

## **Displaced Memories of a Displaced People: Towards the Problem of Missing Polish Narratives in Lviv**

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Every time when it comes to discussion on historical memory, I recall one story told by an elderly woman long ago. It was in mid 1980s, I was a teenager then and she was probably in her sixties. We were stuck together in a hospital room for about one week. The old lady was quite talkative so I had a chance to hear a lot about her life. With time most of that has been forgotten, but one story gives me no rest even today.

“When we came to Lviv”, she said, “everybody was so happy, people welcomed us warmly. They had been looking forward to having us, so they had prepared everything for us. Immediately upon our arrival we were taken to an apartment downtown, which was prepared for us so carefully. You know”, she maintained with enthusiasm, “we came over with few suitcases; I had no more than a couple of dresses and one pair of shoes. And we were so tired after that long train journey...” (Her speech became more emotional, as she was coming to the point of this story.) “So you can imagine how generous the locals were to us, so they equipped that apartment with literally everything we could possibly need. There were all kinds of garments in closets, bed linen, kitchenware... There was even a pot of hot soup for us on the kitchen-range! So we knew for sure: people are glad to have us down here in Lviv. I know this from my personal experience!”

The described events took place in 1946. Then she was married to a mid-rank Red Army officer who was commanded to serve with the western frontier troops, and they moved from eastern Ukraine to the city of Lviv which was going through perhaps the hardest times in its history.

Even at that time I understood that something was wrong with her interpretation of the situation, and that hot soup was scarcely cooked for the newcomers. But the old woman really believed in what she stated. At that time she still lived in the apartment they were given upon arrival. She remembered everything, every little detail from that time and later on. But she did not remember what was there before their arrival. Indeed, she could not remember what she had never witnessed or experienced or was a part of. For her, and for many other Lviv city-dwellers, the entire history of Lviv started afresh only after the Second World War.

That story makes me uneasy and pushes me to think about the mechanisms of personal and collective remembering and forgetting. Would it be correct to assume that “one cannot forget what one does not remember”? (Zehfuss 2006: 226). Does one’s historical memory derive from one’s experience only? Is any forgetting of the past spontaneous and natural, or is it man-made and manageable, just like historical memory which often is deliberately constructed?

### **Lviv – a contested city**

Lviv is known for its centuries-long multicultural history; yet it has gained fame as a citadel of Ukrainian nationalism in the 20th century and especially in the most recent past. Lviv is perhaps not unique in its seemingly contradictory historical fate. Some scholars consider it to be just “one of many divided, contested cities, cities that switched hands and now belong to two separate and often competing histories” (Grabowicz 2000:313-314); yet others insist that

“in Central and Eastern Europe Lviv was an exceptional city... where elements of the western and eastern cultures were tightly intertwined and simultaneously actual” (Janowski, 2002: 24, [my own translation]).

Lviv became the symbolic battleground of several competing national narratives long ago. Images and visions of Lviv/Lwow in, respectively, Ukrainian and Polish history and culture go to the very heart of national memory and provide for each society powerful symbols of national identity, particularly as narratives of collective struggle, victory, and defeat. In his study on images of this city in Polish and Ukrainian literature, George Grabowicz revealed the ways and mechanisms of creating the great myth of Lviv. His analysis showed that despite the antithetical or sometimes even antagonistic nature of the two competing national identities, “the symbols and narratives that subtend them are remarkably similar .... While partaking of various common themes, topos, and (often repressed or unconscious) intertextualities they coalesce into national myths which are central to the respective collective, national experiences and are characteristically defined by an implicit and explicit confrontation with the Other.” (Grabowicz 2000: 313-314). “As far as historical and emotional involvement and investment are concerned,” Grabowicz concludes, “it seems at times ... that Lviv/Lwow becomes the preeminent objective correlative of narratives of national self-assertion.” (Grabowicz 2000: 313-314)

The Second World War and the following events played a crucial role in the fundamental transformation of the cultural landscape of the city. First, its demographic composition changed drastically during and after the war. The remarkable figures of those days’ population changes show the harsh rupture in an otherwise evolutionary development of Lviv’s urban culture.

