs is hardly unique to Bukovina, this book moreover makes an argument for studying Eastern Europe and Europe as a whole across traditional chronological and geographical boundaries. Although historians are now exploring cross-border and transnational phenomena in Europe, most historiography remains siloed and fragmented between different areas of specialization.²¹ Trained either as Ottomanists or Habsburg historians, as Russianists or Sovietologists, historians tend to stick to their own turf. But this option was not available to Bukovinans, who had to become specialists in multiple empires and polities over the course of one lifetime. Historians of the region need to do the same.

Although it is not a global history in the usual sense of the term, this study shares with global histories the desire to shift attention from capitals and power centers to see how small and apparently remote places were embedded in larger contexts and interactions. It deliberately focuses on the story of a political and economic periphery to make an argument for the significance of small, seemingly marginal places.²² Yet much of what we call “global history” aims to chip away at stories of Western exceptionalism, or “provincialize” Europe, as Dipesh Chakrabarty memorably put it.²³ Here, I show that we need not leave Europe to find complexity and difference. Power differentials structured relationships among European actors too: Europe was a continent of great powers and small states, of economic giants and countries that lagged behind, of rulers and the ruled.²⁴ Places like Bukovina remind us of the multiperspectival, complex nature of European history, a history made up of a multiplicity of stories, often clashing.

As global historians and practitioners of micro-history have observed, foregrounding small, marginal places presents several advantages. Such places offer

new angles of vision from which to observe the great powers anew and notice phenomena that may not be visible elsewhere.²⁵ Moreover, marginal places have often been central to the development of states and the global order's overall evolution. "What Europe has been and done since the second half of the nineteenth century," historian Holly Case writes, "has hinged on how marginal states interpreted its role and function in international relations."²⁶ Even peripheries that struggled economically have made key contributions to the cultural and intellectual lives of imperial heartlands.²⁷ Peripheries have always been important to empires' expansion and survival,²⁸ especially during transitional periods when political and cultural systems were reinvented and revamped.²⁹

In fact, Bukovinans' intellectual and moral universe revolved around a deep preoccupation with peripherality and marginality that shaped virtually everything, from their interactions with the states that governed them to their interpretation of ideologies and experience of change.³⁰ Many of them felt marginal not merely because they lived far from the center of power, but because, coming from a place that straddled multiple worlds, they did not feel they truly belonged anywhere.³¹ In her memoir, Pearl Fichman, a former resident of Czernowitz, recalled that she felt "fake" her entire life. Though born on Romanian soil in interwar Romania, Fichman came from a German-speaking Jewish family who kept Austrian traditions. They lived in Romania but "ate Wiener Schnitzel and drank spritz," "listened to German classics," and read "Schiller, Goethe, Heine."³² This failure to be completely integrated, whether into a polity, nation, or culture, became a defining feature of many Bukovinans' lives.

Sometimes, anxieties about peripherality translated into an overwhelming fear of being left behind and forgotten, of dropping out of history. At other times, these feelings gave rise to a sense of superiority and exceptionalism. Some Bukovinans came to believe that because they were located on the margins of states, they had privileged insight into those states. Bukovinan Germans felt more German than their counterparts in Berlin. The writer Gregor von Rezzori (1914–1998), who built his entire literary identity around his Bukovinan origins, claimed that they made him a "free man" who "thinks every ideology stupid."³³ Philipp Menczel, a local journalist, could never forget or forgive the man he met visiting a spa resort in Germany, who asked him if Czernowitz was anywhere near "Kattowitz," a Polish town over four hundred miles away.³⁴ Such encounters reminded Bukovinans that power inequalities persisted between residents of a small province and metropolitans, even if the latter were in reality the more provincial, and the former the more cosmopolitan.

As people like Menczel knew only too well, being marginal did not mean being static, backward, or disconnected from the rest of the world.³⁵ Bukovina's location on a geopolitical fault line ensured that it was always connected to people and places far beyond its borders, and meant too that it was located

at the epicenter of the revolutions and transformations that eventually encompassed all of Europe. In highlighting these aspects of its history, I join other historians of Eastern Europe in their efforts to “de-provincialize” Bukovina. Many have done this by tracing the various forms of exchange and circulation that tied it to the rest of the world.³⁶ I argue instead that we can see it as a microcosm of Europe, and a lynchpin between that continent and the world beyond. Precisely because of its marginality, Bukovina’s history offers a parable about the modern age, a time defined by bold aspirations for change coupled with a perpetual feeling of loss and homesickness.

A Short Biography of Bukovina

Bukovina was a product of empire, a completely new geopolitical entity or, as Larry Wolff writes about the neighboring province of Galicia, a “new world [. . .] invented in the rational spirit of enlightened statecraft.”³⁷ There was nothing predetermined or inherently logical about Bukovina’s boundaries: in fact, the province emerged as a self-standing entity through an unexpected turn of events. When it came into being, Austria was buttressing its position in East Central Europe after regaining Hungary from the Ottomans in 1699.³⁸ The Habsburgs conceived of their empire as a bastion of civilization and protector of Christianity against the Ottomans, a “bulwark and guardian of Europe against Asiatic elements of every kind.”³⁹ In the east, a new expansionist power was on the rise: Russia, whose empress Catherine the Great hoped to reach Constantinople, clashing with the Ottomans in a series of wars. The war of 1768–74 ended with the Ottomans’ defeat, marking a “quantum leap in Russia’s international position.”⁴⁰

Although Austria did not directly participate in the war, it gained something: in return for Austria brokering the peace, the Ottomans ceded to it the northwestern corner of the principality of Moldova, then under Ottoman suzerainty. A small, fragile state, Moldova bordered the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. Austria’s new territorial conquest, located at the converging tips of three clashing empires, in a *triplex confinium*, would be called Bukovina.

