

The Lemko Land Remembered: About the Research on the Memory of the Lemkos in Poland and Ukraine

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Abstract: The paper concerns the collective and cultural memory of the Lemko community, members of which identify themselves as Ukrainians or as Russians (Carpathorussians). As a consequence of deportations the group experienced at the end of the Second World War in communist Poland (1944-1947), most Lemkos now live scattered in western Poland and western Ukraine. The members of the group are unusually focused on the past and still build their identity on this historic reversal, which re-defined the meaning of being the Lemko. In the late 1980s, they began intensive commemorative practices. I have explored the discourses of the Lemkos' past shown in written and oral narrations, which I gathered in Poland and Ukraine. The results of ethnographic field research and the analysis of documentary literature show the variety of memory discourse strategies which often lead to conflict, and which the Lemkos apply in their discussions of contemporary ethnic identity.

Keywords: Lemkos, memory, narration, identity, Poland, Ukraine

Introduction

The Lemkos are one of the Carpathian ethnic group, a small group of the East Slavic peoples. The Lemko region is called *Lemkovyna* / *Lemkivshchyna*, and it is situated in the southeastern part of Poland, stretching from the valley of Poprad in the west to the valley of Oslava in the east, including the whole of the Lower Beskid Mountains.

This group was displaced in 1944-1947 to the USSR and to previously German lands in northern and western Poland, and, as a result, has become dispersed¹. The majority of Lemkos--about 70%, or 70,000-100,000 people--were deported to Soviet Ukraine. Today, many live in the western part of Ukraine (in the Ternopil and Lviv regions) and in the western part of Poland. According to the National Census conducted in Poland in 2011, there are about 10,000 people who identify themselves as Lemkos living in Poland. Half of these declare only one national identity – Lemko nationality; the other half declares double national identity – for example, Lemko and Ukrainian, or Lemko and Polish². The rest of the Lemkos identify themselves as just Ukrainian, making the total number difficult to estimate.

Considering the fact that the position of the Lemkos in Poland is the position of an ethnic minority³, it is worth noting that in Ukraine the Lemkos are treated as an ethnographic group of Ukrainian Carpathian mountaineers. Some the researchers insist on the theory that the Lemkos are the most westerly situated part of the Ukrainian nation, speaking a Ukrainian dialect (Krasowski 1995: 381-386). For others, the Lemkos are just the Lemkos, a regional ethnic group, nothing more, nothing less (Michna 1995, Nowak 2003), while for some, the Lemkos are a part of the Russian nation (living in Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, the USA, Canada) (Duć-Fajfer 1991: 11-30, Duć-Fajfer 2001: 55-64). Therefore, among the

Lemkos, there are two main national identity options: Ukrainian and Russian, and two regional ones – Polish or Ukrainian (Michna 1995: 79-84).

Some of those who were resettled in the western and northern Poland returned to their abandoned places in the Lower Beskid Mountains, but the majority stayed far away from this territory. Furthermore, it is common that they have not been able to come to Poland for over sixty years, especially when living in Ukraine. Living far away from their ethnic territory, the Lemkos have developed many important strategies of remembering the past and the place where they were born. The Lemkos, in Poland after 1989 and in Ukraine after 1991, began the intensive commemorative practices: they meet one another at festivals, visit family villages, erect memorials, and write diaries. Nevertheless, in many cases *Lemkovyna* ‘exists’ only as an idea.

It is impossible to briefly reconstruct the variety of meanings the Lemkos apply that are focused on the retrieving the space and the past of *Lemkovyna*, such as ethnic documentary literature, folk festivals, religious ceremonies, and journeys to the place of origin, so I will point out only the most important ones⁴. I will concentrate on the experience of the people who have not returned to *Lemkovyna*.

Investigating memory

My aim was to reconstruct the Lemkos’ collective and cultural memory. Using an anthropological approach, I tried to seek socially situated acts of memory making. I explored the discourses of the Lemkos’ traumatic past shown in written and oral narrations. In order to achieve these goals, the investigation was guided by the following questions: What do the Lemkos remember and how do they talk about their group and individual past? What is the place of the past and the narrative about it in the cultural practices of the Lemkos in Poland and Ukraine? What meaning is attributed to what happened in the past? What provides the material for the construction of contemporary Lemko cultural self-presentation? How are group memories negotiated by memory communities within the group and how are they involved in their discursive strategies? Does the past exist for everybody in the same way? When describing Lemko memory, is it entitled to use the category of collective memory in the singular? Is this memory homogeneous? Do the Lemkos in Poland and Ukraine construct complementary images of the past? What general similarities and differences can be found in the ways by which the Lemkos build their oral and written narratives of the past? How do the next generations of displaced Lemkos use the experience of their ancestors in postmemory practices understood as efforts to preserve the memory of successive generations that did not experience the events underlying this memory?

Today, memory becomes an important matter in public debates and social initiatives. Collective memory is often equated with social memory, and both are opposed to individual, biographical, personal memory. Social memory consists of images of a group on its past and forms of celebration of the past events and characters (cf. Szacka 2006). The members of the group therefore create “memory communities,” which have an impact on the circulation of contents, succumbing to remembering or forgetting. The memory conveys the contents to the group, which may decide about the group’s endurance. The past has an important influence

on constructing and continuance of social and ethnic bonds because it enables an identification with the group (Sztop 2001: 70, 74).