The Nazi and Soviet regimes combined to destroy the historically multicultural character of the city. According to the Yaroslav Hrytsak’s study, from 1772 to 1939 the ethnic structure of Lviv had evolved in a rather stable tripartite manner among the dominant Poles (from 50 to 55 percent), and the two minorities of Jews (30-35 percent) and Ukrainians (15-20 percent). The German Nazi invaders totally decimated the Jewish population (only some 2-3 percent survived the mass murders), while the Soviet regime deported Poles and repopulated the city with people from other parts of the Soviet Union (Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Belarusians, Moldovans, and others) and with Ukrainians who had been deported from territories allotted to postwar Poland. The remaining Ukrainians and Poles were repressed by the Soviet regime; many fled to Western Europe or North America. All told, Lviv lost about 80 percent of its pre-war population. Resettlement transformed Lviv into a predominantly East Slavic city of Ukrainians and Russians. (Hrytsak 2000: 58-59)

In 1950s the Soviet government decided to transform Lviv - a previously successful commercial, cultural and academic centre - into an industrial city. This decision was inspired partly by the idea that the increasing number of mill-hands – considered to be the base of Communist Party – could help to root out the strong Ukrainian nationalist underground movement which plagued the city. The army of workers was replenished mostly with young migrants from the west-Ukrainian villages, as recent research has shown. In 1959-1989 over 230 000 people migrated to the city. The migrants constituted more than 60% of the entire growth of the city population at that time (Bodnar 2007:10). Taking into account that Ukrainians comprised the absolute majority of the local peasants, one can speak of the “physical Ukrainization” of the city as a side-effect of its industrialization plan. As a result, the Ukrainians steadily increased their proportion of the population from 44.2 % in 1955 to 79.1 % in 1989 (while the Russian proportion dropped from 35% down to 16% during the same period). By 1989 Jews and Poles comprised 1.6 % and 1.2 %, respectively. No other ethnic minority constituted more than 1.0% of the population on the eve of Ukrainian independence (Hrytsak 2000:58-59). The census of 2001 showed an even further reduction of ethnic

minorities in Lviv: at that time Poles comprised 0,88%, Jews 0,27%, and Armenians 0,11% respectively (Sereda 2008: 95).

In that way it becomes clear that the majority of contemporary Lviv city dwellers had not lived there during the war, nor had their ancestors, and they therefore had no direct memories or memories transmitted through the family of events preceding the war. That is why one should agree with Omer Bartov, who states: “The lack of direct experience with the eradication of the large Jewish and Polish urban populations of the region may have made it even easier to recreate a historical narrative cleansed of the populations that had once been such an integral part of it” (Bartov 2007: 32-34). Those dramatic ethno-demographic changes combined with and strengthened by Soviet politics of history construction resulted in near total erasure of any memories of pre-war urban life in Lviv. The remark by Luisa Passerini aptly describes that situation: “There is nothing left to transmit if nobody is there to receive the message” (Passerini 1992).

The demographic figures are not, however, sufficient to understand the reasons and scope of forgetting Poles and Polish history in Lviv. Knowledge of general cultural, historical and political contexts could help one to see those complex processes and factors (peculiarities of interethnic relations in the city, official ethnic policies and politics of memory, etc.) which facilitated if not determined this situation.

Indeed, Polish-Ukrainian relationships were problematic for centuries, as Poles have dominated Ukrainians in eastern Galicia for hundreds of years in terms of statehood (in 1387-1772 and 1918-1939 Poland governed this territory); social stratification (Poles prevailed in the nobility whereas Ukrainians constituted an absolute majority of the peasants), and religion (Poles attempted to impose Catholicism over mainly Orthodox Ukrainians). Therefore, in Ukrainian national mythology and nationalist thought a Pole appears as an eternal Other; an oppressor, whose centuries-long domination and discrimination hindered the progress of Ukrainians as a fully-fledged nation. The most recent history of Polish rule over this land (in the inter-war period) left Ukrainians little reason to feel sympathy towards Poles. Although Ukrainians constituted the majority of the local population, the religious, cultural and language policies of the Polish government were clearly discriminatory (if not harsh)<sup>89</sup>, so it would be rather problematic for Ukrainians to cherish a good memory of Poles afterwards.

The 20th century happened to be the turning point, as Ukrainians finally took over power in the region (in 1939 eastern Galicia became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which obtained sovereignty after the USSR’s disintegration in 1991). Then this event was interpreted as the triumph of historical justice; a fulfillment of an eternal dream of all Ukrainians – the dream of a United Ukraine.