At its annexation by Austria in 1775 the territory was sparsely populated and thickly forested. It measured 10,440 square kilometers (4,030 square miles) and counted between seventy thousand and seventy-five thousand residents, mostly speakers of Moldavian (Romanian) or Ruthenian (Ukrainian).⁴¹ It had no obvious physical delimitations other than the river Dniester in the north and the river Prut in the east, and the bulk of its population raised cattle in the valley between the two rivers. More than half of the territory was covered with forests ripe for exploitation. Agriculture was relatively underdeveloped due to

Bukovina's scarce arable land, most of it the property of the Orthodox Church, the province's largest landowner. Empress Maria Theresa's son and (officially) co-ruler Joseph II believed this northwestern corner of Moldova, though not especially large or rich, had strategic value, and that annexing it would facilitate transportation and movement between Austrian-ruled Hungary and Galicia, which the Habsburgs had taken from Poland a few years before. And so, Bukovina came under Habsburg rule. Initially under temporary military administration, it was incorporated into Galicia-Lodomeria in 1786. It took local elites more than fifty years to persuade the Habsburgs that Bukovina deserved its own administration. They finally succeeded in 1860, when the province was granted a separate administration and provincial parliament.

Bukovina remained under Austrian rule until World War I, when it was successively occupied and liberated by the armies of the Russian and Austrian empires. Shortly after the Austrians definitively recovered it, Austria-Hungary collapsed, and Bukovina once more became the object of territorial contestation. Ukrainian and Romanian politicians both claimed it, arguing that the province was indispensable to their respective nation-states. The dispute was resolved in the Romanians' favor, and Bukovina was incorporated into Greater Romania in the fall of 1918, an outcome made possible by the simultaneous collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Leaders of the newly created successor states, including Romania, were confident that history was on their side. They all sought to tie their newly incorporated provinces to new national centers and metropolises, an especially difficult task in Bukovina because of the Habsburg Empire's enduring legacies. By the 1930s, the Romanian authorities in Cernăuți were losing patience with Bukovina, which refused to look and feel Romanian. Meanwhile, Bukovinans of all ethnicities, Romanian and non-Romanian, were feeling increasingly alienated from an administration they believed did not adequately represent their interests.

In accordance with a secret provision of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact signed in August 1939 by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Romania lost Bukovina's northern half to the Soviet Union in 1940. The almost one year that northern Bukovina spent under Soviet rule proved truly transformative, as the Soviets implemented more drastic changes than the Romanians had achieved over two decades. The Soviets came armed with an ideology and state apparatus designed to bring about revolution "from abroad."⁴² As soon as they landed in Cernăuți, renamed Chernovtsy and then Chernivtsi in Ukrainian, they launched collectivization and mass literacy campaigns, re-enacting, decades later, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. They disseminated propaganda across the province, including the deep countryside that had eluded the reach of previous administrations. Wielding the weapons of total

war, the Soviets set into motion demographic transformations that would continue through the war and postwar years, completely transforming the province's northern half.

When Adolf Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, it caught the Soviets in Chernivtsi by surprise. Backed up by their German allies, Romanian troops entered northern Bukovina and reclaimed it, along with most of the territories they had lost to the Soviets the previous year. Having experienced occupations in World War I, some Bukovinans felt they knew what to expect. But as they painfully discovered, Nazi Germany and its Romanian ally, as well as the Soviet Union, were completely new entities, with totalizing ambitions the likes of which Bukovinans had never experienced. The returning Romanian administration came to northern Bukovina poised to achieve what they had failed to do earlier: namely, to tie the province to the nation-state for good and remove any chance of losing it again. This was a tragedy many attributed to the machinations of ethnic minorities, above all the Jews, who had allegedly invited the Soviet troops into Bukovina in 1940.

This time around, the Romanians could use war circumstances to achieve nationalization on an unprecedented scale, implementing previously unthinkable policies. Taking advantage of Nazi Germany's patronage, they carried out the wholesale deportation of Bukovina's Jewish population. But as the tides of war changed again in the Soviets' favor in 1944, the Romanians lost northern Bukovina once again. The Red Army reincorporated it into Soviet Ukraine, where it remained until the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. Since then, the province once known as Bukovina has been divided between independent Ukraine and Romania.

Although the specifics of Bukovina's story are unique, some readers may find striking similarities between its history and Galicia's.⁴³ Both provinces, though poor and marginal, gave birth to tremendous cultural riches. Devoid of material and political power, they were nonetheless symbolically significant, looming larger in the imagination than they ever did physically. They were both at the center of endless myths and legends through which different states and political actors told stories about themselves. There are perhaps as many stories about Bukovina as there ever were people living there. Nationalists—Ukrainian and Romanian above all—were prolific writers of legends and creators of “invented traditions” in Bukovina.⁴⁴ Dreaming of a pristine, ethnically authentic Bukovina buried beneath the surface of the present, they chased chimeras in hopes of recapturing what had allegedly been lost through denationalization.⁴⁵ With every political rupture and takeover, moreover, state administrations also took the opportunity to rewrite Bukovina's history. Such recasting of the province's past and future was indispensable to these regimes' efforts to reimagine it as an integral part of their own polities.

But in other respects Bukovina is quite different from Galicia. First, its ethnic landscape was considerably more variegated than Galicia's; for much of its history, many ethnic groups inhabited its relatively small space. Austrian statistics recognized six different ethnic groups (*Volksstämme*) living in Bukovina, classified by their languages of daily use (*Umgangssprachen*): Ruthenians, Romanians, Germans, Poles, Magyars, and "others."⁴⁶ Unlike in Galicia, whose population was pretty evenly split between Poles and Ruthenians, Bukovina's *Volksstämme* had "an uneasy balance of power with none able realistically to claim political or cultural dominance in the manner for example that Poles managed in Galicia."⁴⁷ Romanians and Ruthenians together constituted the bulk of Bukovina's rural population (74.41 percent). Romanians, unlike Ruthenians, were well represented among the landowning, educated elite.⁴⁸ Like Galicia's Poles, Bukovina's Romanians were recognized by the Habsburg administration as the more powerful group and were recruited into the imperial administration.