In cultural anthropology, the division between individual and collective memory is being discussed and often replaced by the distinction between specific memory communities. Memory takes a particular significance when an anthropologist examines a community, members of which are bound by a sense of a common past and common perception of this past. An important term in this context is postmemory in the meaning of Marianne Hirsch (1997: 22). Postmemory concerns the past which was experienced by someone else; it is directly the memory of the second generation, which having not lived the reality itself, is doomed to determine its own identity not by its own experience of the past. Shaping the postmemory proceeds under the influence of narrations; the second generation becomes confident about recollections of somebody's authentic experiences, which release emotions and empathy and which may save the past from gradual disappearance.

I understand memory as an object, a source, and a tool for an anthropologist (Kaniowska 2003). For me, exploring memory means exploring narrative, because I consider memory as a way of telling the past. There are two different types of collective memory – communicative and cultural memory. According to German researcher Jan Assmann, memories are transferred by witnesses from the memory community, who remember the events of 80-100 years within their individual biography. Their death gives way to cultural memory – witnesses passing away causes the past to move beyond the reach of memory as it is transferred by witnesses to their children (Assmann 2008: 36-37). My aim is to explore the ways in which a distributed and often shared knowledge of the past is re-constructed, managed, communicated, and negotiated.

I would like to clearly differentiate between the memory propagated ("objective memory") by the "memory guardians," and therefore close to the cultural memory, as understood by J. Assmann⁵, and common memory ("subjective memory"), focused on family and its non-institutionalized message, that is similar to Assmann's concept of communicative memory (Assmann 2008: 36-37). It should be noted that in some cases the authors of these oral accounts, in their motivation go beyond the frames of communicative memory and become conscious of cultural memory, have in mind a certain framework for common memory. Moreover, digging up common memories has a grassroots character (amongst the participants) on such occasions as holidays, public celebrations, and festivals that are authoritatively created manifestations of "memory communities."

Memory is not just an individual, private experience but is also part of the collective domain. It is a phenomenon that is directly related to the present – our perception of the past is always influenced by the present, which means that it is always changing. As interpretations of the past constantly change, so do cultural memories. Collective remembrance creates a common identity.

I focus on the most recent past of the Lemko people, and thus a past, which is still remembered by the eldest members of the group and which they were the witnesses to or took part in. It is closely linked to the question of cultural self-presentation of the Lemko community in the area of how this particular group communicates its memories, and creates the material representation and interpretative pictures of these memories (cf. Djebabla 2007: 261).

The Lemkos' narrations based on personal experience are the most widespread cultural resource they use to construct, communicate, and transform autobiographical memories. The authors make use of collective experiences and the perspective of the "average Lemko" in their texts, which are constructed on the basis of everyday life experiences, as well as extraordinary circumstances such as war and displacement. The reader perceives those heroes and places to be witnesses to history and also objects of identification.

My aim was also to answer to the question of whether and how written reminiscent narrations differ from oral narrations obtained from ethnographic interview. As a result, I formulated a methodological proposal to anthropological studies of memory (Trzuszczńska 2013a).

As a theoretical approach, I wanted to look at the cultural phenomenon of self-presentation, in an attempt to conceptualize this idea with the example of the Lemko community. I was also interested in how the Lemkos remember their collective past and how it helps them survive, as a group. I wanted to show the past of Lemkos from the perspective of members of the group, their beliefs, and the intersubjective images of Lemko memory. Moreover, I planned to present the multifaceted view of Lemko memory taking into account the position of the guards and promoters, the modes of transmission and divergence of remembered content, and to explore various strategies of talking about the past through the choice of discourse.

I define the Lemkos' collective memory as a manner of telling the past. In this context, there are many strategies taken, which I define as a self-presentation. This presentation has two dimensions: ethnic, reserved for the members of the Lemko symbolic universe, and a wider, supra-group presentation, which is intended for the Poles (the Lemkos who publish in Poland) and for the Ukrainians (those Lemkos who publish in Ukraine). The collective memory and the ways it is manifested show not only attitudes and emotions towards the past events, but also the views of the future of the group and its opinions about an actual group condition.

I was inspired by Victor Turner's cultural performance concept (Turner 1982: 102-123). I define self-presentation as a strategy to express the memory and present the past, its interpretive restoration or as a collection of cultural expressions representing a group self-definition, which is to serve the members of the group, as well as those who want to know something about it.

I wanted to investigate how the Lemkos deal with the past, collectively understand and construct the past, and how it is reflected in their narratives during public practices of remembrance at commemoration ceremonies held at special places – sites of memory in *Lemkovyna* or in Ukraine. All these practices show many different ways in which Lemko memories are based on construction, manipulation, and transmission. They also show the role played by memory in collective and individual identity formation. References to the past reassure the members of the group of their collective identity and supply them with the awareness of their unity and singularity in time and space by creating a shared past.

Group memory is intertwined with cultural identity. It relies on a relatively permanent identification of a given group with certain cultural relation, which foresees ideas, opinions, convictions, customs, values, norms, and laws. In this way, an individual identifies himself/herself with the group and the territory (Rykiel 2010: 20). Following Zbigniew

Rykiel I assume that territorial identity is a part of cultural identity (2010: 20), which allows perceiving the group as agreeing on values, symbols and meanings solidified by tradition (Grotowska 2003: 76).