In 1946 Poland and the USSR undertook a compulsory exchange of populations; hence a huge number of Poles and Ukrainians living on the borderland were forcibly resettled. Ethnic Ukrainians living in south-eastern Poland were deported either to the north-western parts of the country or to Soviet Ukraine, whereas Poles were simultaneously expelled from Ukraine to Poland. Many of the displaced Ukrainians ultimately found themselves residing in Lviv. Their extremely traumatic personal experiences of expulsion – marked by cruelty and loss – have

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<sup>89</sup> In 1924 the use of the Ukrainian language in public offices and local administration was prohibited; since that time the number of schools where instruction was offered in Ukrainian language dropped dramatically in eastern Galicia. In the autumn of 1930, in the course of the Polish public campaign of *pacification* of Ukrainians in Galicia, a number of representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were repressed, and many Ukrainian cultural and educational institutions were ravaged. In June 1934 the Polish government established a concentration camp in Bereza-Kartuzka, where a number of important Ukrainian political figures of nationalist views were imprisoned together with other political opponents of the regime. In 1939 the Polish administration ravaged the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Kholmshchyna region, so over 180 churches were destroyed, and about 150 converted into Roman-Catholic ones.

strengthened pre-existing negative attitudes towards Poles amongst local Ukrainians<sup>90</sup>. Thus the memory of Poles has been reduced to the memory of suffering from Polish dominance. Consequently, the remnants of Polish culture were considered unworthy of remembrance or preservation: they have been either ignored or vanished from collective memory. Indeed, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka is right when she states that “When we are asked not to remember, we are essentially being asked not to honor or respect; at issue is usually whether a person, a group, or a movement *deserves* remembrance” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 127).

Besides this, memories of the pre-war Soviet atrocities and post-war massive repressions against the west-Ukrainians (accused mostly of “bourgeois nationalism”) have virtually supplanted the memories of the Polish times. Indeed, the victims and their relatives, neighbours and friends have preserved their painful recollections for decades. The history of Ukrainian national struggle and suffering had ultimately dislodged the memories of the exterminated Jews and deported Poles for there remained virtually nobody to sustain them. Those few who survived were not in a position to claim back their memories during the Soviet era. The Soviet politics of history assisted considerably in this massive amnesia, as the Holocaust and the ethnic deportations were strictly concealed in the official historical discourse.

Furthermore, the Soviet politics of history have also implicitly fostered the negative image of the Poles. The official history of the Ukrainian SSR constantly stressed the centuries-long ethnic discrimination and humiliation Ukrainians endured under Polish rule in order to justify the Soviet occupation of these territories in September 1939 (this event was normally presented as an act of liberation of oppressed counterparts and the reunion of Ukraine as an integral state). This stereotype of the Poles as eternal oppressors of Ukrainians remained mostly untouched in post-Soviet Ukrainian official historical narratives, as an analysis of school textbooks on Ukrainian history has shown. “Ethnocentrism peculiar to the representations of the past and the way historical memory is reproduced in school history textbooks rather stimulate – not overcome – mutual Polish-Ukrainian ethnic stereotypes”, Victoria Sereda concluded her study (2000: 397).

It is remarkable that during the wartime the cityscape did not change much, as physically Lviv survived nearly untouched by military operations. Most transformations have taken place on a symbolic level, though. The Soviet politics of memory, aimed at the inclusion of west-Ukrainian history into a unified Soviet model of the past, started with transformation of the multicultural image of Lviv into a Soviet one. This process assumed thorough erasure of any visible traces of previous presence of other ethnic cultures there, so the Soviet regime has removed the majority of pre-Soviet monuments, accompanied by massive changing of street names in post-war decades. The few remaining streets and monuments bearing names of Polish historical figures have been ascribed new meanings in line with the Soviet model of the past (Sereda 2008: 76).

Despite the majority of scholars studying symbolic representations of Lviv agreeing that it is one of the key elements in Polish national mythology, some alternative views have recently been expressed in historical debates on Polishness of the city cultural landscape. Thus Maciej Janowski, a Polish historian, is confident that “among the numerous [ethnic] cultures in Lviv the role of Polish culture was not leading” even at the time of Polish governance (Janowski 2002: 24). Searching an answer to the question of which factors created Lviv as it looks now, Janowski considers Austro-Hungarian, Ukrainian and Soviet elements to be the

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<sup>90</sup> In fact the memory of Ukrainian deportation from Poland is maintained on the institutional level, as there are several associations of resettled with their headquarters in Lviv (*Tovarystvo Nasyannya*, *Tovarystvo Lemkivshchyna*, *Asotsiacia Deportovanyh Ukrainciv Zakerzonnya*). Those organizations and people (known as *pereselentsi* - resettlers) are perhaps the most passionate opponents of restoring the Polish traces in Lviv, so the study of their activities could be fruitful in the framework of research on memories of Poles here.

most influential in forming its present-day image. “During over seven hundred years of Lviv history”, the scholar maintains, “the Polish element was real, but not decisive. [sic] Paradoxically, the important role of Lviv in Polish history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries made nearly no impact upon the city exterior!” he claims (Janowski 2002: 23[my own translation]).

