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PAVLO LENO
Department of Archaeology, Ethnology and Cultural Studies,
Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine

HISTORICAL MEMORIES IN TRANSCARPATHIA: ORAL HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the personal stories of Transcarpathian inhabitants who reflect on their collective memory and experiences of the Second World War in order to understand the regional context of memory that shapes understanding, through the eyes of witnesses to past events, and to reconstruct the features of collective regional memory narratives, which are, I argue, significantly different from the official Ukrainian version of national history.[1] The basis of this research is the memories of people from the older Transcarpathian generation who reflect on the past in a more distinctive and significant fashion than can be found in official accounts of history. These oral history data allow us to place the memories of ethnic minorities alongside testimonies from the national majority, ethnic Ukrainians for comparison and contrast. Each group had its own distinct experience of living through the region's extreme history in the 1940s, as ethnicity or nationality could determine a person's place in the social and political hierarchy, influence the possibilities of social advancement, or, conversely, could engender different forms of persecution or repression.

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[1] The name "Transcarpathia" is used to denote the interwar territory known as "Subcarpathian Rus", which was part of the First Czechoslovak Republic, when it was inhabited by Rusyns, who only received the official ethnonym "Ukrainians" in 1944. Other nationalities, namely, Magyars (Hungarians), Slovaks, Jews, Romanians, Germans, and Roma, were subsumed under this ethnonym at the same time. The most illuminating ethnographic studies of these communities in Transcarpathia are: Tyvodar (2011), Maryna (1995), Elynek (2010), Navrotska (2007), Moimir Benzha (2005). It should be noted that a separate controversial topic (a review of which is not within the scope of this study) is the issue of the identity and status of the Carpathian Rusyns. In Ukraine, academic discussion on this matter has been complicated when taken up in the political sphere. Examples of an academic approach to the issue of options and the development of the Carpathian Rusyns identity can be found in the works of Mahochi (2016, 2021), Lysiak-Rudnytskyi (1994), Hyidel (2007).

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Transcarpathia lies in the westernmost part of Ukraine, bordering Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland. Historically, this land has been a part of different states, kingdoms and empires at different times: the Kingdom of Hungary (since the eleventh century), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918), Czechoslovakia in the inter-war period, the Hungarian Regency during the Second World War, the USSR (1944–1991), and now independent Ukraine. Despite historical changes in various types of belonging, the region has always remained a border-zone, or peripheral territory, far from each successive new capital. A century ago, the Transcarpathian population was regularly described in the works of popular writers, photographers' albums, and tourist guides, as a traditional, conservative community of peasants living in harmony with nature and their neighbours (Prokop 1934; Olbracht 1933; Oplestilova & Babka 2014).

The multiculturalism of the population, however, has become a distinctive feature of the region. In addition to Rusyns, there were compact settlements of the ancestors of modern Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Romas, and, since the eighteenth century, Swabians (Germans). Historically, Jews constituted the majority of some cities and towns, in particular, in Mukachevo and Solotvyno (Elynek 2010; Slavik 2017). The ethnic diversity of the population was complemented by religious diversity and socio-economic differentiation. Such geographical features as mountains, foothills, and valleys served as natural borders and contributed to the development of the Rusyns' ethnographic mosaic and the spread of smuggling activities on both sides of the political borders.[2] From the second half of the twentieth century, this part of the Carpathians attracted researchers interested in national identities, as a trip to this destination was "an excuse for exciting research [...] and contained many universal values" (Lysiak-Rudnytskyi 1994), and this region was seen to represent the whole of Europe in miniature.

The relatively calm life of the local population was interrupted by world events in the late 1930s and 1940s. To begin with, a decision of the 1938 Munich Agreement transferred the region from Czechoslovak to Hungarian power.[3] Carpathian Ukraine was proclaimed in March 1939, but was quickly drowned in the blood of its defenders; the Jewish community of the region was all but destroyed during the regency of Miklós Horthy by the end of the war (Slavik 2017), and with the arrival of the Red Army in 1944, repressions of ethnic Germans and Hungarians began in earnest (Makara 1995). As a result of their defeat in the war, the latter lost the status of the titular (dominant) ethnic group in the region. Subsequent events, particularly the incorporation of the region into the Ukrainian SSR, led to the fact that local Rusyns gained this status. The ethno-cultural characteristics of the Carpathian Rusyns allow scholars to consider them as a part of the Ukrainian ethnic group, which was in line with Stalin's geopolitical interests and became a pretext to justify the inclusion of this region in the process of "collecting Ukrainian lands".[4]

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[2] Local Ukrainians are typically divided into four sub-ethnic groups: Hutsuls, Lemkos, Dolynians, and Boykos (Tyvodar 2011).

[3] The Munich Agreement was concluded in Munich on 30 September 1938 by Nazi Germany, Great Britain, the French Republic and Fascist Italy. The agreement provided for the annexation of part of Czechoslovakia by Germany.

The result of this "reunification", the assessment of which differs in various national historiographies, was the proclamation of Transcarpathian Ukraine, incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR/USSR from 1944–1946 (Mishchanyn 2018, pp. 73–114).[5] This historical reinterpretation did not erase the millennium-long development of the region, however, and therefore there was a need for a more "organic" incorporation of this new Transcarpathian Ukraine into the official canon of Soviet Ukrainian history. Operating with the procrustean concepts of "class and national struggle", Soviet historians fashioned a narrative that had local Rusyns living for centuries in isolation from the surrounding Ukrainian peoples, without losing hope of merging with a (now re-imagined) Ukrainian (read: Soviet) nation. Soviet historiography thus claimed a common historical past between the Carpathian Rusyns and the proto-Ukrainian population of Kievan Rus, beginning under Prince Volodymyr the Great, who controlled Transcarpathia and the local tribe of White Croats in the 10th century until the region was "occupied" by the Hungarians in the eleventh century (Leno 2018b).[6]

The process of "creating a common past" was accompanied by a policy of "erasing" all positive references to previous political periods, which could only be mentioned in the context of criticism and accusations of oppression and "foreign enslavers". With respect to ethnic minorities, Soviet historians of Transcarpathia used class theory to argue that local proletarians of Hungarian/ Slovak/ Romanian origin endured economic oppression by exploitative manufacturers and landlords, and were saved by Soviet military "liberation" (Leno 2018b).[7]

After the region's incorporation into the Soviet Union, the lives of all Transcarpathian generations were affected by the experience of living within the Soviet system. After the fall of the USSR, Ukrainian sociocultural space continued to exert much influence on local everyday life. Education policy, for instance, has ensured that the majority of Ukrainians know and support the official version of history, which, following independence, has emphasised the rehabilitation of Augustyn Voloshyn, the Carpathian Ukraine President, as well as other victims of Soviet repressions. Although the Ukrainian national grand narrative replaced class theory, a shadow still falls over the rather distinct patchwork experience of "history" that the diverse Transcarpathian population has endured throughout the twentieth century. Transcarpathians even highlight this historical irony through a commonly-retold joke in the region about a local peasant of a rather blurred ethnic identity who has been a citizen of many different states, while never even leaving his village it is a witticism that captures the paradox of so much change within such an otherwise bucolic region of the world.[8]

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[4] The process of collecting lands inhabited by representatives of the Ukrainian ethnic group. During the period of Stalin's rule, it took place under the slogans of restoring historical justice, the national liberation struggle of Ukrainians against foreign masters and representatives of the exploiting class. This process is described in detail by Yekelchyk (2004).

[5] There are wildly diverging assessments of the "reunification" event: from the triumph of historical justice to soft annexation and even occupation.