Although the ethnic composition of Bukovina's population changed over time, its chronic diversity remained a source of concern for all its subsequent administrations. The Austrians were the only ones to take pride in it, likening the province to a "microcosm of the Danube monarchy."⁴⁹ Austrian poet Ludwig Simiginowicz-Staufe (1832–1897), born in Bukovina to a German mother and Ukrainian father, believed that Bukovina's diversity was one of its main selling points.⁵⁰ Since "Romanians, Russians, Israelites, Germans, Magyars, Poles, Great Russians, Slovaks, Armenians, Gypsies are all represented here," he insisted, any resident of the Habsburg monarchy would feel at home in Bukovina.⁵¹ The head of Bukovina's Austrian gendarmerie Eduard Fischer reflected that people who "develop on such soil will not easily be able to maintain their racial purity, and under these circumstances there arise mostly mixed types, often entire groups change their languages and customs, and through this living together and in each other's midst the unique characteristics of different races become diminished."⁵² For the nationalists, as we will see, this was a serious problem. To their exasperation, the inhabitants of Bukovina proved all but impossible to categorize according to national-ethnic criteria.⁵³ The high degree of cultural intermixing that prevailed there defied nationalists' most basic assumptions about the world.

Like Galicia, Bukovina was home to a large Jewish population, but Bukovinan Jews were generally more urban and acculturated, and occupied more politically and economically prominent positions, than their Galician counterparts. Prior to World War I, Jews accounted for 33 percent of Czernowitz's population, making Bukovina's capital the empire's fourth largest Jewish city after Vienna, Lemberg (modern Lviv), and Kraków.⁵⁴ Jews played an especially important role in Czernowitz in the 1870s and 1880s, after Austria became a constitutional monarchy.⁵⁵ The city—a symbol of imperial modernity—grew alongside them, its history impossible to disentangle from theirs. Bukovinan

Jews owed their success in part to their fluency in German, the language of culture, administration, and socio-economic mobility.

Some Bukovinan Jews, like the poet Paul Celan's mother, for example, took pride in their impeccably pronounced *Hochdeutsch*.⁵⁶ But most spoke a dialect affectionately called "Bukowienerisch," a linguistic mélange that combined the Viennese lilt with Romanian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish inflections and alluded to their ambitions of turning Czernowitz into a miniature Vienna. Thanks to Bukovina's German-speaking Jews, the German language retained its prominent position in the province long after its use had dropped in Galicia and elsewhere in the empire. This was why the young Karl Emil Franzos, whose father had been a German patriot, left Galicia to pursue a German-language education at the *Gymnasium* in Czernowitz. For as long as he lived, he viewed Czernowitz as the "antechamber to the German paradise," a cultural island where "European *Bildung* [culture, education] and Asian barbarism, European love of progress and Asian indolence" came face to face.⁵⁷

Even today, Bukovina is known mainly through the prose and poetry of its German-language writers, most of whom were Jewish. It remains anchored in German cultural space as the symbol of a lost Germanophone Atlantis. The German-Jewish poet Rose Ausländer, born in Czernowitz in 1901 (d. 1988), claimed she owed her writerly sensibility entirely to Czernowitz and "that special landscape. The special people. Fairy tales and myths were floating in the air, one breathed them in. The four-language Czernowitz was a musical city, which sheltered many artists, poets, lovers of art, literature, and philosophy."⁵⁸ In exile in Germany and living out of suitcases in a hotel, Ausländer remembered her native city as "both beautiful and ugly," as "architecturally in bad taste and uninteresting, but in its landscape lovely and with an idiosyncratic allure." Above all, she remembered Czernowitz as a cultural paradise where literature and philosophy were discussed "with ardor," a city filled with disciples of "philosophers, political thinkers, poets, artists, composers, or mystics," where people read "in the streets, in parks, in forests, and by the shores of the Prut."⁵⁹ The German writer Georg Heinzen echoes Ausländer, describing Czernowitz as a city steeped in intellectual discourse, where "a new aesthetic theory was invented every morning," where "dogs bore the names of Olympian gods and hens scratched verses by Hölderlin in the sand."⁶⁰

Borderlands and States

In the mid-eighteenth century, sovereignty became associated with territory and political control came to be seen as bounded. As a result, borders became markers of modern state sovereignty, helping to "determine the nature of the state"⁶¹ and marking "the actual power of states over societies."⁶² By contrast, early modern states were typically "non-territorial, not exclusive or fixed," with

no “clearly designated geographic limits to authority.”⁶³ Spaces of empire were traditionally demarcated by “irregular and porous borders” and contained “enclaves and irregular zones and areas of partial or shared sovereignty.” Once sovereignty was defined along territorial lines, the “uneven, disaggregated, and oddly shaped” political geographies of early modern empires gave way to a new constellation of clearly bounded territorial modern states.⁶⁴ Sovereign border control became the marker of being “a civilized country.”⁶⁵ With the emergence of nationalism, borders took on additional significance as markers of homeland territoriality, a new way of thinking about land that deepened its symbolic value by investing it with “both material and invented properties.”⁶⁶

Bukovina’s existence as a frontier district of the Habsburg Empire began in the late eighteenth century, about the same time as the emergence of the concept and practice of modern state sovereignty. Throughout its history, it remained a border province, located on the edge of territorially bounded states. After World War I, Bukovina became Greater Romania’s northernmost district, bordering Poland and the Soviet Union. During World War II, a new frontier between two empires, Nazi and Soviet, ran straight down the middle of Bukovina, turning the province into the site of a colossal ideological battle and separating the newly expanded Communist world from the capitalist one. That border still splits the territory once known as Bukovina, separating the European Union from non-EU Eastern Europe, a border some have described as Europe’s last Iron Curtain.