I observe general differences in the manner in which the Lemkos in Poland and in Ukraine have built up their written and oral discourses of the memory of the past. Based on 66 diaries published in Poland and Ukraine⁶, I used biographical method (Trzeszczyńska 2013b, cf. Kabzińska 2003, Kaźmierska 2004) to reconstruct Lemko memories, which are cultivated and negotiated. I chose to compare memories concerning only one place in *Lemkovyna*, the village of Komańcza. The comparative materials were comprised of the transcripts of 57 interviews, carried out in Poland and Ukraine with the current and former residents of the village. Moreover, the project also aimed to shed light on the current practices of commemoration and remembrance related to the 1944-1947 deportations and their consequences on the Lemkos who live in Poland and Ukraine. Lastly, I analyzed differences that can be observed in the manner in which the Lemkos in Poland and in Ukraine have built up their written and oral discourses of the memory of the past.

Diary as an anthropological source

I examined the Lemko diaries and memorial relations as a cultural practice set in the context of certain actions characteristic to the Lemko community, which have the continuation of their own cultural identity in mind. The diaries are usually written by people who have no professional link to literature. I would like to emphasize the specificity of the material: diaries as discursive practice arise independently of the researcher's initiative, non-spontaneously, giving the author time for conscious self-presentation. In other words, the author has time to decide what he or she wants to show from the individual and groups past.

The Lemkos' diaries have been first published in Poland and Ukraine in the 1990s. The number of witnesses to the tragic events is dwindling, but those who remember them from their parents' and grandparents' tales often reach for the pen themselves. The returns to the realm marked with this past presence appear often on the pages of the diaries and collection of memoirs. In case of the Lemko authors, it is a mythical region in the Lower Beskid Mountains.

What connects all the Lemkos-- and is apparent in different forms of their ethnic and cultural expression--is the collective memory of oppression⁷, channeled by the fate of the community and passed through the word of mouth. It shapes popular categories of description of the group's past, and determiners of its ethnic and cultural identity. As observed in the hub of the Lemko community, the manifestations of collective memory deal with key issues (such as remembrance of the events before the deportation, after the deportation, passing on the memory of the Lemkos – their origin, generational transmission about customs and group traditions, different political and national alignments, religion, and territory).

As I mentioned, writing diaries is a cultural practice rooted in context. Moreover, diary is an ethnographic source, not historical one. As a narrative, it is a specific way of understanding reality and storytelling. Anthropologists are therefore interested in interpretations of the past which are concluded in diaries, and not in verification of facts. Written accounts can be an excellent reference material for interviews. However, an

anthropologist who wants to work with such sources faces a methodological problem - how to analyze them? I suggest using modified biographical method, which enables the analyst to reconstruct the work of memory, which occurs during writing down memoirs. This method is popular among Polish sociologists and is dedicated to analysis of biographical interviews, but I am convinced that it can be useful also in case of written narratives. Briefly, it consists in dividing a text into narrative, argumentative and descriptive parts and then on working with these parts of the text to searching for relationships (Trzeszczyńska 2013b).

Although the articulation of the past was forbidden by political pressure, it was not erased from the Lemko memory. The Lemkos realized that official history was only one version of the past, and they became more and more concerned with their own past which helped them shape a collective and ethnic identity. It took until 1989/1991 before the Lemkos' painful histories could be told and were listened to.

Why do the Lemkos practice writing diaries? Usually in the preface or afterward an author explains his or her motivation to write a diary. Firstly, they try to fill the gaps in the Lemko historiography, to provide material, which is often disregarded by professional historians. Moreover, as they try to overcome the ignorance of Polish society of the Lemko history, they need to adopt this stance. They also want to leave testimony for the Lemkos living in scattered settlements about their lot. Another reason is the desire to transmit knowledge of the past to descendants. Last but not least, writing a diary often has the therapeutic function as the expression of personal and group trauma, and a chance to overcome it.

A text taking shape is always a transformation of the past from today's point of view. Writing a diary, as a public representation of a life's story, is always framed within the socio-cultural context, this influences ways of presenting the content. The history shown in the Lemko diaries does not only have the character of recollection of events, and the works are not simply an account of the past as experienced by the author. It has the connection with the condition of the group and it denotes the field for discussion about the identity, constantly updating itself, creating a close connection with modern day. The source of ways of recalling history has its source in collective needs. From this point on, it can be updated selectively, taking into consideration only the events that are most crucial, from the point of view of the group, and make an important benchmark for the group's contemporary moment.

The Lemkos' narrations grew out of the family stories and they co-exist with contemporary knowledge, further personal experiences, and awareness of how the group and the others would interpret the text. They are written and spoken in socio-cultural conditions remote from when they were originally experienced and with other listeners in mind – the members of the group, the Poles and the Ukrainians. Therefore, the question of audiences is crucial for understanding the dynamics of remembering, the gaps, omissions, and absences in memory, and in the narratives. I therefore propose to investigate the relationship between memory and narration on many levels – oral, written, made in Poland and Ukraine, by witnesses, and by the second generation. Altogether they demonstrate the strong role that these memories of a disappeared life and the experience of cultural loss play in the maintenance of the group identity.