[6] This mythologised version of the past contradicted historical realities, but it is worth noting that Rusyns sincerely accepted the region's entry into the Ukrainian SSR, as well as the fact of replacing the ethnonym "Rusyn" with "Ukrainian" (see Leno 2018a). However, this acceptance was quickly overshadowed by the forced collectivisation that began once Soviet and Czechoslovak authorities officially recognised the new borders between them on June 29, 1945 (Mishchanyn 2018, pp. 1103–114).

[7] The role of creation was assigned to professional writers and poets, linguists and historians such as Mikhail Pokrovsky, Mykola Bazhan, Maksym Rylskyi and others (Leno 2018b). More information about the participation of intellectuals of that period in the development of the Soviet model of historical memory, in the context of the whole of Ukraine, can be found in Yekelchyk 2004.

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Neither the collective memory of the Transcarpathia population nor local historical narratives were objects of much academic interest in Soviet times. While one must assume that in connection with Russia's current war in Ukraine, the process of national history revision may accelerate and pay closer attention to regional memory, history textbooks as yet do not contain regional versions of the past from the perspective of the local population.[9]

A more local, historically-oriented view of the Second World War, however, can be found in studies based on oral sources. Similar oral history studies have been carried out on the consequences of the region's ethnic homogenisation in the middle of the twentieth century. First came studies of the Holocaust and research on the process of inhabitants of Transcarpathia opting for Czechoslovak citizenship (Elynek 2010; Khudish 2016; Slavik 2017).[10] A separate niche of modern oral history research is devoted to recording Soviet repressions of the Hungarian population in Transcarpathia, such as Punykó (1993) on repressions in the Transcarpathian village of Beregujfalu (Berehiv district). This field data was collected in the early 1990s, when the village was still inhabited by twenty-seven people who had survived the Stalin-era deportations and concentration camps.

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[8] One version of the joke goes as follows: an old Transcarpathian man tells journalists that he was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, went to school in Czechoslovakia, served in the military in Hungary, married in the USSR, and retired in independent Ukraine. Amazed, the journalists ask "Have you travelled a lot during your life?!" He replies "No! I have never left Transcarpathia, but I have lived in five states!".

[9] According to Volodymir Fenych's assessment, only 0.2% of the text is devoted to Transcarpathia on the pages of the twenty-two most widespread domestic generalised works of Ukrainian history as of 2005 (Fenych 2014). I personally doubt that this situation has significantly changed in the fifteen years since the calculations were first made.

[10] This process was established by the Agreement, transferring Subcarpathian Ruthenia from Czechoslovakia to the USSR, signed in Moscow in June 29, 1945.

Two studies that try to reproduce the local experience of the Second World War with an emphasis on personal stories are worthy of attention: Hrytsak and Ofitsynskyi (2013) write detailed essays in their study of Transcarpathian labour camps, and include a large number of transcribed interviews with participants who endured forced labour during the war. Aladar et al. (2006) tell the stories of local Roma who shared their impressions and personal tragedies of the 1940s and early 1950s with the researchers.

These studies focus on personal life experiences in the extreme conditions of war, occupation, and repression, but do not go beyond the scope of their subject matter. Currently, there is only one example of a broader analysis of Transcarpathian historical memory (Ferkov, Ferkov & Shterr 2018), based on the results of a questionnaire and short selective interviews with two hundred people from every Transcarpathian region.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SOURCES USED

Oral history data collected by my students and me during Uzhhorod National University's ethnographic expeditions, which took place over the past eight years, became the main source for this study.[11] Before the COVID pandemic, we would conduct three-to-four week ethnographic expeditions every year, thanks to which we covered a significant number of villages and towns, almost the entire Transcarpathia. As opposed to deep and prolonged immersion in the context of a particular research problem, Ukrainian ethnologists usually practice an extensive version of field ethnographic research. This means having a large number of specialists (ten or more) on certain ethnographic topics. They travel for several weeks to the ethnographic field, where they work in the format of "bush" or "route" expeditions. In this way, more than a dozen settlements can be covered in a few weeks, and hundreds of respondents can be interviewed, more details about which can be found in Hrymych (2008) and Hlushko (2008).

In this article, though, I rely principally on my own field data, most of which was recorded in the last eight years, but with additional field records dating back to the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Of necessity, I occasionally include material recorded by my students as well though. Such a need arises when working with Hungarian students who can more easily interact with residents of ethnically-Hungarian villages. During field research, we used primarily in-depth biographical and semi-structured interview methods. I typically preferred a semi-structured or in-depth biographical interview, while my students usually worked through questionnaires, conducting structured interviews.

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[11] I have been leading the students' ethnographic practice since 2016. Usually, one expedition group consists of about twenty people. During an academic year, there may be two or more such groups. In total, hundreds of students have participated in expeditions since 2016, many of whom have been involved in recording oral history materials. The scope of this publication does not permit the listing of every name, so I will mention only those who are currently enrolled in a doctoral programme: Halyna Reitiy, Mykhailo Perun, and Mykhailo Rekrutyak.

I also had the opportunity to participate in other research projects in Transcarpathia. Among them is "Holosy" (Voices), organised by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center.[12] This project recorded more than 130 interviews with witnesses of the Holocaust and World War II. Another powerful project was "Mist 19" (Bridge 19), which aimed to record the oral histories among the divided villages and families that one day in 1946 found themselves on either side of a new state border with Czechoslovakia.[13]

Interviews collected by the Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute reveal the Hungarian experience of Soviet repression and Sovietisation. In terms of research, ten interviews with repression victims and 170 questionnaires with post-memory carriers were conducted.[14] The results of these studies have not received the attention they deserve and remained practically unnoticed among Transcarpathian residents, not to mention the population of Ukraine in general. It is symptomatic that Ukrainians study their own collective traumas but are inattentive to the traumas of "domestic others", such as Transcarpathian Hungarians or Germans. As a result, in Ukrainian society, there is a lack of robust discussion about diversity and mutual openness to otherness, which leads to a dearth of collective empathy, and promotes the cultivation of a sense of sacrificial exclusivity of one's own ethnic group.

Other pertinent information can be found in published memoirs (for example, Baleha 2006; Kediulych-Khymynets 2011) and historical and local history books written by amateur historians.[15] Soviet historical myths and interpretations still endure in some form, in particular, a much-repeated claim of almost 115,000 Transcarpathians who were killed by the Nazis, without specifying that approximately 100,000 of them were Jews. Such manipulative methods have continued in local or non-professional research on the Soviet era, where victims of the Holocaust have been concealed among general population losses.[16] These publications nevertheless contain the memories of elderly people who speak as the voices of the *local* majority, as well as of local “domestic others”. Their stories are thus powerfully representative of ethnic minorities in this region. In particular, the memories of a former Soviet partisan Ivan Rusyn negate the Soviet thesis about a heroic and massive partisan movement in the region and testify to the reality that partisans could peacefully coexist with Hungarian gendarmes (Kutskir & Rubish 2012, pp. 77–78).

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[12] Project Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre "Voices. Testimonies of the Holocaust in Ukraine" (June–December 2018–2021). Project manager: Gelinada Grinchenko.

[13] Project NGO "Molotok" (Nyzhnye Selyshche, Zakarpattia), Moara Veche – Alte Mühle – Régi Malom – Old Mill (Hosman, Romania): BRIDGE 19 (May 2021 – February 2022). Implemented with the support of the House of Europe and the Goethe Institute in Ukraine. Project manager: Tetiana Belousova.

[14] Reports of conference participants (Braun 2004; Gerendely 2004; Stark 2004), part of transcribed interviews and examples of questionnaires: https://kmf.uz.ua/mr/index.html (accessed 18.10.2023).

[15] The list of such local history monographs is quite significant, so I mention only a few, selected at random: Hvozdo 2009; Kerechan 2004; Kutskir & Rubish 2012; Mateleshko 2009; Rosokha 2014.