For each state that ruled Bukovina, the frontier province played a special role, both for security reasons and because it was a site of mutual observations and encounters, where states showcased their policies and ways of life. To rule Bukovina, each polity adopted a version of “frontier governmentality,” a set of governmental norms, administrative practices, and legal regimes peculiar to frontier areas across the world.⁶⁷ Even the Soviets, whose revolutionary, internationalist ideology aspired to make borders redundant, were preoccupied with their westernmost frontier. Like their tsarist predecessors, they wanted to delimit and defend state frontiers, which now had new ideological meaning.⁶⁸

Given the significance of borders to modern states, it is unsurprising that borderlands have generated a wealth of historiography. Although this literature is vast and varied, it revolves around a few general tropes and themes.⁶⁹ Most historians seem drawn to borderlands histories because they allow them to overturn narratives that may otherwise seem self-evident or set in stone.⁷⁰ In other words, borderlands histories are alluring because they show what might have emerged had history taken a different turn. Histories of borderlands often highlight failure, especially that of modern states to carry out their projects and impose their visions of “territorial and social control.”⁷¹ Books in this

genre often highlight the way in which modern states, initially confident in their ability to exercise complete sovereignty and render political space uniform, discover that they lack the muscle and resources needed to establish hegemony over territories far distant from the metropole.⁷² Or, as anthropologist James Scott put it, modern states fail because “the state simplifications” they require to operate fail to represent “the actual activity of the society they depicted.”⁷³ Borderlands histories highlight the complexity of the societies modern states attempted to rule. They emphasize intermingling and hybridity, presenting borderlands as zones of “contact and transition”⁷⁴ that give rise to “malleable identities” and “syncretic cultures”⁷⁵—and inhabited by people highly skilled in disputing state control.⁷⁶

At first sight, this narrative of state powerlessness in the face of social complexity appears to describe Bukovina’s experience well. In some respects, the province always remained outside the polities that governed it, challenging their claims to legitimacy and repeatedly failing to conform to their expectations. Upon closer examination, however, this interpretation barely scratches the surface. First, it fails to account for important differences between modern states.⁷⁷ By emphasizing their uniform failure, these narratives reduce modern states to monolithic, static entities whose actions have a predetermined outcome. But states were seldom homogeneous entities; they were diverse, and they evolved over time. There could be no coherent, unitary Habsburg imperial or national Romanian project in Bukovina, for instance, as these polities themselves kept changing, not least in response to encounters with the province’s diverse population.

Moreover, although failure was indeed common, it is important to note that not all failures were equal. Not all states failed in the same ways, and even when they did, they often left behind far from negligible legacies. These legacies are especially striking in Bukovina, where regimes that followed each other in quick succession left their marks on the province’s landscape long after their political demise. Beyond the appearance of constancy and circularity suggested by the “failed modernization” trope lay a reality defined by constant change.

Therefore, this book views Bukovina (and by extension the East European borderlands) as an ideal site to study the evolution of modern states’ ambitions and instruments of governance comparatively. The chapters that follow highlight the great extent to which modern states were shaped by their entanglements with each other and with the populations of the border regions those states took turns at ruling. These entanglements, which could take the form of competition, emulation, or conflict, were, as historian Michael David-Fox writes, important regardless of whether they were positive or negative.⁷⁸ Borderlands like Bukovina functioned as vehicles by which different states and

political regimes shaped each other directly or indirectly, through physical encounters or the legacies they left, including assumptions about what governance ought to look like, what constituted legitimate authority, and so forth.⁷⁹

The encounters that took place in Bukovina against the backdrop of interstate competition help explain why modernizing states occupying ideologically opposite ends of the spectrum often converged in their aspirations and practices. One might attribute this convergence to the shared modernizing impulse of states that originated in the Enlightenment. Yet Bukovina lets us see another, equally important reason: different modern states took turns ruling the same border regions. Entanglements at the border thus helped to create “a world of semblances and likenesses, recognitions and misrecognitions at the very same time.”⁸⁰ In Bukovina, Austrian governance practices and ideologies of rule were shaped by the Russian Empire’s proximity—and vice versa. When the Russian troops occupied Czernowitz in World War I, they immediately began cleaning the city’s streets to demonstrate that Russia was cultured—and to imitate what they thought the Austrians had been doing. Similarly, the Romanian nation-state that ruled Bukovina after 1918 ended up incorporating administrative bodies and cultural practices it inherited from Austria, even as it tried to differentiate itself from its imperial predecessor. Later the Soviets, though ostensibly dismissing nationalism as backwardness, found themselves paying homage to national self-determination, accomplishing in Bukovina what some nationalists had dreamed of but had never had the resources for.⁸¹

The interplay between states in Bukovina also shaped local nationalisms and the ways national differences were articulated. During World War I, previously weak nationalists gained a new lease on life from the great powers’ efforts to channel nationalist energies toward their projects in the region. Ukrainian nationalists, for instance, benefited from Habsburg and German patronage. Romanian nationalists in Bukovina found favor with the Russian occupation authorities. The inter-imperial conflict thus reinforced the conflict between opposing national groups and injected it with new vitality and meaning.⁸²