Another question is the admiration of *Lemkovyna* space (see. photo 1). Space is one of the most important conceptual frames around which people organize their reality and activity.

Not only is the space (and the way it is reflected in a language) in the Lemkos' culture axiologically and emotionally marked, but it has also been sacralized and included into a value system of their identity. Cultural meaning of the Carpathian Mountains determined life choices and decisions of hundreds of people. It also impacts their personal attitude to the ethnic past. The lack of the mountainous landscape leads to a feeling of emotional homelessness.



Photo 1

The Lemkos' narrations demonstrate the image of *Lemkovyna* – the homeland lost because of the deportations, erosion of social bonds and previous symbolic universe, which are preserved by them in documentary literature (particularly diaries and collections of memoirs) and by commemorative efforts (folkloristic festivals and religious holidays). The memory places (*Lemkovyna* as a “symbolic domain”⁸) and events constitute the core of the Lemkos' collective memory. They are expressed by the narrations about the past, which refer to the most basic community values and cultural identity, and through it, they influence participation of the Lemkos in making them a memory community. Narration basing on such a mechanism is to represent reality cognitively as a subjective description linked to emotional experience.

In the Lemkos' accounts of their memories there is a visible longing for the days gone by-- for life in the green *Lemkovyna*, which is mythologized as the lost Arcadia. The idealization of the past before the catastrophe, the time of ancestors, as a golden-age image

are shared. The authors use the same words to describe the sense of the loss (photo 2). The tone of such recounts is very characteristic – filled with emotions, nostalgia, showing a great deal of respect to the traditions of their ancestors and their religion.



Photo 2

The Lemkos have upheld the idea of a perfect land that was taken away from them. The land where they have left not only their best years, but their happiness as well. Remembered and preserved, *Lemkovyna* is left frozen in its unchanging perfection, being a certain counterbalance to the grey blandness of the totalitarian state (before 1989/1991). The reinforced image of a familial village was passed onto their children, equipping them with knowledge about their roots.

The landscape inhabits an important place in the cultural memory discourse of the Lemkos and is a symbol of events that may exist only through the narration. A memorial represents a sense of loss, which is shared. The Lemkos' memory is topographical and full of "sites of memory"⁹ (Nora 2002, 2007, Kończal 2009). Places "become" through memory, and memory is taught through place. The Lemkos' landscapes of memory are still alive and vivid. *Lemkovyna* is filled with memories. The second generation is taught by the ancestors how to experience this place mentally and often by visiting it. Their memory – postmemory – has grown from a lively atmosphere of listening and family participation from their earliest years.

Lemko diaries as records of memory

What is the content of Lemko written narrations? About which events and circumstances do they mostly tell? The authors mostly focus on: the life in the Lemko region before the Second World War (the childhood and youth of the narrator and his relatives, friends, neighbors); armed conflict and displacement in years 1944-1946; Vistula Operation 1947, circumstances and the course of displacement; leaving their homeland, farewell to the family home, the tragedy of exile; journey to the place of settlement and a meeting with the new reality, the organization of a new life; longing for the homeland and its impact on the contemporary condition of the author or generally of the Lemkos, being a Lemko today; assimilation.

The Lemko diaries are a record of memory. They do not relate knowledge gained from a specific source, but rather a memory based on the narration of the past. It paints more than a generational picture of the ethnic past based on the experiences constitutive for the modern situation of this community. Apart from the callbacks to war times and the events of years of 1944-1947 and their consequences, there are returns to the times of childhood, youth, the lost Lemko region, family land with the ancestors' ashes, and symbolical universe that was taken away from the group. Collective memory of the Lemkos, both in its communicative and cultural aspects, preserves and protects this past, and maps certain means and actions to see it done.

The Lemko authors' images of the past created in the diaries stimulates pride in the past, preserves the memory of ethnic history and teaches the young Lemkos of their ancestors' homeland. The right of Lemkos to live on their native land is frequently emphasized, the land on which they have been living for ages, keeping their native unchanging traditions. The homesickness, sorrows, and great attachment to the fatherland are also reflected in the diaries, and filled with emotions. In their narrations, the Lemko region is associated with characteristic symbols: mountains, wooden houses, or memories of their homes, like the smell of bread or the taste of milk, Orthodox or Greek Catholic churches with high steeples (photo 3), three-branched crosses, church domes, icons, and roadside shrines.



Photo 3

The most dominant elements in the diaries are the symbols of Lemko martyrdom and the deportations and later life of the Lemkos. The deportations resound with a tragic tone – the alien land, pressure, people and their customs found in the new place, longing for lost *Lemkovyna*. They often write about hunger, terrific poverty, and humiliation, which the deportees suffered during the first, most difficult years. The narrations reflect idealized lyrical descriptions of the beauty of the homeland: they describe the charms of the Lemkos' former life, treating the Lemko region as a "paradise lost." The authors glorify also its exceptional resources. Here are some examples of how the deportations are described:

No one at the time of our grandparents, or great-grandparents thought that they would have to leave their family home and land, and would be carried into the unknown of hunger and cold (...) When the farmers harvested hay and grain, and some had already dug potatoes, the tragedy started for us, for the entire generation of the Lemkos (Gocz 1999: 54).