[16] Non-professional local historians still use the authoritative Soviet-era publication *Zakarpatska oblast'* (Transcarpathian region) from the series *History of Towns and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR* (in 26 volumes). This publication existed in two versions: Belousov (1969), Semenyuk ed. (1982). It contained quite detailed historical information about all settlements of the region, which explains its popularity. However, this factual richness was accompanied by tendentious Soviet clichés that are still uncritically repeated by local amateur historians.

The ethnographic data used in the research primarily reflect the subjective views of rural inhabitants and geographically covers the territory of the entire region.[17] For the analysis, I used the testimonies of elderly interlocutors who could provide, when interviewed, coherent and consistent accounts of that time. An important criterion for selecting testimonial narratives was the fact that key aspects of the narratives were repeatedly documented in interviews across the region over the course of the study.[18] Interlocutors are mostly civilians but there were also military–local participants in the Second World War from both the Hungarian Army and the Soviet Red Army.

In addition to the stories of autochthonous Transcarpathians, memories of migrants from other parts of Soviet Ukraine and the Soviet Union, who were sent by authorities to establish order in Transcarpathia, were recorded. The majority of my interviewees are Ukrainian, but there are also interlocutors of Romanian, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian origin. There were also those from ethnically-mixed families that became common in the post-war period. Tellingly discussions of conflict have mostly been avoided in such families. Sometimes there were cases where the descendants of Soviet “liberators” were critical to the consequences of the arrival of Soviet troops and “Matskals” in Transcarpathia, where, it must be said, nobody needed “liberation”. They did not, however, speak badly of their parents in any direct fashion during the interviews.[19]

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical approaches to collective memory owe a great debt to Maurice Halbwachs (2007). Through him, social memory can be understood as a specific construct, influenced by the framework of social communities to which an individual belongs: family, community, class, and denomination. Assmann (2004, 2010), in his turn, has broadened the understanding of this process to “cultural frameworks”, to include texts, rituals, holidays, landscapes, and other phenomena.

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[17] According to the census in 1930, almost 70% of the Subcarpathian Rus population was employed in the agricultural sector. This indicator was even higher among Rusyns, as 82% were employed in agriculture (Prunytsia 1995). During the years under Soviet power, the urban population grew, but even today, two thirds of the region’s residents live in rural areas.

[18] Most of my interlocutors were autochthonous Transcarpathians born in the 1920s and 1930s, but in the process of recording materials I had to communicate with people even older. The oldest recently turned 106 and is still in good physical shape for his age and of sound mind.

[19] Matskal/Moskal is an external ethnonym with a negative connotation, widespread throughout Ukraine, which the local population used to refer to “Russians”.

Grounding my research in Halbwachs and Assmann, then, I read the main source of local memory differentiation as the social and cultural framework, while incorporating a significant ethnic character. In my research I use collective (social) memory as an explanatory tool. At the same time, I use this concept metaphorically, as a reflection of the processes of accumulation, reproduction, transmission, and reception of information that makes up a relatively stable image of the past of certain social groups. Such an image is an important condition for the group's identity construction. In the case of Transcarpathian Ukrainians, it allows me to talk about the important ground of their regional identity.

I contrast collective memory to communicative memory (Assmann 2010), collected memory (Olick 2007), and communal memory (Thompson 2005) to understand the manifestations of local memory narratives, which can contradict as well as complement and clarify the generalising images of collective memory. It should be noted that the apparent simplicity and explanatory power of the terms proposed by Assman (2010), Olick (2007) and Thompson (2005) are often severely tested when exposed to the many nuances inherent in field realities. Communal (or community memory) as I read it in my area of research is the memory of a group of people living in a certain area who recall biographical events that have remained stable in the absence of external pressure to change these memories (cf. Thompson 2005). One proviso I must include though is that in my research case, external influence is observable because in Soviet times the memory of groups was subjected to various forms of active correction, falsification, and erasure (which sometimes included an ancillary form of forgetting the community would fall into themselves when subjected to effective propaganda). This primarily affected the post-war generations of Transcarpathians who studied Soviet history textbooks and grew up in the symbolic space of a region rich in communist heroes. However, the memories and visions of the past produced by representatives of the pre-war generation allow us to defend the existence of a distinct communal memory process that Transcarpathian ethnic groups engaged in.

The Transcarpathian region is an exemplar of a borderland that has experienced a broad cultural palette since at least the Middle Ages (Kilianova 1994). A distinctive feature of this contact zone has been the convergence of confessional and ethnic boundaries. Being a Rusyn meant attending a “Russian” church, which is an Eastern rite church, and this religious identity still plays an important role in Ukrainian self-identification in Transcarpathia. Other ethnic groups in the region have belonged to other denominations: e.g. Jews were, naturally, representative of Judaism; Hungarians and Slovaks were partially Greek Catholics or Roman Catholics; and Germans were Protestants or Roman Catholics. Regarding Roma and Romanians, who were also mostly Orthodox, the differentiation took place primarily at the linguistic level. Within the boundaries of the villages, local government was carried out by representatives from ethnic communities who did not interfere in the internal life of other ethnic groups. The consolidation of ethnic identity was facilitated by the rural nature of the region. Even today, two thirds of its population live in the Transcarpathian villages, barely diminished since the beginning of the last century, when peasants made up approximately 90% of the inhabitants (Laver and Makara 1993; Mahochi 2021; Tyvodar 2011). Local ethnic groups were characterised by conservatism and endogamy, and even in the case of villages that had a prominent ethnic mix, mixed marriages were rare, a reality that has largely continued until today.

Since the village community and the family were the main social institutions, and were traditionally conservative, it was they who influenced processes of rural identification, as well as the "framework" for collective memory. Transcarpathians conceived and built their narratives (including memorials) based on binary oppositions such as "ours/theirs". This can be traced from the ethnographic works of nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Ján *Čaplowič*, the founding father of Slovak ethnography and author of *Ethnographic Observations from Hungary* (*Čaplowič* 1970) and Vasil Dovhovych's 1824 critical review of it (Dovhovych 2003). Indeed Yuri Zhatkovych's reflection upon the book can be included too (Zhatkovych 2007), as all three emphasised the ethno-cultural differences among local ethnic groups. Opposition at the ethnic level can also be observed in examples drawn from folklore tradition (Melnyk 1970; Senko 1996a, 1996b).

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the traditional demarcation of the region's ethnic groups was reinforced by the national policies of the ruling regimes, primarily the Hungarian authorities. Ethno-mobilisation projects, which intensified in Transcarpathia in the interwar period, had difficulty in reorienting the conservative population to think in national rather than religious categories. The events of the middle of the twentieth century, and especially the war period, exacerbated the "ethnicisation" of relations, which was especially manifested in the conditions of the Hungarian occupation during 1939–1944 and later under Soviet occupation (Leno 2019a). The Manifesto text on the reunification of Transcarpathian Ukraine with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic is an ideal example of ethnicity instrumentalisation (Leno 2018a).[20] As my previous research illustrates, lured by the prospect of being the titular ethnic group in the new state, the local Rusyns supported this Manifesto, although the version of the region's history it proposed contradicted their personal experience and historical memory (ibid.). In particular, over the last millennium (until 1944), the region developed under the influence of the ebb and flow of dominant European powers, which kept the region largely unscathed by the spheres of Russian Empire or USSR influence.

Thus, since 1944, we can observe differences in the memories of different ethnic groups. The result was the dominance of the official (Soviet and modern Ukrainian) versions of Transcarpathia's past and the parallel "underground" existence of the memory narratives of local ethnic groups. They were transmitted mainly in the form of oral narratives and more often appeared on the pages of memoirs or local history monographs. In addition, in recent decades, they have influenced the appearance of new memorial sites in Transcarpathia.