The perspective presented here highlights the importance to modern state-building of local cooperation, and challenges the view that modernizing states and borderland populations were inevitably locked in conflict. Even when they declared a total break with the past, states needing local participation and knowledge ended up incorporating preexisting local elites into their structures.⁸³ This dynamic was not exclusive to Bukovina; it was an indispensable feature of the modern state, where populations became “members of the state, not just objects of state policies.”⁸⁴ The “strength and inescapability” of the modern state, as Yanni Kotsonis writes, lay in the fact that “the population comprised it.”⁸⁵

In turn, Bukovinans had ambitions and visions of their own that they pursued through and alongside states.⁸⁶ Locals pressed state officials to

implement the policies they desired and thought would advance local interests. They sometimes championed state initiatives when state officials had lost interest in them, often appealing to states as an antidote to marginalization or to claim a space for themselves within domestic and international politics. The loudest advocates of modernizing reforms were often people on the periphery. Likewise, radicalizing impulses and a willingness to use violence to achieve the aims they implied did not always come from the center, but could originate in marginal places like Bukovina, where locals' dreams of becoming modern were repeatedly frustrated. Locals had limited choices, but choices, nonetheless. They were not simply swept up by impersonal forces, but tried to meld their own goals and ambitions, rooted in local circumstances, with the goals and ambitions of states that competed for influence over the region.

Modernity and Culture

Modernization was perhaps the most important point of convergence and mutual influence among the different states that ruled Bukovina. All of them, from the Habsburg Empire to the Soviet Union, wanted to modernize the region and had in common assumptions about what modernity was: economic prosperity, literacy, the absence of ethnic and national strife, civilized government. They all viewed Bukovina as a testing ground to showcase the superiority of their respective paths to modernity. Even nostalgic regimes that harked back to an idyllic, premodern past aspired to modernity.⁸⁷ Romanian nationalists in Bukovina, for instance, hailed the countryside as the source of pristine national identity but ultimately focused their energies on the city of Czernowitz, aspiring to nationalize it and wrest it from the hands of people they denounced as "foreign" to the province. The Soviets, whom many locals dismissed as uncivilized and backward, also engaged in this "quest for modernity," asserting the need for a different way of achieving it: an anti-capitalist path.⁸⁸

The modernizing states that tried their hand at governing Bukovina thus competed to demonstrate their civilizational superiority. One by-product of this competition was the assumption—which all regimes, whether liberal or illiberal, imperial or national, came to share—that civilized states could transform society and exercise authority by cultural means rather than through exploitation and force. Modernity was very much a "cultural program."⁸⁹ States legitimized themselves in the eyes of locals and to each other through their promise to deliver Bukovina from poverty, backwardness, and underdevelopment via reform schemes centered on education, urbanization, and hygiene.⁹⁰ One regime after another touted its efforts to build schools and hospitals and clean up and expand Bukovina's cities. As an antidote to the province's alleged backwardness, they invoked a "normative

concept of culture.”⁹¹ They all paid lip service, at least, to the idea that government should seek to improve society and that the contest over territories and populations could not be justified unless it brought a civilized, just system of governance to places lacking it.⁹² Local non-state actors also bandied about the idea of civilization, sometimes using it interchangeably with notions of modernity and progress.

Governance through culture was a key aspect of enlightened Habsburg rule. The concept of *Kultur*, frequently invoked under Austrian rule, had its origins in the German Enlightenment, which rejected revolutionary change in favor of “fus[ing] continuity and change.”⁹³ Unlike their French counterparts, adepts of the German Enlightenment hoped to enact transformations through and with the state. The focus on *Kultur* thus signaled a preference for reform from within and above, as well as a reliance on the state.⁹⁴ The appeal made by all of Bukovina’s rulers to “culture” to justify their rule derived to an extent from the pattern initiated by the Habsburgs that continued to set the terms for what successor regimes imagined and deemed possible. At the same time, the general preference for cultural reform shared by all polities in Bukovina was also the product of scarcity: repeatedly, states with inflated ambitions found themselves overstretched and without the necessary resources to transform the periphery economically.

Although “culture” was frequently invoked to justify rule and offer a vision of how Bukovina could achieve modernity, it meant different things to different political actors. Vejas Liulevicius has shown how Eastern Europe became an “experimental domain” for *Kultur* and was thus also key to the emergence of a German national identity defined by *Kultur*, in contradistinction to Eastern Europe’s alleged poverty, misery, and dirt.⁹⁵ After a separate German nation-state emerged in 1871, the Eastern European borderlands further facilitated Austria’s efforts to differentiate itself from Germany and justify its own continued existence. Increasingly, Austrian Germans conceived of Austria as a *Kulturstaat* whose mission was to bring enlightenment and civilization to the diverse peoples inhabiting its empire. Austrophiles such as the Bukovinian historian Raimund Friedrich Kaindl argued that Austria accommodated a more expansive form of German identity, one defined primarily along cultural lines and thus uncontainable within state borders.⁹⁶ German-speaking elites in the province avidly supported Austria’s so-called cultural mission in the East, hoping to channel more of the state’s resources and attention to the province.

The liberal bourgeois model of culture upheld by Austrian liberals in Bukovina gave rise to what locals called *Bildungsdrang*: a thirst for *Bildung*, or self-cultivation.⁹⁷ The *Gymnasia* and university of Czernowitz produced a generation of local elites fluent in the language of Goethe and Schiller and raised to believe that “the task of humanity is culture.”⁹⁸ Bukovina’s nationalists

emerged from this “culture of culture,”⁹⁹ inheriting the Habsburg-German ideal of *Kultur*, even as they reinterpreted it as pluralistic and unique to each people rather than universalist.¹⁰⁰ Rather than rejecting culture altogether, they fought to ensure that their respective national groups were not left without it.¹⁰¹ The cultural institutions that had prestige under imperial rule—the *Gymnasia* and the university, for example—were the most contested among nationalists. In this sense, nationalists were as much products of the liberal imperial state as they were its adversaries.