In the post-socialist Ukraine seeking to establish a great national narrative of its own, one could find even less reasons to retrieve from oblivion the perished history of Polish culture. In short, one could find but few interested in restoring Polish traces in Lviv among the insiders. This is not to say, however, that there are no such stakeholders beyond Ukraine, especially among the nostalgic Polish nationalists for whom Lviv represents an important symbol of (once) Great Poland. As a matter of fact, the discussion over the question “whose history?” has never taken place within the limits of scholarship; neither was it ever free from political pressures. Despite all the efforts made by Soviet authorities to suppress the nationalist activities in the city of Lviv, in the post-war decades Lviv became a leading centre of anti-Soviet nationalist opposition; in fact, it played the crucial role in awakening national awareness among Ukrainians throughout the country. Indeed, since the Second World War Lviv has been steadily reasserting its Ukrainian character, and after the collapse of the Soviet regime this process became even more intensive. Its current narrative is focused on depicting the Ukrainians as the only and eternal victims of ethnic discrimination and political repression before and under the Soviets. The national revival in the 1990s and the process of nation-state building have facilitated rooting into the public discourse the idea of the Ukrainian nation’s martyrdom on its way to independence. Ultimately Lviv has played the crucial role in the very becoming of an independent Ukrainian nation-state, so today it is perceived as a representation of pure and genuine of Ukrainian-ness.

## **Remembering and Forgetting in Lviv**

The problem of forgetting – intentional and unintentional – appears as one of the most disputable in studies on historical memory today. The very nature, general mechanisms, key factors and other peculiarities of distortion in human memories attract the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds – from philosophy to neurophysiology. As a matter of fact, this interdisciplinary character of research on individual, collective and historical memories has proved to be especially productive today. In one of his articles, “Memory-Forgetting-History” (2006), Paul Ricoeur discussed the problem of the two most widespread “sicknesses” of collective memory, namely excess of memory and shortage of memory. He explains the discrepancy between the two in terms of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur refers to Freud’s essay of 1914, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-through”, where the author tried to “define the basic obstacle hindering the ”work of interpretation” as it seeks to recover traumatic memories. He designates this obstacle ... by the term ”repetition compulsion””. According to Freud, a repetition compulsion consists of a tendency to act instead of remembering when a patient reproduces the forgotten fact ”not as memory, but as an action: he repeats it” (Ricoeur, 2006: 13). This idea is perfectly in line with the observations made by other scholars studying socio-psychological consequences of a historical trauma. Thus, Duncan Bell in his introduction to the volume *Memory, Trauma and World Politics* correctly remarked that one of the post-traumatic memory problems “is the absence of temporal distance, the failure to regard the past as past, as something that can be left behind” (Bell 2006:8).

If extrapolated to the scale of nations, according to Ricoeur, “that excess of memory resembles repetition compulsion, which puts a turn to action in place of the genuine memory through which the present and the past could be reconciled with each other .... In this case some people take a sick pleasure in cultivating the repetition-memory” (Ricoeur 2006: 13-14). Indeed, the anxiety that many scholars express thereupon concerns those pernicious social and

political consequences which such an obsession with the past could cause. Todorov, for example, argues that European societies are dangerously obsessed by a cult of memory: “Possessed by nostalgia for an age now irrevocably past, we revere its relics and indulge in magic rituals that are supposed to keep it alive”. Charles Maier suggests that this leads to the danger of “complacency and collective self-indulgence” and he warns that “an addiction to memory can become neurasthenic and disabling” (both cited from Bell 2006:25).

Another disturbing effect of traumatic events on collective memory, Ricoeur argues, is its shortage, represented in the form of forgetting. He defines two kinds of forgetting, passive and active. “Passive forgetting manifests itself as ... an *escapist forgetting*, ... a strategy of avoidance, that for its part is guided by an obscure desire not to know, not to be informed about, and not to inquire into atrocities committed in one’s own neck of the woods” (Ricoeur, 2006:16). At a certain point, according to Ricoeur, this rather spontaneous escapist forgetting could turn into an *active forgetting* or selective forgetting which takes place when forgetting is deliberately practiced by “official history” attempting to conceal particular aspects of the past (Ricoeur 2006:16-17).