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[20] The Manifesto was proclaimed on November 26, 1944. Its text contains many ethno-mobilising slogans. It focuses on the historical justice of the reunification of Transcarpathia with the Ukrainian Socialist Republic, as well as historical grievances and centuries-old suffering of the local population under the control of foreign "exploiters" (Leno 2018a).

DIALECTICS OF TRANSCARPATHIAN MEMORY NARRATIVES

Oral histories of Transcarpathians can be divided into two large divisions: *memories of extreme* experiences (suffered in the midst of everyday life during extreme periods of history) and *memories of peacetime*. Here we can see a pattern of memories of extreme times differing according to the ethnicity of the narrators. In other words, the memories of Ukrainian and Hungarian peasants reported about the Second World War differed, sometimes quite strongly, regardless of their age. In times of radical change and war, ethnic status (whether majority or minority) influenced both the level of suffering experienced and the possibility of survival. In the peacetime of the Soviet era, conversely, nationality played less of a role. Meanwhile "peaceful stories" are correlated according to cohort (respondents' age category), which is to say that the memories of Hungarian or Ukrainian workers during the Soviet period were similar, especially if they belonged to the same generation. In other words, we can speak about some differences in collective memory based on socio-economic distinctions of class.

The interwar period

In almost all the memories of the older respondents (aged between seventy and ninety at the time of research), the political periods in the life of the region are divided by ethnicity: times "for the old Magyars" (Hungarian Kingdom period, which lasted until 1918), "for the Czechs" (the interwar period), "for the new Magyars" (1939–1944) and "for the Russians/Moskals" (1944–1991). The earliest period that my interlocutors remember was the 1920s, when Transcarpathia was under Czechoslovak rule.[21] From the point of view of elderly respondents, these were the best times in their lives, while the following periods, "under the new Magyars", and "under the Russians/Matskals/Soviets", were the worst. To my surprise, this attitude towards the Czech period is sometimes found even among the local Hungarian community, which had the status of majority ethnic group during the Hungarian occupation of Transcarpathia (1939–1945).[22] Not all local Hungarians, however, share this view and believe that the best time was under "their" rule, but other locals agree about the

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[21] In some memoirs, one can find earlier testimonies, but this article is primarily concerned with the interwar and later periods, which can be "reached" with the help of living witnesses.

[22] In Hungarian publications, the period of the Hungarian Kingdom in Transcarpathia (1939–1944) is not considered an occupation. Conversely, for Hungarians, the period of occupation was the interwar Czechoslovakian period (1919–1939).

"golden" interwar period, especially in comparison with the Soviet times. Recently I had the opportunity to hear from several old women of Ukrainian origin that the best life had already been in the most recent years of independent Ukraine (this was a few years before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022).

My narrators' memories of people and events were usually centred around their own locality, which is not surprising, as social mobility and travel opportunities were generally much lower a century ago. Quite often, though, the conversation turned to regional or metropolitan centres too. In the mental maps of my interlocutors, such centres of political or economic attraction were Prague, Budapest or neighbouring cities. Interviewees rarely mentioned Kyiv, L'viv, Kharkiv, or Moscow as actually Ukrainian or Russian, except in conversations about relatives who had been captured by the Russians during the First World War.[23]

Sometimes in the narratives about the interwar period, and foreign cities and places, the topic of employment of Rusyns and Romanians in the Western European countries and the USA or Canada were mentioned. Based on them, it seems promising to study how this experience accelerated changes in their communities and influenced the modernisation of the local population. I did not come across any stories about local Hungarians or Germans leaving Transcarpathia for work, but I must assume that there were some. During the conversations, the narrators were often shown photos of that period. A visual comparison of photographs from the interwar period with more recent photographs from the Soviet period revealed that the level of cultural development and economic prosperity declined significantly after World War II. We can, in fact, confidently state a noticeable regression in many spheres of society. In the photographs of the interwar years, Transcarpathians look more modern, happier than the next generation, whose childhood was spent in the Soviet period of the 1950s.

Sometimes it was possible to detect the theme of a gradual militarisation of society, manifested in stories about the participation of young people in various organisations that began to function on the eve of the war.[24] It is possible to note the absence of stories that would testify to inter-ethnic tension or confrontation in the rural environment. Sometimes in our conversations, there were hints of anti-Semitism or antipathy towards Roma, but these were usually emotional expressions against specific people and their "immoral deeds" that did not reflect a general attitude towards an entire ethnic group. Negative moments arose more often in conversations about “drunkards” or “thieves”. Although endogamy and ethnic separation prevailed in society, representatives of different cultures generally remembered treating each other with respect, as can be seen from many interviews. Of course, this did not exclude inter-ethnic tensions, which were rarer. According to numerous oral memoirs, despite the high level of interethnic tolerance, there was also a certain hierarchy. In particular, while no ethnic group objected to a Hungarian being the head of the village, they never wanted to see a Gypsy in this position.

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[23] Among the emancipated youth, who later became active persons in Carpathian Ukraine, there were active connections with representatives of Western Ukrainian territories (see, for example, Kediulych-Khymynets 2011). However, the task of this article is to reflect the memory of the region's ordinary residents, and therefore the memories of representatives from among the intellectual class are almost not found here.

[24] The militarisation of society began before direct hostilities, one sign of which was the appearance of people in military uniforms. Among the paramilitary organisations of that period were: the Ukrainian National Defense, People's Defense Organization Carpathian Sich, Hungarian youth military, and the sports organisation Levente.

The Period of War

The period of the Second World War is an important milestone in our recorded memories. Even my earliest field research demonstrated the unsuitability of research frameworks that are typical for conversations and memories about the war in other territories of Ukraine. Usually those frameworks capture and discuss the issues of Nazi occupation, mass-partisan struggle, collaboration, Gestapo activities and other similar topics, which are not related to the Transcarpathian context. The question of the war’s local chronology also turned out to be debatable. In addition, it was interesting to trace the characteristics of everyday life, the course of the Holocaust, the relations of residents with German army representatives, the public reaction to the arrival of the Red Army, the attitude to the spread of banditry, to military raids by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. While for any historian the importance of chronology and dating of historical events cannot be overstated, for my interlocutors these aspects were not considered essential. The question of an exact or approximate date of the beginning of the war sometimes gave rise to long reflections and even active disputes in cases where a group interview was conducted, because there was no common opinion on this matter.

Some considered that the war had started in the autumn of 1939, but there were other dates mentioned. For example, the beginning of the armed confrontation between the Sichmen[25] and the Czechoslovak army, and later, Hungarian soldiers, which took place in March 1939. But Ukrainians from the Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, and Berehovo districts believe that the war began in the autumn of 1938, when in November, according to the Munich Arbitration decisions, Hungarian troops occupied a large part of the region. Many other elderly people, regardless of their ethnic origin, said that the war began in the summer of 1941.[26]

Thus, based on the subjective ideas and memories of Transcarpathia inhabitants, it is possible to revise the usual chronology of the war and change its beginning to the autumn of 1938. At the same time, it should be remembered that in their personal experience, there is no specific date when the war started, or it was declared to have begun on June 22, 1941, the date of the German attack on the Soviet Union, to which Transcarpathia did not belong yet. In the personal stories, experiences, and memories of the native Transcarpathians it is impossible to find any subjectively distinct recollection of a day when the war began. We can see the difference with the Soviet Union population, for whom the war began with the attack of Germany on June 22, 1941. Likewise, when we look at the present recollection of Russian aggression – for the vast majority of Ukrainian inhabitants, the beginning of the current war is February 24, 2022, as everyone has come to subjectively experience and feel it. Since Transcarpathians do not have such a personal (subjectively suffered and experienced) dating for the beginning of that war, they often mention the date that they learned at school, through Soviet commemorative policy and in books and films. It is also noteworthy that this Soviet periodisation of the war is found in the memories of all Transcarpathian ethnic minority groups.