Nationalists’ infatuation with culture persisted into the interwar period. Romanian nationalists in Bukovina appealed to culture to differentiate themselves from their co-nationals in the Old Kingdom and criticize the Old Kingdom’s “politicianism”: a synonym for corruption and superficiality.¹⁰² In its most extreme form, this distaste for Bucharest’s politics and preference for culture eventually found fulfillment in the Romanian Legionary Movement, and the other right-wing movements that were popular among Bukovina’s Germans and Ukrainians. These all drew a good deal of inspiration and energy from borderlands like Bukovina, feeding on the frustrations of provincials and their antagonism toward the central government.

During World War II, Bukovina found itself in the middle of a confrontation between two rival conceptions of culture: Soviet *kul’turnost’* and Nazi *Kultur* and its Romanian version, embodied in and upheld by Ion Antonescu’s racial state. The Soviet concept of *kul’turnost’* had roots in the Russian intelligentsia tradition, whose “missionary idea of transmission of education and culture to the backward masses” was in turn inspired largely by German Romanticism and Idealism. Translated into campaigns to disseminate culture to the masses, it shared with the German humanist tradition of *Kultur* and *Bildung* the impulse for “enlightened self-transformation” and the assumption that self and society could be completely remolded.¹⁰³ In a sense, *kul’turnost’*, which put the human being and society at the center of history, resembled the classical humanist concept of *Kultur* more than Nazi Germany’s racially defined *Kultur* did. In practice, it meant the Soviets founded libraries and reading rooms in remote villages and obsessively measured Bukovinian literacy levels. At the same time, they deported entire pockets of populations that supposedly stood in the way of revolution, to Siberia and Kazakhstan. This too was part of the Soviet repertoire of power.

Time and Revolution

The onset of modernity was marked by changes in everything “from morals to law, religion, economy, states.”¹⁰⁴ During the *Sattelzeit* (saddle period), as Reinhard Koselleck described the period between the late eighteenth and

early nineteenth centuries, people's conceptions and experiences of time radically shifted. Once predetermined, the future was now changeable. Hand in hand with this new historically immanent definition of time came an inclination toward "historicity" or "historicism,"¹⁰⁵ and the idea that radical change was both possible and desirable.¹⁰⁶ This newborn revolutionary impulse could take different forms. It could be expressed as the desire to free oneself from the past or from the chains that kept one mired in a state of economic or political backwardness.¹⁰⁷ It could also take the form of restorative ambitions powered by the idea that a historical trajectory could be reversed.¹⁰⁸

The need to distance oneself from the past and the feeling of loss that came with progress were deeply intertwined and integral to the modern experience. Walter Benjamin captured the tension between the two through the memorable image of the Angelus Novus, pushed into the future by a storm "blowing from Paradise" that "has caught his wings" so that "he can no longer claim them." Even as he moves into the future, the angel's face is "turned towards the past." This storm is "what we call progress."¹⁰⁹ In the modern conception of time, the present's rush toward the future was inevitable and unstoppable, but its seemingly unquenchable drive brought with it a deep nostalgia for the pile of debris left behind.

The dynamic so beautifully described by Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* perfectly encapsulates Bukovinians' experiences as they got caught in a maelstrom of successive modernizing projects. The appetite for change gave rise to deep and conflicting anxieties: about remaining mired in the past, and simultaneously about losing one's bearings. As Arno Mayer defined it, revolution is a moment when "a nation's or a society's traditional ground rules crumble, and willy-nilly man has to reconstruct human relations himself."¹¹⁰ It is an epoch of its own.

Yet in Bukovina and much of Eastern Europe the crumbling of ground rules and reconstruction of human relations occurred repeatedly, even continually, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. Revolution was not neatly bookended, since locals experienced border shifts, regime changes, and rapid population fluctuations over and over again. Bukovinians lived always on the cusp of transformation. With every new collapse in state authority, a new regime and local actors took it upon themselves to remake Bukovina and the world. As a result, nothing ever felt stable. Reform projects were often left unfinished, and new borders were contested before the ink had even dried on new maps.

Though revolution was a more or less permanent reality in Bukovina, change did not always take the same forms. It followed a variety of cadences and rhythms, seldom uniform, simultaneous, or even complete. Nonetheless, the pendulum swing of Bukovina's history could make it seem as if the province was going through a set of revolving doors, moving through an endlessly

repeating cycle of invasions and occupations followed by liberations, with the old forces coming from the east and west under different guises, but always essentially the same. Yet the illusion that nothing ever changed was just that: an illusion. It was exacerbated by the fact that so many elements of the past inscribed into the province's landscape endured almost untouched. "For the historically conscious observer," one memoirist from Bukovina wrote, "it is ghostly to pass through the center of Czernowitz today [in the 1990s]: here the past has been preserved in the facades—an Austrian past, to which the current population seems to have little connection."¹¹¹ Elements of Czernowitz's palimpsest are not simply allowed, but sometimes invited, to resurface and be re-inscribed into the urban landscape. Consider a house from Czernowitz's former Jewish quarter, once the workshop of Isak Eisikowicz, a sign painter. According to the sign running below the eaves, the workshop was founded in 1910, under Austrian rule. Yet the signage is in Romanian, not German, and dates back to the interwar period when Czernowitz became Cernăuți, under Romanian rule. The building's current owners, residents of Ukrainian Chernivtsi, painted the building's walls in a garish turquoise that is now peeling off and revealing the original dark yellow. At the top, however, the original Romanian-language sign, formerly turquoise, has a new coat of yellow and dark green. Such gestures have become increasingly common as Ukrainians in Chernivtsi seek to distance themselves from their Soviet heritage and envision a new European future for the city.