They destroyed us, and deprived of all human rights, destroyed our youth, and yet we were as hard to live the war as the whole Polish nation. And after the war, Polish People's Republic robbed us of everything and scattered us over a few provinces (Chomiak 1995: 71).

The Polish government harassed the exhausted Lemko nation. Polonization began. (...) Our own traditions, rituals, which had been so valued and carefully guarded for centuries, have gone to rest of history. Mixed marriages were formed. Children who come from such compounds in the world, only in adulthood learned about their roots. *Lemkovyna* froze. (...) What's left today are just shreds of what once been important to Lemko. (...) Within one year, almost the entire Lemko nation formally ceased to exist (Żrółka 1998: 152-153).

Another question is memory of the next generation. The number of witnesses to the tragic events is dwindling, but those who remember them from their parents' and grandparents' tales, often write accounts themselves. An important term in this context is postmemory (Hirsch 2003). Postmemory concerns the past that was experienced by someone else. It describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful and traumatic experiences that preceded their births, but that were transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. It shows the role of the family as a space of transmission. Postmemory describes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives, whose belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.

He had to pray in a church and cross himself the other way round, but people were still telling him that he was doing it wrong. He did not understand anything in church. No saint from the iconostasis was looking in his eyes. That's why he didn't feel the fear of God. He feared the great edifice which - it seemed - at any moment could

collapse. When hearing *Dominus vobiscum*, he could not answer: *Hospody pomyluy* (*God has mercy*). He never sang *Credo*, pretending not to know how, but his soul was singing: *Viruyu v yedynokho Khospoda* (*I believe in one God*) He made the children go to church out of obligation because he didn't know how to answer their probing questions: - Why does not our church? But on Sunday afternoon they all had to gather in a room to kneel before the icon. There, he taught them all the prayers, his own ones! He taught and checked as if he wanted to make sure that they would pray for his soul over the grave in their own way (Maślej 2007: 9).

And when my mother took off her shoes and walked barefoot, yet there was still this huge noise ... God - I'm thinking today - why was I still so small that I was only eight months, and I couldn't scream: "You big-small, rude world - why are you exhausting my Mother so much, why have you taken away, wrenched Her from - from Her warm wooden church and why are you driving her to the battered, cold and stone one, hustling her along this remote, alien, loathsome land" (Murianka 2007: 27).

The next generation's memory is therefore a duty and is based on the imperatives to remember, recall, and consolidate: an author is a link between the memory of witnesses, who spin stories and guardians of cultural memory, who design future strategies of remembering. They can become such guardians themselves. The authors have trouble with "tell-ability" of memory, there are gaps and disturbances in the rapidity of narrative, they have to reach for external sources, like other diaries, scientific studies, and the memory of older people. The most emotional narrations reveal "maturation" to being a Lemko – they show that memory is not simply a legacy of the parents.

There are several points of contact in the memoirs from both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border: the authors show the perspective of one's own generation and own biography, which are always filtered through the history of the community. They always show the displacement of the Lemkos separately, without references to other groups, for instance Poles or Germans. The Lemko villages in the Lower Beskid Mountains are shown without Poles as neighbors. Jews are mentioned as closest strangers, but the authors do not recognize them as a generation of the Holocaust. The authors provide meticulous recording of customs, traditions, practices of everyday life, precise descriptions of "how it was" and "what was done."

What are the differences in the memoirs from both sides of the border? The authors from Ukraine discredit interwar Poland, and write about the "Polish bands" that were to force them to leave for the USSR. They always speak in a broad and general Ukrainian context and are very emotional about recent politics, also, contemporary *Lemkovyna* is for them "the most western part of Ukraine"--loss of it is like the loss of part of Ukrainian lands, hence they devote much attention to the role of Ukrainian Insurgent Army in counteracting displacement and they appreciate that role; they write little about life in Ukraine, the image of *Lemkovyna* is frozen, the present day of Ukrainian Lemkos shown through the prism of folkloristic vitality; they show the common fate of *all* the Lemkos.

The authors from Poland are more reserved, less emotional when writing about political decisions concerning Lemkos - in the tone of reconciling with the fate they do not

expose their recent political sympathies, they treat their lands individually, and they devote much attention to life in the West. When recalling *Lemkovyna*, they build contrasts: before - then, there was - now there is not, here - somewhere else. They also write about the status and prospects of a member of a minority group and exclude the experiences of other Lemkos from their own memory communities (for example, Lemkos with different views on contemporary identity).

In the Lemko diaries, we can notice lots of clichés and quotes, but the authors also engage in discussions and polemics with other authors. Who is the reader and for whom the texts are written? It turns out that the Lemkos write mostly for themselves, secondly for other Lemkos, subsequently for their neighbors – for the Poles and the Ukrainians. The author's purpose determines the choice of language in which a diary is written: Lemko dialect, Ukrainian, Polish.

Moreover, the Lemko narrations, although marked by the author's signature, folklorize, recur and become characteristic of “species” of the Lemko folklore. They play crucial role in designing Lemko cultural memory, they institutionalize it through written and published word. The authors preserve the image of Lemkivshchysna by writing about the world, which should be protected against oblivion, by commitment to detail which enables re-experiencing.