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[25] The Sichmen were members of the Carpathian Sich People’s Self-Defense Organisation, a kind of military force of Carpathian Ukraine.

[26] According to the Soviet propaganda interpretation, the war began on June 22, 1941, when Hitler attacked the USSR. This date would later form the basis of the cult of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union.

The end of the war as it emerges in the personal stories of local people does not coincide with the official Victory Day (May 9, 1945) either. Oral testimonies allow us to conclude that, for most narrators, the war ended when the "Magyars" retreated and the "Russians" (Red Army) occupied the territory, in other words, when the front moved further west. Alongside such a subjective (local) vision of the end of the war, there is also an official date, Victory Day, May 9th. If for the Rusyns the arrival of the Red Army was associated with hopes for a peaceful life, the Hungarians and Germans did not know what to expect but looked on at the change of power with fear.

An interesting and ambiguous topic is the impressions of Transcarpathians regarding the participants of the conflict: the German, Hungarian, and Red Armies. In addition to these main characters, Ludvik Svoboda's Czechoslovak Corps,[27] units of the RLA[28] and UPA,[29] and representatives of the Galician SS[30] all appear in personal stories. These latter military units will not be discussed now, but the collected material opens the prospect of further research, since the stories tell of interesting domestic relations and surprises. I will only add that none of them provoked any preferences; in the narratives the newly-arrived soldiers did not loot, they behaved decently, communicated with and contacted local residents on a range of topics, and tried to maintain good relations.

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[27] Czechoslovakian military units within the Red Army were formed from immigrants, prisoners, and fugitives in 1943. This Czechoslovakian Army Corps was commanded by the future president of the Czechoslovakia, General Ludvík Svoboda.

[28] The Russian Liberation Army (RLA) was a collaborationist formation, primarily composed of Russians that fought under German command during World War II.

[29] Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiia (abbreviated UPA). The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was a Ukrainian nationalist paramilitary and guerrilla formation founded by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in 1942.

[30] The Fourteenth Waffen-Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician) was a military formation of Nazi Germany during World War II, consisting mainly of military volunteers of Ukrainian ethnic origin, later also Slovaks.

German troops were stationed in the region for a short time (summer–autumn 1944), but they were vividly etched in the population's memory. Their presence was not accompanied by local oppression, as Transcarpathia belonged to their partner Hungary. My interlocutors' memories of the Germans were mostly neutral and often positive, although, at the same time, the narrators expressed the fear they felt in the armed soldiers' presence. It is interesting that in their stories the locals used the ethnonym "Germans" and did not use the word "Nazi", unlike some of my interlocutors who moved to Transcarpathia from other Ukrainian regions after the Second World War.[31]

The stories reflect a wide range of relations between Germans and the local Ukrainian population. Germans attended Sunday services in the church, which surprised and impressed the pious locals (Interview with male Ukrainian born in 1923, village of Velyki Komyaty). The teenagers and children of that time remembered how the soldiers shared chocolate with them. The older ones said that the soldiers paid attention to the children, played games and talked with them, showed them photos of their family members, and admired the surrounding nature (Rosokha 2014, p. 130). One of the interviewees was struck by how "very young Germans cried and prayed" before the battle (Interview with female Ukrainian born in 1929, village of Luh). Sometimes soldiers helped peasants on the farm, for example, by plowing the land with their horses. They shared products, and paid for housing, food, and for washing clothes (such local commerce was recorded in many villages and in the memoir literature, in particular, in the book of Yuri Balega, b. 1928 [Balega 2006]). There were cases of soldiers showing interest or even falling in love with local girls, but the commanders maintained discipline and punished offenders. Despite the ban on flirting with persons of the opposite sex, however, there were cases of intimate relationships and even births of children by local women.[32] The relationship between the locals and the Germans is a complex issue that requires a particularly sensitive approach and separate research.

Memories of German units' presence were also occasionally negative though. For example, in the village of Chornyi Potik, they burned houses in which Soviet partisans were hiding, and became more active in the summer of 1944 as the front line came closer. In another story, the interlocutor recalled how the Germans, playing with a little girl, threw her up, scaring the child and making her cry, although they probably did not wish her any harm (Interview with female Ukrainian born in 1926, village of Bushtyno). Other unpleasant cases were also mentioned. However, in general, the German military collective image in Transcarpathia is one of an ordinary person, with none of the features of a Nazi occupier with sadistic tendencies that appears in stories from Ukraine or Belarus.

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[31] This also applies to Hungarians, who were also called *nèmetek*, that is, "Germans".

[32] Information recorded from a Ukrainian woman, born in 1926, village of Lazeshchyna. She said that several children were born in the village at that time, who were physically (hair and eye colour, body shape) very different from their parents. Similar information was recorded from other narrators.

The negative image of the "local Nazi", which was later actively used in Soviet popular and scientific literature and commemorative politics, was assigned to the Hungarian gendarmes and partly to soldiers of the Hungarian army. People's memory connects them with the extermination and persecution of Sichmen and those who supported the proclamation of the Carpathian Ukraine, the Holocaust, the requisitioning of horses, and the mobilisation of Transcarpathian people into forced labour units and battalions to construct the Arpad Line fortifications, parts of which still exist in the region.[33] From the testimonies of former workers, we can see that the forced labour affected various ethnic groups of the region: Romas/Gypsies, Jews, Ruthenians and Romanians, Slovaks, and even local Hungarians (Hrytsak and Ofitsynskyi 2013).[34]

Hungarian gendarmes, as representatives of the administrative authorities, maintained strict public order and forbade communication in non-Hungarian languages in public places. They could severely beat people for using a non-state language, regardless of their gender or age. Remarkably, Transcarpathians of Hungarian origin never told me about the language intolerance of the Hungarian authorities, just as they did not try to justify the gendarmes. At the same time, interviewees from all parts of the region admitted that, thanks to the "pyryashes", the abuse of tavern keepers stopped, and there were few problems with village drunkards.[35] We see morally ambivalent features in images of the Hungarian gendarme, but at the same time, contemporaries recognise them as "conscientious" servants of public order.

Representatives of the local Hungarian population remembered the military and gendarmes with greater respect in contrast to Ukrainian-Rusyns. However, there were also those who experienced fear, as in cases of public order violation, they were also punished. There are cases when Hungarians hid Jews or Roma, even though if they were exposed, it would lead to the rescuer's execution (Aladar, Zeikan & Navrotska 2006). It should be noted that more recently, local Hungarians usually claim to have had good relations with Jews during the war and that they condemned the repression and extermination of Jews initiated by the authorities.[36] Oral memories testify that humanity and empathy, and envy and hatred did not depend on ethnicity of the inhabitants of the region. Most watched the eviction of the Jews in silence because they were afraid of the military or of gendarmes. There were those too who, out of hatred for them or for pragmatic reasons, handed Jews over to the gendarmes. Then there were some who hid and helped Jews or Gypsies, who, although to a lesser extent, were also subjected to repression during the war.[37]

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[33] The Arpad Line is a line of fortifications built in 1941–44 in the Carpathians along the border of the Kingdom of Hungary.

[34] Their local ethnic name is *Tsygani* ("Gypsies"), and so is their self-name. However, in recent years, the power of the media has gradually influenced the spread of another name; Roma.

[35] *Shandars*, *pyryashes*, *pyryaniks* are the local names of Hungarian gendarmes. The latter two names are derived from the long feathers (Ukr. *pyrya*) that were an element of their headdress.

[36] A similar opinion is shared by Hungarians in all villages and towns of Transcarpathia, where the interviews were recorded. For example: Mali and Velyki Heyivtsi, Chaslivtsi, Surte, Berehove, Batyovo, Mala and Velyka Dobron, Yanoshi, etc.