In the case of Lviv, one could easily detect the complete set of described symptoms with regard to the memory of its recent past. Indeed, here we deal with an abnormal memory, which is excessive in what concerns the history of local Ukrainians and deficient when it comes to the remembering of other ethnic cultures which once constituted important elements of the vibrant multicultural cityscape. These seemingly opposed tendencies are just two sides of the same coin, though; they do not contradict but rather complement each other. The excess of memory of events which suit the Ukrainian-centred historical narrative is to compensate for the void caused by the shortage of memory of other nations considered to be irrelevant; the excessive commemorative practices of the former are to dissemble the lack of commemoration of the latter. Indeed, “most of the time, when we speak of forgetting, we are speaking of displacement (or replacement) of one version of the past by another” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 118). In short, in Lviv the memory of the multicultural past and its dramatic ending is successfully substituted by the narratives of national liberation struggle and nation-state building, which implies that the Ukrainian identity is to be constructed around the notions of martyrdom and glory.

The manifestations of this situation are very visible in western Ukraine today; indeed, here one can easily discover numerous “examples of Ukrainian self-glorification along with remarkable neglect, suppression, and even destruction of all signs of the land’s multiethnic past” (Bartov 2007: 40). The most indicative practices of symbolic marking of the cityscape are showed by the fact that 24 out of 38 new monuments erected after the disintegration of the USSR in Lviv are dedicated to Ukrainian historical figures or events; none of those newly-established *lieu de memoir* is related to Polish history (Sereda 2008: 78). The same tendency has been revealed in the study conducted by Yaroslav Hrytsak and Victor Susak. Their research proved that the massive change of the street names undertaken by Lviv city council in the early 1990s aimed at creating a Ukrainian city image by promoting and rooting in public consciousness the Ukraine-centred historical memory. Following this idea, the downtown has been transformed into a symbol of unity of all the Ukrainian lands struggling for national liberation (Hrytsak-Susak 2003: 153-154). In this context the conclusion of Omer Bartov after his search for the (erased) traces of Jewish culture in Galicia sounds logical: “In this memory, there is no room for any other victims [except Ukrainians themselves]” (Bartov 2007: 33-34)<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> In recent years, however, some promising changes have taken place in the city of Lviv. One can detect a stable tendency of gradual inclusion of certain elements of multicultural historical memory into the Lviv symbolic space. During the post-Soviet times the number of streets bearing Polish names increased from 9 in 1986 to 17 in 1997, and the share of loci named after non-Ukrainian historical figures now comprises 20 percent (Hrytsak-Susak 2003: 155-156). The distribution of newly established memorial plaques proves this trend as well, as four percent of

## Absence of memories of the Poles in official local discourses

In post-Soviet Ukraine, memory was totally mobilized for political purposes, and today it remains in the service of politics. Indeed, collective memory is a subject of politics struggling for self-assertion through historical legitimization. Following on the heels of Peter Burke, Alon Confino provides an easy yet very correct explanation of what the politics of memory are about: “simply stated, it is who wants whom to remember what, and why” (Confino 1997:1393). In this context, research on historical memory would never be a purely academic undertaking in Ukraine nowadays. The Ukrainian national great narrative has not been completed yet; it is still the battleground of competing political powers promoting different – sometimes alternative – versions of the Ukrainian past. As a matter of fact, the Ukrainian-centred historical narrative, though it prevails in political discourse and official historiography today, has not been firmly established and avowed yet. In this unstable situation its partisans are on the alert to secure its legitimacy and to suppress any attempts to question its integrity.

“To justify the new ways of remembering, whether on moral, intellectual or emotional grounds, is often to undermine some very cherished cultural values and beliefs”, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka warns those who aspire to overcome forgetting. “On all counts, many of the basic principles guiding collective life may come under attack”, she explains. “If remembrance tends to maintain social identity and order, working against forgetting is often a radical challenge to both. As such, it is likely to meet with resistance and opposition, even when (or perhaps especially when) the new ”infrastructure” of memory is in fact allowed to be constructed”. (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 126). That is exactly what a historian interested in the restoration of the Polish history of Lviv should expect to face at all levels of memory construction – from national to personal.

Lviv’s local authorities (most of which are the right-wing parties’ representatives) are doing little (if anything) to retrieve and maintain the memories of other nationalities once living there (Poles and Jews alike). Scandalous developments surrounding the allocation of the future Polish cultural centre (which does not exist in Lviv today) and procrastination on allotting the construction site for the new building of the Consulate General of Poland in Lviv suggest that the local authorities are not very interested in the preservation or promotion of Polish culture here. A seemingly minor disturbance in the Ukrainian-Polish relationship (i.e., Poland’s recent signing of the Schengen visa treaty and subsequent complications of visa procedures for Ukrainians) could aggravate considerably negative attitudes towards Poles in Lviv, where the Consulate General of Poland resides. In addition, the majority of museums in Lviv belong to the state and are supported either by national or local budgets. Their exhibitions would rather represent the official, Ukrainian-oriented history; one lacking some of the others’ stories. In general, the current political situation on the national level in Ukraine does not encourage the re-introduction of any counter-narratives on the local level, so there is not much pressure from above. This phenomenon of mass social amnesia Omer Bartov calls *an erasure* of the others’ cultural traces; Iwona Irwin-Zarecka considered the notion of *an absence of memory* or even such a term as *a memory void* more appropriate when one is “to speak of forgetting in respect to experience that had been deemed irrelevant from the start.” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 117).