What is also typical for the Lemko diaries? The use of different components of memory or individual memories on the basis of partially convergent elements, functioning on both sides of the border, with narrators-witnesses and narrators-representatives of successive generations of the Lemkos. Moreover, diversified narrative resources emerging from these different repertoires are used to speak about the past. The more fragmentary memory, the greater attention to supporting the argument with references to archival and contemporary photographs, copies of documents, song lyrics, etc. The authors provide meticulous reconstruction of knowledge about a particular village and its former inhabitants, the exhibition of *Lemkovyna* space.

For all the authors their homeland has been an important focus point of their cultural revival and was always the geographic center of their identity. It seems that over 65 years after the deportations the Lemkos are still in process of giving this traumatic past an appropriate form of memorial. The Lemkos create remembrance in order to keep a part of the past ever-present, a part that they do not wish to be forgotten because it is perceived as being particularly important for the present and the future of the group.

Memory in the field

I decided to choose Komańcza situated on the eastern *Lemkovyna* as a village where Lemkos still live. Moreover, there is no significant debate on the question of national identity. The Lemkos in Komańcza identify themselves as Ukrainians. By such a choice, I wanted to omit the question of identity diversity in order to focus on the work of memory.

In the years of 2009-2011, I conducted 57 semi-structured interviews with former and current residents of the village, mainly with those aged 60-90 years who were not displaced, displaced, and who returned from deportation. I gathered narrations about past and space of the native village and complemented the material with observations and informal

conversations during folkloristic events. I spent several months in the village. In Ukraine, however, my meetings with the former inhabitants of Komańcza happened only once.

I had no problems with finding elderly people in Komańcza with Lemko background. In Ukraine, I found people from that village by the snowball method, taking next addresses from persons I previously had found. I found the former inhabitants of Komańcza in 12 villages, towns, and cities in Ukraine in the Ternopil¹⁰ and Lviv¹¹ regions.

Very often, especially during interviews conducted in Ukraine, my emotions were engaged. I listened to dramatic stories about war, displacement, difficulties concerning negative stereotypes, and years of aiming at cultural assimilation (in Ukraine) or struggle against ethnic assimilation (in Poland). I could not remain indifferent. My interlocutors often expected my commitment.

During the fieldwork, I asked about the past and the space of the native village. I got the stories about events in Komańcza, its inhabitants and topography. The stories were not about time, but most of all about places and changes in space. Each tale “grew” around the indicated location of the family house, reaching to significant places or homes of neighbors. What is more, my interlocutors faced some difficulties in telling a story as it moved away from the turning point of displacement - even if before-displacement time was in the biographical horizon of an interlocutor. The events were located by referencing them to important biographical breakthroughs of my interlocutors, such as birth of a child, military service, wedding, etc.

Some interviews turned out to be meetings of neighbors or cousins of my informants, invited by them to join the interview. I observed group “event-reminding” and the work of memory. Telling the story was a kind of acting the interpretation of the past.

What were the factors that affected the form of the communicative memory? First of all, of course, the experience of being displaced or not. Secondly, particular family’s fondness of narrative, family tradition of telling stories from the past and attitudes towards one’s own memory. Furthermore, the age at the time of witnessing events. Many of narrators were children during the Second World War but they did not tell the story referring to war events - I often heard opinions depreciating the memory of the child: *What can I remember? I was only a child!* – They said. Nevertheless, the narration given to me by some of my younger speakers was just as rich as the ones performed by the eldest. Postmemory was, in some cases, richer than the base memory itself. I think that the younger generation of my speakers, their children and grandchildren included, took over the duty of “remembering” their roots from their parents and grandparents in a different way. The children of the displaced in Ukraine acquired their parents’ stories, “armed” them in details or abandoned incomplete threads and use them as their own childhood memories, although they are their parents’.

The elders however, do not seem to notice or appreciate this fact. His or her world is irreversibly gone, and no one is able to understand it anymore. Faced with the lack of anyone to talk to from the older generation and sometimes interest from the youngsters, the people from Komańcza wander off into their own private worlds of memories.

The next factor was distance from home to the place where the events took place was also important in the stories - for example, I heard about a fire of 11 houses in 1943 in upper Komańcza from the people whose houses had been situated nearby. Those informants, who

had lived in different part of the village, did not mention this event. The last factor had been ejecting the memory of native village in families deported to the USSR in order to avoid difficulties in becoming accustomed to life within Soviet society.

During my ethnographic field research in the southeastern part of Poland and in Ukraine, I interviewed the Lemkos who shared the experience of historical events. Often, they had extremely different interpretations of the time of 1940s. Lemko memories are not coherent, but influenced by different discourses, narrative abilities, self-presentation strategies, and policy of the country that the narrators live in. The attempts to regain the space and the past, which now has been only the visualization in their minds, are also culturally and socially conditioned and depend on the extent of the assimilation as well. Although the articulation of the past was forbidden by political pressure, it was not erased from the Lemko memory. The Lemkos realized that history was only one version of the past, they became more and more concerned with their own past which helped them shape a collective and ethnic identity. It took until 1989/1991 before the Lemkos' painful histories could be told and were listened to.

I noticed several differences in the contents of oral narrations I received in Poland and in Ukraine. The Komańcza people from Poland and Ukraine operate with different sets of stories generated by different experiences after the displacement, but in terms of what they remember from before the displacement, the differences on both sides of the border are also significant.