Soviet Red Army representatives left an ambiguous and contradictory set of memories behind them (Leno 2017) as the Transcarpathians experienced the peculiarities of life in wartime conditions in September-October 1944. Although it lasted no longer than a month, it can be compared to the negative war experience that Ukrainians, residing in different parts of the country, endured for several years. The Rusyns were waiting for the Soviet soldiers' arrival, bringing, as they had hoped, the end of the war with them and the hope of meeting a "brotherly" nation, actively promoted by influential Russophile representatives in the interwar period.

In many Rusyn, Slovak, and Romanian villages, the Soviet Red Army was welcomed with joy, which did not at the same time exclude fear. Nevertheless, the villagers showed their hospitality sincerely, even if "liberators" did not always behave decently (Ferkov et al. 2018; Ofitsynskyi 2015b). Some demanded alcoholic beverages, arranged drunken fights, took people's possessions, and abused girls and women (Ofitsynskyi 2015b, p. 135).[38] Their popularity among Rusyns was further diminished by the recruitment of "volunteers" that resembled forced mobilisation. A lot of men hid for months and avoided this "voluntary" conscription, although others willingly enlisted in the ranks of the Soviet Red Army (Interview with male Romanian born in 1935, village of Bila Tserkva). Among them were many young men and even girls who were lured by the new uniforms and the promise that they would first be trained and not immediately sent to the front line (Interview with male Ukrainian born in 1925, village of Simer). Judging by the memories, not everyone was so lucky, as many Transcarpathians died in their first battle, without having gone through the proper military preparation. As a result of these and other circumstances, when the cult of the Great Patriotic War began to form in the mid-1960s, it did not find a significant number of supporters in Transcarpathia. This mythology[39] could not take root here, despite the considerable efforts of Soviet propagandists and mass commemorations, which really began during the tenure of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.

Although Soviet Red Army soldiers of Ukrainian origin often appeared in personal stories, narrators usually used the words "Russians" or "Matskals" as a general term for "liberators". The first ethnonym was connotatively identical to the endo-ethnonym of the local Rusyns, which provided some local justification for their sense of kinship with the "liberators". The second ethnonym ("Matskals") was almost never found among Transcarpathians during the war, so it obviously spread later and expressed an exclusively negative attitude. It was not used in communication with Russians and was used in relation to them in the circle of other ethnic groups. This dysphemism is most likely a consequence of the negative attitude towards Russians as representatives of the Soviet government which was formed over the following decades in Transcarpathia. It should be noted that in the second half of the twentieth century, there was no erasure of differences between local ethnic groups in the region. Despite Russification, which has led to the contamination of local dialects and languages with "Russisms", local Rusyns mainly identify themselves as Ukrainians and oppose themselves to "Matskals". In the case of mixed families that appeared after the war as a result of the resettlement of Russians in Transcarpathia, offensive ethnic names were usually absent in the family members' memories of the war period.

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[37] The repression of Gypsies during the war is a separate topic. They were not subjected to total persecution in Zakarpattia as the Jews were, but many of them did suffer as a result of the Paraimos (Gypsy Holocaust). So far, these studies in Transcarpathia remain a promising and under-researched area. Some of this information can be found both in published oral history materials (Aladar, Zeikan, Navrotska 2006) and in recorded memoirs of elderly narrators from various local ethnic groups.

[38] Information about the "liberators" is quite contradictory. Local Hungarians speak extremely negatively about them (Ferkov et al. 2018, p. 6). Among other ethnic groups, they may encounter both more positive and negative memories.

[39] This cult in Zakarpattia was supported primarily at the official level. At the family level, it was revered mainly by immigrants from other parts of the country who experienced the German occupation regime during the war.

The ambiguous attitude towards the "liberators" is demonstrated by the memory of other local nationalities: Hungarians, Slovaks, Swabians (Germans), Romanians and Jews.[40] Thus, the Soviet troop offensive brought much suffering to those belonging to the former titular ethnic groups, the Magyars (Hungarians) and the Swabians (Germans) (Mishchanyn 2018, pp. 140–152). If for the pro-Ukrainian Rusyns, the arrival of the Soviet Red Army can in principle be called "liberation", then for the Hungarians and Germans this period is more characterised by years of persecution and poverty, a characterisation that is still not widely publicised in the context of the whole of Ukraine and which appears very superficially in history textbooks (Leno 2019b).

In ethnically Hungarian and German villages, and sometimes in Slovak and Romanian ones, according to the testimony of narrators, the "liberators" robbed shops (Interview with male Hungarian, born in 1924, village of Muzhievo; male Germany born in 1926, village of Bohdan), raped women (Interview with female German, born in 1942, village of Zhdenievo; female Hungarian, born in 1923, village of Velyki Geyivtsi), and killed people who seemed suspicious. These are stories the eyewitnesses of those events are still afraid to tell (Interview with male Slovac born in 1934, village of Dravtci; see also Braun 2004). In November 1944, long before the region officially joined the USSR, repressions initiated by the decisions of the Fourth Ukrainian Front command began (Mishchanyn 2018, p. 141).[41] This applied to all Hungarian men aged eighteen to fifty (Makara 1995, p. 649), although there were also cases of repression of younger boys and older men. The cynicism of the repressions is compounded by the fact that in 1945, a monument dedicated to liberations with the words "gratitude on behalf of the residents" appeared in the centre of Berehovo, where Hungarians comprised the majority (Leno 2019b, p. 87).

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[40] This topic is partially covered in the following studies: Leno (2017); Ferkov et al. (2018).

[41] The official accession of Transcarpathia to the USSR was preceded by a period of being a quasi-state of the Transcarpathian Ukraine (1944–1946).

While the men were in concentration camps, Hungarian women were subjected to violence by military personnel for several years after the war. Such stories are told by Hungarian, Roma, and Ukrainian interlocutors. From them, we learn how young women hunched over, put on old clothes and masked their faces with mud so that the Soviet soldiers would not flirt with them (Interview with female Hungarian, born in 1923, village of Velyki Geyivtsi). Such testimonies partially coincide with the archival data, but in general, this page of the history of the Soviet Transcarpathian "liberation" remains unknown.[42]

It is estimated that at least 10,000 out of 25,000 Transcarpathian Hungarians died in concentration camps.[43] Most interred Hungarians did not know the Russian language, which only added to their problems.[44] Often, the Soviet secret police investigators attributed accusations to them and provided pre-written confessions for them to sign, which Hungarians did without hesitation, having no idea what was written in these confessions. The victims of the camp who survived and lived until 2004–2005 did not show any anger or resentment, the result of the fear that haunted them all their lives.[45] However, it is noticeable that in the memory of the older generation of Hungarians, Stalin was seen as the culprit of the tragedy and was especially hated. For example, in one of the Hungarian villages we were told that when he died in March, 1953, residents smashed his statue without waiting for any official dismantling and threw the fragments into the river (Interview with male Hungarian, born in 1937, village of Shalanky). Local Swabians (Germans) did not escape Soviet repressions either (Interview with female German, born in 1942, village of Zhdenievo). According to the orders of the Fourth Ukrainian Front, men between eighteen and fifty and German women between eighteen and thirty were subject to labour mobilisation and deportation (Makara 1995, p. 649). As a result of the repression, their numbers in the region decreased to approximately 4,000, which was less than a third of their pre-war numbers. Among the stories told by Hungarians, there were memories of how they used their knowledge of the Rusyn or Slovak language to allow them to declare themselves Ukrainian-Rusyn/Slovak and avoid repression (Braun 2004). A similar practice of mimicry during the war was sometimes used by Jews who changed their faith or declared that they had changed it and married people of other nationalities. Such cases are recorded in the memories of several Ukrainian narrators from villages of Maramorosh district; Shiroky Lug, Uglya, Bushtyno, etc.

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[42] This topic is partially covered in my article about the crimes of the Red Army in Transcarpathia, written on the basis of archival data (Leno 2018b).