At the same time a successful – though difficult and time-consuming – solution to the highly politically and emotionally charged problem of restoration of the official Polish military memorial cemetery of the ”Eaglets” (“Cmentarz Orłąt”) in Lviv testifies that reconciliation is possible if there is sufficient political will from both national governments. The cemetery was

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them refer to the history of the Poles (Sereda 2008). The restoration and official unveiling of the Polish military cemetery ‘Eaglets’ in Lviv in 2005 can also be interpreted as a sign of changes.

restored and its official unveiling was attended by the highest government officials – the presidents of Ukraine and Poland – and followed by a mass ecumenical prayer in Lviv in June 2005. This should be considered an important step in the process of national reconciliation and the righteous return of the historical memory of Lviv's multicultural past. However, the optimism that the event may give rise to is rather illusory, as permanent fights for power at the highest levels of Ukrainian politics constantly divert the leaders' attention from these questions. In such an unfavourable situation there is little chance of finding any visible and established representations of memory of the Polish heritage.

In what concerns the memory of Poles in Lviv, the politics are very clear: there is a general – although informal - unanimity among local officials, historians and ordinary city dwellers of what concerns forgetting Polish culture in both active and passive ways.

This seemingly hopeless state of affairs, however, pushes us to think about some alternative ways to retrieve the missing elements of the past. Indeed, Alon Confino was perfectly right when he said:

A search for memory traces is made mostly among visible places and familiar names, where memory construction is explicit and its meaning palpably manipulated, while in fact we should look for memory where it is implied rather than said, blurred rather than clear, in the realm of collective mentality. We miss a whole world of human activities that can not be immediately recognized (and categorized) as political, although they are decisive to the way people construct and contest images of the past. We can think of the family, voluntary association, and workplace but we should also include practices such as tourism and consumerism ... There exists in memory studies the danger of reducing culture to politics and ideology, instead of broadening the field from the political to the social and the experiential, to an everyday history of memory (Confino 1997: 1395, 1402).

Following these suggestions, a scholar should focus on at least two possible ways to explore the remnants of memory of displaced Poles in the city of Lviv. The local tourist industry and the personal life stories of the elderly city dwellers could in fact be those realms which are least affected by official historical discourses (ideologies) and political practices.

### **The tourist industry and studies of collective memory**

The rapidly growing tourist industry makes every attempt to satisfy the needs of a variety of tourists coming to the city. Famous for its rich multicultural past, eastern Galicia in general and the city of Lviv in particular found themselves among the most popular tourist destinations in the post-Soviet time. It is especially true after the inclusion of Lviv in the UNESCO list of places of World Cultural Heritage. It is not surprising that most Lviv visitors are Poles. Obviously, this cannot be explained only by the geographical proximity of Poland; one should not underestimate the role of strong nostalgic sentiments towards Lviv among many of those visitors. This attitude is being both *used* and *stimulated* by the numerous travel agencies located on both sides of the border. It is not a secret that the excursion itineraries vary depending on the nationality of the tourists, so different narratives are constructed and offered for the city tours designed for each particular target groups<sup>92</sup>. These itineraries and narratives are of special scholarly interest. They could be analysed in terms of what kind of loci, events,

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<sup>92</sup> An assumption that tourist agencies may offer counter-narratives which are not loyal to or perhaps even contradict the Ukrainian-centric history of Lviv is based on the fact that recently the Lviv city council attempted to assume control over all city tours by means of special licensing of the travel agencies and tourist guides.



personalities and stories they consist of, and what meaning is ascribed to all this. In this case, the method of participant observation could be useful in addition to textual analysis and interviewing.