The communicative memory of the Komańcza people in Poland reaches 1918, but in Ukraine about 1939. The war and displacement in narratives from Ukraine are described as far more tragic. In the stories from Ukraine, Komańcza appears as the true and only home, though not ideal: concrete in the past, abstract in the present, and unreal only in the plans for the future.

Moreover, the interlocutors who live today in Komańcza eliminated from their collective memory those displaced to Ukraine together with the tragedy of war and displacement; they do not talk about them and do not treat their visits in the village as a chance to merge the memory torn by the border.

On the other hand, they have stories about transformations of the Komańcza space. Some significant spatial changes in the village, which took place in 1960-1970s, are completely unclear for the former inhabitants. Many stories I obtained in Komańcza were focused on that period of the village history. For the Lemkos in Komańcza the village is a living tissue of everyday life, for the Komańcza people in Ukraine - memory stopped at a freeze frame mode.

The best occasion to weave their memories are, for them, not the gatherings of their village neighbors, families or fellow evacuees, but "Vatras"¹² such as the one in Monastyrsk in Lviv *oblast'* (Lviv region), about which a lot of people speak with pride. The numerous audience on "Vatra" is to fill a function of a guardian of memory, and to be a substitute for curious listeners, who could not be found amongst their families. That memory is expressed by taking part in the festival, and the duty to reminisce the past and the roots takes on the collective responsibility, which "Vatra" can perfectly fill. Therefore, it is not the rural village or any particular events are the object of reminiscing, but the collective memories of all the evacuees.

During such gatherings, apart from the presentation of the Lemko folklorism, affirmations of the past and reflection on the current state group and its “golden age” take place. The need to keep this memory alive is underlined, and themes of the harms the Lemko people suffered during forced relocations and taking away the space in which they could grow their roots. Moreover, these celebrations enjoy popularity and relatively high attendance from amongst the locals and tourists. For the participants themselves they have a very special message: they allow them to fill in the missing knowledge of the history of their homeland, the fates of the members of the group, and give a wider context to these events, context related to the group reliving their past. Such events fill the basic medium of transmission of ethnic memory, which the family and they allow it to take on the common aspect. Coming out to the wider audience than a narrow circle of family and friends seems to be a conscious reaction to the dangers of assimilation, in the ethnic (in Poland) and cultural (in Ukraine) meaning of this term.

Activities aimed towards the continuation of the Lemkos’ collective memory take the form of not only the revindication of remembrance of events constitutive to the group, history of the Lemko group as an event-based memory, but also a whole group of events, which Pierre Nora (2002, 2007) would describe as “sites of memory”; it includes the topography of little motherland (lost Arcadia, *Lemkovyna*, placed in the Lower Beskid mountains) with its memory traces (cemeteries, sacral and secular architecture), archives, museums, institutions, cultural events (concerts, festivals, folklore events), holidays, religious celebrations and anniversaries, artistic and ethnographic legacy (understood as the material and spiritual legacy – traditions, ethnic symbols, religious tradition).



Photo 4

The Lemkos living in western Ukraine create their own ethnographic microcosm in Ternopil *oblast'*. Marking their space with a such familial symbol as monuments (photo 4), the Lemko Greek Catholic churches (e.g. in Lviv, photo 5) or chapels (e.g. in Zbarazh, photo 6) and symbolic, condensed Lemko domains (such as *vatran* field, or the bell tower in Monastyrsk) clearly state a claim to this space as a substitute of *Lemkovyna* in the Lower Beskid mountains, which does not stand in opposition to its surroundings, as it happens in Poland, due to the feeling of being a part of Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian culture as a baseline. It means that the events celebrating their cultural identity are seen to be regional in character, rather than ethnic or nationalist displays as it happens to Lemkos living surrounded by alien, Polish majority. The accounts of my speakers tell of general acceptance of their place of settlement, and cultural identity fitting in well into the Ukrainian symbolic universe.



Photo 5

Conclusion

Different interpretations of the past strongly disintegrate the Lemko community and are evidence of differentiating the ways of remembering the past of the group, which prevents considering memory as an integrating factor.

Among the Lemko there are many communities of memory, operating diverse strategies of talking about the past. Comparison of oral and written narratives, produced without the participation or thanks to the researcher's participation, containing a variety of self-presentative strategies on both sides of the border has led me to the conclusions on the heterogeneous nature of the Lemko collective memory and a specific break in the womb of cultural memory.



Photo 6

The Lemko memories, which are written down, and memories that live only in oral form are not coherent, influenced by different discourses, narrative abilities, self-presentation strategies and policy of the country that narrators live in. That is why I suggest that today the Lemkos should be seen through the prism of competing communities of memory, that we should see the opposing and conflicting strategies of recalling the past, which strongly supports their present day, to stop talking about them as a monolith, as Lemkos “in general.” There are many collective strategies of remembering the past but all of them assume the interference of past and present tense, a place, where the event had happened, and the place where it is remembered, a mixture of the past and it’s living memory (Skórzynska, Pepin 2007: 17). Moreover, the Lemkos’ representations are the result of the public debate within the community, and compromise by the individual members’ memory. Personal identities and memories in these representations, take the form of common, labored through time customs of remembrance. In fact, how strongly the Lemkos’ past is present in folkloristic performances, or in the wider aspect – in artistic shows, surely demonstrates its influence on today’s process of building the cultural identity.