[43] There are no exact data on the number of Transcarpathian Hungarians who died in Soviet camps. Researchers suggest that this number ranges from 10,000-16,000 (Dobos & Molnár 2017; Shtork 2010).

[44] Transcribed interviews from several local Hungarians who passed through the Soviet camps can be found here: https://kmf.uz.ua/mr/7_digit_inteju.html (accessed 07.11.2023).

[45] In 2004–2005, the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute conducted oral history field research in Hungarian villages in Transcarpathia, involving hundreds of post-memory carriers and some living victims of Soviet repression and Sovietisation.

Local Slovaks, despite their fear of the military, mostly welcomed the "liberators", as they associated them with hopes for Czechoslovak power restoration in the region (Interview with male Slovak, born in 1934, village of Dravtci). As an interviewee related, the Romanians, who, like the Rusyns, suffered from forced labour and the horrors of the war (Ofitsynskyi 2013), also welcomed the arrival of the Fourth Ukrainian Front troops (Interview with male Romanian born in 1935, village of Bila Tserkva). At the same time, representatives of both national minorities have many stories to tell about the repression and destruction of their community members by Soviet power, especially because of the first post-war years during the preventive Sovietisation.[46] The first victims of Soviet persecution were priests and the so-called "kulaky" (in Russian) or "kurkuli" (in Ukrainian) who resisted collectivisation[47]. Persecution for them meant being either physically destroyed or, more often, being sentenced to extended periods in Stalinist camps. Tragically, two respondents from the Romanian villages of Solotvyno and Bila Tserkva, recalled that Ukrainians or Moldovans (the latter essentially Romanian[48]) were reportedly the most violent guards in the camps. Other informants from Romanian villages (seventeen records) could not confirm this information, however. Among my Hungarian respondents (more than thirty entries), I heard similar information from three elderly interlocutors. Then, as others noted, among the Russian or Ukrainian soldiers and guards, there were both good and bad people.

EVERYDAY LIFE DURING THE WAR

A separate theme of our conversations with interviewees was everyday life and their experience in war. During the war there were no massive evacuations of enterprises and factories, no collapse of infrastructure, no protracted battles, no strict regime of German occupation, no collaboration with the enemy, or, vice versa, no mass involvement of civilians in hidden or guerrilla struggles or Nazi repression. Such narratives of war, inherent to other territories of Ukraine, were absent here. Some of these aspects appeared in this region, but in fact, the Hungarian occupation regime was much more lenient than the German one.[49]

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[46] Preventive Sovietisation is the period of the first years of Soviet power in the region (1944–46). The first Sovietisation events took place on the territory of the puppet quasi-state of Transcarpathian Ukraine. The implementation of collectivisation, the establishment of the cult of Stalin, and the creation of the Soviet system of regional management took place while preserving the formal independence of this state entity.

[47] "Kulak" or "Kurkul" was a negative name for the category of peasants who were considered ideological enemies of the Soviet government. Usually, this category included reasonably wealthy and commercially successful peasant farmers.

[48] By ethnic origin, Moldovans share a common ancestry with the Romanian ethnic group, as evidenced by their common language and traditional culture. Moldovans became a state-forming ethnic group as a result of Soviet policy and the proclamation of the Moldavian SSR.

[49] There was no German occupation regime, no organised partisan activity, and no Soviet saboteurs. They tried to exile the latter in January 1942, which ended with the operative destruction of

This situation was the result of the official "Ugro–Rusyns" policy, according to which the historical and national unity of Hungarians and Rusyns (Slavik 2013, p. 117) was defended and coexisted relatively peacefully for almost a millennium as part of the Hungarian Kingdom.[50] Thus, we can speak about a relatively high loyalty to the Hungarian authorities during the war. From the beginning of the war to the autumn of 1944, there were no military actions in the region's territory. The front passed the Transcarpathian territory in September-October 1944, however, which in some places led to the serious destruction of local infrastructure and human casualties on both sides (Ofitsynskyi 2010, p. 252).

The personal stories of the locals give the impression that the rhythm of everyday life in the region during the war did not differ too much from the pre-war period until the spring and summer of 1944. Changes did take place, but the stories of people I spoke with were sketched mainly within the boundaries of their own settlement or the neighbouring administrative centre, where the villagers went to the market or on other errands. Inhabitants of lowland villages recalled that with the war's outbreak, not many changes took place in daily life, apart from a mobilisation of men into the Hungarian army. The Transcarpathian highlanders, who, due to the economic and geographical specificity of the region, had a more difficult life than the valley dwellers even in peacetime, gave different information that the war immediately caused more difficult times. In the memories of combatants who have survived to the present day, there are no hints of any heroic moments connected with the war; they only remember their fear, their difficulties, and death. During the war, the organisation of forced labour in the region was announced. It had a temporary (shifting) nature that allowed people to carry out their usual daily activities, take care of livestock, engage in agriculture, harvest crops, and sell products in markets. Only a relatively small number of local people became "Ostarbeiters" working in the territory of Germany.

The effects of the war began to be felt after the local Holocaust, which caused profound demographic and economic changes in the region. The Jewish community, which was the third-largest community and constituted the majority in some villages and towns, practically disappeared in the spring of 1944 (Slavik 2017). This affected economic life, as Jews traditionally received raw materials and products from people and ensured trade. The Holocaust did not directly affect other ethnic groups in the region, as mixed marriages were rare. The Holocaust experiences were felt at the neighbourhood or at individual levels, and this event still evokes condemnation and negative local memories. However, in the 1950s and 1970s, authorities took consistent measures to eliminate any references to the Jewish presence in Transcarpathia from the collective memory and the symbolic space.

Borkaniuk's group. Soviet sabotage groups, as well as partisans, became active soon after, at the end of the summer of 1944.

[50] The Kingdom of Hungary was a monarchy that lasted for almost a millennium until 1918. For almost the entire period, the Transcarpathian territory was part of the kingdom.

At the end of the summer of 1944, the front approached Transcarpathia, which deepened the shortage of consumer goods. I recorded such information from members of all ethnic groups living across the region. In order to escape possible bombings as the front approached, the locals began to dig "dykunky", fortification pits for their families. It became customary to turn off the lights at night and cover the windows in houses, because planes on both sides could drop bombs by targeting the light. At the same time, there was a shortage of livestock, which was increasingly taken by the army (first Hungarian, later Soviet), although Soviet troops took the cattle without a word (Rosokha 2014, pp. 130-132), while Hungarian soldiers provided compensation or issued receipts, according to which the owners could receive compensation in the future (Leno 2017, p. 50).

Military actions took place in the region during the second half of September and lasted until the beginning of November 1944. In general, compared to other territories of Ukraine, Zakarpattia was spared the horrors of war. However, even two months of active hostilities in the region had their impact on the rules and norms governing traditional morality. Marauding became common during this period. Many testimonies have been collected about men or teenagers who would undress the corpses of dead soldiers and steal their clothes and especially shoes (male Ukrainian born in 1930, village of Orychovytsa). The bodies of the dead people could even be dug up for this purpose, their lower limbs cut off when their shoes were frozen to them (male Ukrainian born in 1936, village of Zhdenievo). Not all locals committed such acts, and many condemned looting. One story, for instance, tells of a woman forbidding her daughter to communicate with a potential groom when she learned that he had removed the outer clothing of a dead soldier (female Ukrainian born in 1926, village of Bushtyno).