An analysis of age and gender composition of the Polish tourist groups could also bring insights for verification of the hypothesis of mainly nostalgia-inspired tourist interest towards Lviv. Its ancient downtown area is relatively small, so city walking tours proved to be the most popular among tourists. This way of sightseeing allows visitors to come closer to the sites of interest, enter the buildings and inner courtyards, touch the artefacts and to visualize the bygone events at the scene. Tanya Richardson, observing such a group experience in Odessa (another Ukrainian city with rich and ethnically polyvalent history), came to the following conclusion: "In walking and talking about the past, they [tourists] evoke, imagine and reassemble it, which enables them to sense history. The experience of sensing history is shared and personal [sic]. The group's critique of the present is largely based on nostalgia for past epochs" (Richardson 2005: 5).

Another very promising source in the search for Polish historical and cultural traces in Lviv could be tourist guide books. A great variety of such publications in several languages is available for Lviv visitors today. Rudy Koshar in his illuminating article *What Ought to Be Seen: Tourists, Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe*, devoted to the analysis of the entire history of guidebooks in Europe, has demonstrated the heuristic potential of this source in research on national identity construction. "Whether traveling within the nation or abroad, tourists learned not only about the sites they visited but also about their origins in a national collectivity. Tourism and the nation thus met on hallowed cultural ground for which tourists guidebooks offered markers pointing the way to the objects, places and people that had to be seen", he concludes (Koshar 1998:340). Alon Confino in his research also explores the nexus between tourism, consumer culture and national identity in twentieth-century Germany, revealing how the past is turned into a commodity for mass consumption and how consumer culture shapes modern perceptions of the past. Studies on the role guidebooks play in representations of national history and collective memory have been done also in other parts of the world.<sup>93</sup> Similar attempts recently undertaken in Lviv by both local and foreign scholars<sup>94</sup> suggest that at different times tourists were directed to different places; the trajectories of their tours vary greatly depending on what kind of national narrative is to be offered. Taking into account that over the last decade a number of guidebooks came out in Lviv in both the Ukrainian and Polish languages, the study of their structure and content seems to be really relevant and advantageous in terms of revealing both the national and historical discourses they represent.

## Oral history promises

Oral history seems to be another alternative way of searching for the missing Polish memory in Lviv. Since 1991, a number of research projects have successfully applied this method in studies of the most traumatic and previously concealed memories of the recent Ukrainian past

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<sup>93</sup> For example in Vietnam, Singapore and Japan, see Laderman, S. (2002). Shaping memory of the past: Discourse in travel guidebooks for Vietnam. *Mass Communication and Society*, 5 (1), 87-110; Lew, A. A. (1991). Place representation in tourist guidebooks: An example from Singapore. *Journal of Tropical Geography*, 12, 124-137; Nishimura, S., Waryszak, R., King, B. (2007). The use of guidebooks by Japanese Overseas tourists: A quantitative approach. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45, 275-284.

<sup>94</sup> A master's thesis in Cultural Studies entitled "National discourses formation in Lviv: analysis of tourist guidebooks" has been completed by Andriy Vladymyr at the Lviv National University in 2005; Donna K. Rumenik, professor of psychology at Mayers University (USA) also included an analysis of several guide-books into her research "Exploring the missing Jewish narrative in Lviv" at the time of her Fulbright fellowship in Lviv in 2006-07.

(e.g. the forced collectivization of the peasantry in the 1930s; the Great Famine of 1932-33; the history of the forced labourers during the Second World War; the underground work of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; the post-war nationalist guerilla struggle against the Soviets in western Ukraine; activities of the underground dissident movement, etc.)<sup>95</sup>. In most cases oral history turned out to be the most productive way to learn about these events from an individual, human perspective, whereas other documentary sources appeared to be too biased, depersonalized, and incomplete. In fact, without personal accounts of the survivors, witnesses, participants of those events our knowledge of the past would be not only inaccurate, it would be considerably distorted.

The accumulated experience of Ukrainian oral historians allows defining some insights of peculiarities of doing oral history on sensitive issues in post-socialist Ukraine. The complexities of doing oral history in totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies have been widely discussed in the 1990s (Passerini 1992). One of those is caused by the state-dictated official history, which for decades was considered to be the only acceptable way of remembering the past – one history for all – so people ultimately found themselves deprived of their multiple and controversial individual memories. As a result, often their “silence gave an illusory unity to collective memory: everyone’s experience was made to seem the same” (Angel and Vanderbeck 1998: 2). The compulsory unification of memories, along with the gradual, unavoidable forgetting of individual experiences ultimately resulted in a “storytelling disability” when it comes to politically charged issues. In practice, elderly narrators tend to recite some politically correct stock phrases adopted from communist or nationalist propaganda and text-books. It is really hard to make them provide their first-hand accounts of bygone events, personal opinions and views. The current political debates around some controversial historical events also impact on the way those individual stories are constructed and narrated.