The changes that left the deepest imprint on Bukovinans were often drawn out, incomplete, almost invisible. Slow changes could have more staying power than abrupt breaks with the past, which could just as easily and quickly be undone. Under Habsburg rule, for instance, changes happened at a demoralizingly slow pace and were often underwhelming. Locals impatient with the province's lack of progress anxiously tried to discern whether Czernowitz had become a modern *Grossstadt* yet.¹¹² But a hundred and fifty years after the province's incorporation into the Habsburg Empire, when that empire was no longer to be found on any map, the changes it had set into motion no longer seemed slight. Makeshift, incomplete changes had a cumulative effect, quietly producing a legacy of insurmountable mass that all future regimes had to contend with. Not only did the successor regimes have to grapple with Bukovina's persisting Habsburg legacies, but they also found themselves unwittingly borrowing, absorbing, or replicating bits and pieces of its imperial heritage.¹¹³ They continued practices that empires had put in place: for example, promoting culture and enlightenment to integrate the periphery into the state and keep social and political unrest at bay.¹¹⁴

Empire provided an important continuity across repeated political ruptures. It was a constant presence in Bukovina, but not only, as it may seem at



FIGURE 0.3. Writing in Romanian resurfacing from underneath the peeling paint on a house in Chernivtsi, former Jewish quarter. Photo by author, 2013.

first, because the region was trapped in an endless cycle of imperial conquests. Empires endured, as legacies, cultural norms and values, and institutions, because of their enormous capacity to absorb both revolution and reform, to be “revitalized by finding a new balance between their different components.”¹¹⁵ Thanks to recent literature on European empires, we now know that the Ottomans, Habsburgs, and Russians—once dismissed as decrepit—were rarely as hopeless as they were made out to be. They tended to navigate repeated challenges to their authority successfully and to weather most crises intact. When collapse came, it was due not to their long-standing, irreconcilable antagonism with nationalists, but to the qualitative transformation in their relationship with nationalism brought about by total war.¹¹⁶

Bukovina’s story thus calls into question chronologies that assume empires are out of the picture as soon as they collapse. As more and more historians are now showing, empires persisted in various forms well after their demise. Interwar Romania, which governed Bukovina from 1918, itself became a mini-empire by incorporating territories with highly variegated populations. It also inherited a key dilemma of imperial rule: how to manage multiethnicity, especially across large distances. Interwar nation-states such as Romania and neighboring Poland were like empires in another way, too: they pursued “colonization and civilizing missions,” invoking the notions of superiority that empires before

them had long used to justify their territorial claims.¹¹⁷ As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have argued, imperial repertoires of rule delimited what “leaders could imagine and could carry off” long after empires were extinct.¹¹⁸ For all their struggles to dismantle imperial legacies, post-imperial states often ended up perpetuating them. The Soviet Union, for instance, an entity whose very existence was predicated upon anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, ended up reconstituting empire by other means, maintaining a “sophisticated imperial policy when empire was becoming redundant.”¹¹⁹

Such continuities across period ruptures gave rise in Bukovina to a profoundly variegated temporal landscape. Unlike many cities in East Central Europe that were repeatedly razed to the ground, Bukovina’s capital Czernowitz was reinvented through addition, with new elements piled on top of preexisting structures. Chronically short of resources and time, political regimes tended to recycle elements of the province’s heritage to build new systems of rule and ideologies, creating new universes out of scraps of old ones. To describe this multilayered landscape, one might adopt Alfred Rieber’s metaphor of the “sedimentary society,” which he deemed typical of the Eurasian borderlands.¹²⁰ In such places, Rieber argued, “a successive series of social forms accumulated, each constituting a layer that covered all or most of society without altering the older forms lying underneath the surface.”¹²¹

But even this description fails to convey the complexity of temporalities that characterized life in Bukovina. Legacies did not simply lie on top of each other like so many layers of cake, but interacted and recombined periodically, giving rise to a “multiplicity and conflict of temporal regimes.”¹²² The concept is more aptly described as “chronocenosis,” highlighting the “complex and volatile interaction of competing temporal regimes” in which “power and time interface amid intensely competitive temporal formations, not simply parallel or layered ones.”¹²³ Bits and pieces of Bukovina’s past were constantly being reincorporated into the present and taking on new meanings. This process was part and parcel of state-building and regime change in the province. To describe this experience, the Bukovinian writer Gregor von Rezzori coined a new term: *Epochenverschleppung*, meaning “epoch delay,” or protraction, or the “anachronistic overlap of elements of reality that belong to a past epoch with a following one.”¹²⁴

The people who inhabited this temporal landscape developed profoundly modern sensibilities. Their cultural affinities and worldviews were permeated by a feeling of displacement in terms of both location and time. If modernity was characterized, as Marshall Berman wrote, by “the struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world,” then Bukovinians were moderns *par excellence*. Their lives were defined by a “will to change—to transform both themselves and the world—and by a terror of disorientation and

disintegration, of life falling apart,” as well as by the “thrill and the dread of a world in which all that is solid melts into air.”¹²⁵

Von Rezzori captured these feelings best when he described himself as a living anachronism, a person fallen out of time and forced to dwell in an epoch in which he did not belong.¹²⁶ Like him, many Bukovinans in the twentieth century experienced time as lumpy, fragmented, or broken. Their lives seemed to consist of puzzle pieces that could not be made to fit together without doing violence to the individual parts. Take the family of Dmytro Yakoviichul, from the Bukovinan mountain village of Putyla: “the older children had Romanian education, the younger ones—Soviet, and our parents—Austrian [. . .]; each one of us had his own, very different views of life under the influence of different educational systems.”¹²⁷ The history of one Bukovinan family was the history of three different regimes.