Another negative consequence of the war was the emergence of gangs, which was mentioned by narrators from different districts of the region: Khust, Perechyn, Tyachiv, etc. Some aspects of these gangs have been studied by local historians (Arzhevitin 2020; Danylets 2023), which emerged as a result of desertion, evasion of Hungarian and Soviet mobilisations and the presence of a significant number of weapons among the people (Danylets 2023). Such gangs were dominated by Rusyns, but other ethnic groups were to be found among them too. In addition to gangs appearing spontaneously, bands of marauders were created by the Soviet authorities to fight the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Mainly bad memories have been documented with regard to the bandits and the Red Army soldiers who tried to eliminate them. Local people often found themselves "between a rock and a hard place" during these operations, since the Soviet Red Army also committed robberies as well as violence against the civilian population (Leno 2018c; Mishchanyn 2020).

COMMUNAL AND "OFFICIAL" FEATURES OF THE MEMORY LANDSCAPE

Certain local and communal variants of memory in Transcarpathia that have a certain ethnic specificity can be clearly discerned, existing at the family level and mainly transmitted orally. They can additionally be seen in material forms that exist in parallel or are sometimes embedded in the "official", ceremonial landscape of memory. Among the most common forms are: monuments and war memorials that serve as official (state) places of remembrance; rural and urban cemeteries; and crosses and monuments that have emerged as a result of private or regional civic initiatives.

The full-scale war that started in February 2022 launched a mass dismantling of Soviet monuments in the region (*Ziavyvsia*). This communist legacy of monuments had been dominant in the region, as memorials were placed mainly in towns centres. In Soviet times, cemeteries could provide some competition to official memory places. They preserved both their religious and ethnic specificity: Hungarians are buried in the Lutheran cemetery; Ukrainians at the Orthodox and Greek Catholic cemeteries; and Slovaks and Hungarians mostly at the Roman Catholic ones. These rural cemeteries are still distinguished by the symbolism of the images, epitaphs on the tombstones, and the specifics of the ritual burial. Among them, Romanian cemeteries can be singled out as a separate topic of research; large and elaborate, they can be explained by the peculiarities of their mentality, and not only by the peculiarities of memory. It should be added that during the Soviet period, urban cemeteries were characterised by a certain "internationality", while rural cemeteries were marked by a kind of ethnic or confessional homogeneity.

The Jewish layer of the memorial landscape is represented by their cemeteries too, though burials there have not taken place for decades. The local Jewish community was subjected to a double extermination: because of the Holocaust, they were physically destroyed, and any memories or traces of their presence were erased in Soviet times as well, when Jewish religious or administrative buildings were repurposed or neglected. Evidence of the gradual erasure from memory of Jews was not rare, as the Transcarpathian post-war generation (Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Russians) removed many tombstones for private or summer-house construction, a fact attested to in many oral testimonies.[51] Only during the last thirty years have Jewish cemeteries begun to be maintained properly at the expense of descendants of local Jews. Other attempts to restore a Jewish memorial presence have as yet not found support from the authorities. As an example, only twelve memorial sites have been opened in eight regional towns, where approximately 90% of their pre-war population were killed as a result of the Holocaust. Attempts to return preserved religious buildings to the Jews (such as philharmonic halls, cultural centres and banks) have been unsuccessful.

In recent decades, changes to the region's memorial space have taken place that have made it less official. Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Ukrainians opened monuments or put up commemorative plaques to "their" heroes and "victims" or to famous events. During the Soviet period, it had been forbidden to mention them, as they did not "fit" into the communist pantheon of heroes. The subsequent initiative and implementation of such projects came from both private individuals and state authorities. The specifics of these places of memory, as well as the issue of their coexistence in the space of official memorials, requires more research.

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[51] This happened under the Soviet authorities, which did not shy away from such practices; gravestones from the old city cemetery were used to make paving slabs near a large department store in Uzhhorod.

CONCLUSIONS

The grand historical narrative of any country and local versions of history, which are recorded in regional variants of collective memory, are characterised by significant differences. This is particularly evident in the case of such border regions as Transcarpathia. As a result of the oral-historical reflection analysis of the Second World War period and the beginning of Sovietisation in Transcarpathia, the following conclusions may be reached. As the region was a part of Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the interwar period, Transcarpathians developed a special vision and understanding of the events. Particularly noteworthy are the commemorative narratives of 1938–1945, the interpretation of which differ from the interpretation of the war that can be found in official textbooks of Ukrainian history. This applies both to the features of everyday life during the war years and to relations with German or Hungarian and Red Army soldiers. Even in the memories of former soldiers there are almost no heroic motives in the stories about life during the war or the tragic component of life. Except for Carpathian Ukraine and the Holocaust events, there is no great separation into larger narrative layers.

In many regions, the rhythm of life during the war did not differ too much from the pre-war period, and the population had significantly fewer negative experiences compared to inhabitants of other regions of Ukraine. In particular, this less extreme experience of the period meant that efforts to galvanise support for a cult of the Great Patriotic War in Transcarpathia ultimately failed. The cult, which became a cornerstone of Soviet identity, could not take root in Transcarpathia, since its veneration among the population was more formal in nature.

The memories and personal histories of Transcarpathians, however, are often intertwined with official narrative theses. A common example is the different dates for the beginning of the war. Most of the narrators reproduce their own experience of the war, which is usually limited to the outskirts of a particular settlement or the nearest administrative centre. However, in cases where the subject of the conversation went beyond the boundaries of the town or village, the interlocutors provided information that they received from school courses, Soviet and special modern TV, the media, feature films, or literature. The exception was the recorded stories about the Hungarian or Soviet Red Army soldiers; in such cases, the geography of personal memories was much wider.

The personal experiences of different local ethnic groups within the same region must sometimes differ significantly. This applies especially to the tragic historical record associated with Hungarian and Soviet repressions. Unfortunately, more recent collective traumas of local ethnic groups have not yet passed the stage of recognition and discussion between the titular majority and the many ethnic minorities.

This suggests a reluctance to bear responsibility for the past, as well as a weak level of collective empathy that is manifested even at the level of low commemoration practices—each group perpetuates its own victims. The same can be said of the ethnicity of the past. Respondents from different ethnic groups look at the past using their own "ethnic optics" that contains the potential problem of developing into some local version of the "war of memories".

In general, the collected oral history data open the prospect of further research, for instance in challenging and deconstructing the region's "liberation" process. Such research has great potential, but has not yet taken place as the "liberation" narrative still holds sway in books and general works. In addition, less well-known topics remain; the stories of Transcarpathians mobilised to the Hungarian army, the Holocaust, and many other pages of local history that have not come to the researchers' attention yet. The data collection continues while interlocutors still wish to speak and offer their memories and interpretations, so that in time, such dialogues may be possible, and more equitable histories may be written.

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PAVLO LENO

HISTORICAL MEMORIES IN TRANSCARPATHIA: ORAL HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Key words: Transcarpathia, cultural and communicative memory, oral history materials, World War II, Sovietization, Carpatho-Rusyns, Hungarians, Germans

Transcarpathia is a border and mostly mountainous region with a rather complex ethnographic and religious mosaic. It borders 4 countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia), and geographically is the westernmost part of Ukraine. These factors contributed to the shape of a local multicultural population with fluid identities and very specific worldviews. The deepening of cultural ruptures is increased by regional historical memory, which shows the past in a way that is not described in the official historical grand narrative. This situation is also influenced by ethnic diversity and the presence of ethnic minorities, in particular local Hungarians and Germans, whose reflections on World War II and Sovietization differ both from the official grand narrative and from the memories of local Ukrainians.

This study exhibits these differences and attempts to generalize and explain them. The ethnographic data was collected during the author's fieldwork. Among the respondents, there are representatives of various Transcarpathian ethnic groups, direct witnesses of the XX century's most significant events. Memories of these events are analysed through their impact on the everyday life of ordinary people.

Article translated by Viktoriia Shkurenko

Author's Address:
Pavlo Leno, PhD
Department of Archaeology, Ethnology and Cultural Studies,
Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine
Email: pavlo.leno@uzhnu.edu.ua
ORCID: 0000-0002-4196-6173