Being Lemko is being understood as being connected to the region, which they have defended for years, while being often an object of ridicule. The region, they have struggled with for years as well, even today needs special tending to. Memory is therefore not something that the Lemkos always “had,” and used when necessary, but rather an object permanently under construction. It has characteristics of a process and is a dynamic response to the reality. What becomes clear is that the obsession with memory coincides with the fear of forgetting and the aim for authenticity. For the Lemkos, remembrance is a source for legitimation and self-presentation. *Lemkovyna* is still being reproduced as text, actually as various texts, providing material for today's discussions.

The Lemkos cherished the memory about their own past and emphasized the differences that set them apart from others. They meet and combine the individual, separate

memories from their experience to form a common vision for the future. The homeland still exerts a strong pull on many Lemkos, but often more as an ancestral myth or a place of pilgrimage than a place to reside. For the Lemkos, the remembrance of the past is the source for legitimation and self-presentation. In their narrations, again and again the same thing is repeated: they are focused on their catastrophic past. What is beyond doubt, is that over two last decades the Lemkos have experienced very dynamic and discourse-rich processes of remembrance as a result of which the years of 1944-1947 have become a key element of Lemko historic awareness. They seem not to have enough of remembering and talking about the same thing and not to have more urgent problems stemming from their most recent past.

There had been – and constitutes to be – a considerable debate and even a conflict over the appraisal and classification of the Lemko history among the group. In this context, various areas of conflict can be identified. They clearly demonstrate the need for the active study of the past as a corrective to the distortion and instrumentalization of history. If we consider different modes of operation of the Lemko collective memory, we may hypothesize that a common “feeling” does not mean that a mutual agreement exists, but it points out that some of objects, ideas and symbols – apart from being common ones – are exploit in many different ways, and different also is a feeling of being situated in meaningful space (narration in oral stories and written as diaries or collections of memories).

Today depends to a great extent not on the past in general, but on the construction of the memory and narrations about the past. What they remember, is not based on what actually happened, but on what they later can and wish to tell the story about. They believe that nothing is gone unless it is forgotten.

The comparison of the two modes of narration has led me to the conclusion of a heterogeneous nature of collective memory of the Lemkos and a “rupture” in their cultural memory. Today they should be seen as competitive communities of memory. I maintain that the memory strategies developed by the Lemkos on both sides of the border are an important mental mechanism of the attempt to protect the Lemkos’ cultural heritage.

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Notes

¹After the World War Two, on the strength of the legally binding agreement concluded by and between Poland and the USSR and referring to the population exchange dated 9 September 1944, in the years 1944-1946, Polish citizens of Ukrainian ethnicity (among whom Lemkos were numbered, too) were displaced to Soviet Ukraine. In 1947, the Operation Vistula (Akcja Wisła) was carried out with regard to the Ukrainians (including Lemkos) remaining in Poland, who were deported to the western and northern territories of Poland. Cf. e.g. Henyk 2003, Kabaczij 2011, Pisuliński 2009.

² Cf. Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2011. Podstawowe informacje o sytuacji demograficzno-społecznej ludności Polski oraz zasobach mieszkaniowych [Results of the National Census 2011. General information about socio-

demographic situation in Poland and housing], Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 2012, s. 18 [available:

http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lu_nps2011_wyniki_nsp2011_22032012.pdf].

³ In the meaning of National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language Act... Compare also: Michna 1995.

⁴ The wider and deeper overview of the Lemkos' strategies of remembering the past, see: Trzeszczyńska 2013a.

⁵ It seems that in the Lemko community's case, we deal with communicative memory in the oral tradition aspect, and later on written down in the form of the diaries and collection of memoirs. Cultural memory manifests itself during the celebrations, anniversaries and gatherings of the members of this community.

⁶ Certain examples of the Lemkos' documentary literature important for this analysis is included in references.

⁷ Term taken from Piotrowski 1996: 5.

⁸ Cf: Nijakowski 2006.

⁹ Pierre Nora's influential concept of "sites of memory" ("lieux de memoire") locates memory on specific sites from where it can be excavated. Cf: Nora 2002, also: Kończal 2009.

¹⁰ In Ternopil region they were: Kozova district (rayon): (Horodyshche with the Slavne hamlet, Kozliv); Zbarazh district (Zbarazh, Mala Berezovytsya); Ternopil district (Drakhanivka, Khutory), Monastyryska district (Monastyryska), and the city of Ternopil.

¹¹ In Lviv region they were: Sambir district (Sambir, Nakhirne, Biskovychi), Bibrka district (Velyki Khlibovychi), Khorodok district (Khorodok, Buchaly), and the city of Lviv.

¹² Special annual folkloristic festivals, called "Vatras" (sing. "Vatra") taking place in Michałów and Zdynia in Poland and in Monastyrysk in Ukraine.

Photos:

Photo 1 Landscape of Lemkovyna

Photo 2 Abandoned village in Lemkovyna

Photo 3 Typical Lemko Greek Catholic church

Photo 4 Monument of the displacement in Sambir, Ukraine

Photo 5 Lemko Greek Catholic church (a copy of the church in a village of Kviaton, Lemkovyna) in Lviv's open air museum

Photo 6 Lemko chapel in Zbarazh