Chapter Outline

The beginnings and endings of the chapters that follow are marked by wars, revolutions, and regime changes. I have adopted this structure both for clarity’s sake and because so much of the book is about the importance of legacies of multiple state-building projects to the experience of living in Bukovina and Eastern Europe. A traditional chronological narrative allows us to grasp both what changed radically in the process and what stayed the same. It reveals that different regimes often set out to build new worlds out of the same material—materials they inherited from each other. Characters who appear under one guise under one administration in one chapter may reappear in a completely different guise in another. The order in which regimes occurred matters, as they often shaped their policies in response to what had come before. Proceeding chronologically allows me to highlight the accumulated effect of repeated regime changes and revolutions that, piled on top of each other, created new combinations.

The book begins by showing how Habsburg officials in late eighteenth-century Bukovina sought to transform the local population’s relationship with the state as well as the nature of state authority and sovereignty in the province. Chapter 1 argues that the changes they brought about proceeded slowly and with difficulty, and shows the Habsburgs incorporating Ottoman and Moldavian legacies into their structures and then repurposing them. Though changes were slow and makeshift, by the 1870s, a hundred years after Bukovina’s incorporation into the Habsburg Empire, the territory and its population had been deeply transformed.

After 1867, when the Austrian Empire split into Austrian and Hungarian halves, Bukovina was an autonomous crown land of the empire’s Austrian half,

called Cisleithania. Chapter 2 traces the empire's projects in Bukovina in this period, the heyday of Austro-Hungarian liberalism. I show how the Austrian liberal state sought to civilize Bukovina's countryside through an infusion of culture and literacy. Once again, their project was largely a failure, and peasants, seeing few benefits in cultural policies that presented no immediate economic advantages, emigrated overseas *en masse*. At the same time, an urban, middle-class society, highly educated and espousing liberal ideas, emerged in Czernowitz, where modernization meant paved roads, new buildings, public parks, monuments, *Gymnasias*, and the German-language university founded in 1875.

By guaranteeing equality for all ethnic groups in public institutions, the state both facilitated the rise of national intelligentsias and laid the foundations for national conflict by altering the balance of power in the province. Chapter 3 argues that Bukovina's imperial government unwittingly invested nationalism with a meaning and strength it would never have developed on its own. In turn, nationalists—though always grumbling about Austria's policies toward their respective national groups—depended on imperial institutions and structures to survive and succeed. Nationalist disputes took on new dimensions in Bukovina between 1914 and 1918, when the province came under repeated occupation by Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German troops. Chapter 4 traces how the belligerent powers aligned their goals with those of different groups in Bukovina, promoting some and persecuting others. As a result, Bukovinian society emerged from the war torn and fractured along new lines, with those who had been on opposite sides of the barricades eager to settle scores with each other.

When Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918, Bukovina was disputed territory, with both Ukrainian and Romanian nationalists convinced they were entitled to the province. Chapter 5 tells the story of Bukovina's uneasy incorporation into the Romanian nation-state in the 1920s, when the national administration discovered that the province's imperial make-up made it nearly impossible to renationalize. Hard as they tried to set themselves apart from their imperial predecessors, the Romanian administration in Bukovina inherited a landscape profoundly shaped by Austrian rule.

By the 1930s it was increasingly evident that the Romanian administration's efforts to integrate Bukovina into the nation-state had failed. Chapter 6 shows how, largely because of this failure, the region became a weapon in the arsenal of democracy's critics in Romania. By the end of the 1930s, all ethnic groups in the province had come to embrace integral forms of nationalism, largely as a result of mutual imitation. The chapter traces the emergence and interplay of four nationalist movements in Bukovina: the Romanian LANC and Legion of Archangel Michael, the Ukrainian moderate nationalists and the OUN, the Zionists, and the National Socialist Germans.

Chapter 7 shows how the Soviets set out to transform northern Bukovina into an outpost of Soviet civilization after incorporating it in the spring of 1940, allegedly to liberate ethnic Ukrainians from Romanian oppression. Although Bukovina had no sizable working class, the Soviets found a so-called “surrogate proletariat” in its Ukrainians, mapping the revolutionary Soviet project onto preexisting ethnic tensions.¹²⁸ The chapter argues that the Soviets were uniquely able to enact revolutionary changes in occupied Bukovina because they used extraordinary wartime measures.

Chapter 8 takes the story to 1941, when the Romanians returned to northern Bukovina to find it completely altered. Their goal was to remove all traces of Soviet rule and finalize the national unification process begun in 1918. The chapter examines how Romanian officials under General Ion Antonescu’s military administration Romanianized Bukovina and purged it of its Soviet legacies. It argues that the war years permanently changed not only Bukovina’s demographics, but also the way different elements of society interacted—with fatal consequences for the Jewish community, which never recovered from the devastation it suffered during these years.

Finally, the Epilogue explains what became of the land known as Bukovina once it vanished from the map in 1944, when the Soviets reclaimed the province’s northern half and incorporated it into Soviet Ukraine while southern Bukovina remained under Romanian rule. It charts Bukovina’s shift from the real world into nostalgia and its transformation into a borderland between the EU and Russia’s so-called European backyard.

As one legend has it, inside Mount Cecina outside Czernowitz lived an old man who sat and wrote all day, surrounded by buckets of gold and coins, each guarded by a hen. Every time a hen clucked, the old man got up and tore everything he had written to pieces, then started anew. Writing the history of a place such as Bukovina often felt like that. Like the residents of this wondrous place, I found myself starting anew, over and over, searching for a way to tell Bukovina’s story logically and coherently, without robbing it of its mystery or complexity. What follows is the imperfect outcome of those efforts.

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