Peoples’ distrust and suspicion could become another challenge for an oral historian (especially foreigners) doing field research in a post-socialist country. For decades the Soviet people have been trained to hold back their – often unsuitable for official history – private recollections. Indeed, experiencing enormous pressure from the ubiquitous brain-washing Soviet propaganda and living in an atmosphere of overall terror, ordinary people learned well to conceal their critical personal opinions<sup>96</sup>. Therefore a scholar has to be aware of the extraordinary complexity involved in motivating people to discuss their particular historical experiences openly and comprehensively. It is especially difficult to get individuals to reflect critically upon specific topics that were taboo in the USSR, including ethnic discrimination and deportations.

The method of structured interviews (using a list of precise questions) seems to be rather inappropriate and ineffective in oral historical study in post-Soviet Ukraine, especially when it comes to politically charged issues. The research project “Twentieth Century Ukraine in Women’s Memories”<sup>97</sup> showed remarkable differences between women’s spontaneous reflections on some sensitive issues in the course of biographical narration and their opinions as stated in response to the direct questions asked when the life-story telling was over. Indeed, their answers to the questions “What do you think about the people of various ethnicities living next to you?” or “What is the significance of Ukraine’s independence for your life?” tended to be more politically correct, formulated in accordance with the current “political mainstream”

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<sup>95</sup> The specific experiences of Ukrainian scholars doing oral historical research in post-socialist Ukraine have been lively discussed during several national conferences in recent years; it ultimately resulted in the creation of the Ukrainian Oral History Association in November 2006. For more information see: *Ukraina Moderna*, Vol.11, 2007.

<sup>96</sup> For further discussion on the destructive effects of fear on public remembering in the Soviet Union, see: Khubova, Ivankiev-Sharova, in *Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. Luisa Passerini. International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories. Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, (1992), 89-101.

<sup>97</sup> For project outline and other details, see: Kis in: *Ukraina Moderna*. Vol. 11 (Winter 2007), p. 266-70.

and being “loyal” from the viewpoint of the dominant historical discourse. For instance, those who in fact showed their profound prejudices towards certain ethnicities throughout the life-story telling often represented themselves as perfectly tolerant, unbiased and open-minded persons while answering direct questions on this subject. Those who were obviously nostalgic about the Soviet regime suddenly expressed their appreciation of the independent Ukrainian nation-state afterwards. This readiness to provide the “correct” answers which are perfectly in line with the “general political mainstream” was cultivated in Soviet citizens for decades. So asking straight questions seems to be a rather unproductive way of searching for memories which have been concealed, suppressed, or just abandoned for a long time.

The situation could be even more complicated when it comes to the issues not openly discussed or studied in full before. Having no clue in official history, narrators could feel confused and lost; unable to produce an independent personal opinion. Polish history of/in Lviv is one of those publicly concealed, forgotten, neglected subjects. A philistine could hardly find any relevant and publicly accessible information on Polish culture in Lviv before the Second World War, so for the general public this subject would seem rather irrelevant, strange and inappropriate. Even having some (direct or transmitted) memories of Poles, people may find it difficult to inscribe them into the general historical canvas they currently have at their disposal.

Naturally, for lack of any coherent narrative of displaced Poles within the local historical memory, a scholar has to deal with very dispersed, scrappy, vague and ambiguous individual recollections, which – if they have ever been recounted – were most probably told occasionally and/or in private. That is why the notion of *communicative memory*, as described by Jan Assman and John Czaplicka in their article “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” (1995), appears to be most appropriate in the study of personal memories of expelled Poles in Lviv.

The concept of “communicative memory” includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications ... Through the practice of oral history we have gained a more precise insight into the peculiar qualities of this everyday form of collective memory, which we call communicative memory ... Every individual memory constitutes itself in communications with others. These “others” however are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past. Halbwachs thinks of families, neighborhood and professional groups... up to and including nations (Assman, Czaplicka 1995:127).

This kind of memory, which exists on the level of informal individual interactions, is perhaps the most resistant to influences of dominant political discourses. Indeed, it is part and parcel of everyday communicative practices of story-telling amongst close friends, family members, and trusted neighbours. Moreover, it is well known that in these very milieux all kinds of counter-narratives and oppositional discourses (political, religious, ethnic, etc.) existed and thrived during the Soviet era. Therefore there is a high probability of being able to track down some unconventional memories exactly at the level of everyday communicative practices.

This idea brings us to the question of possible actors in such communication. It is rather obvious that those who actually maintain informal communicative networks on a regular basis are predominantly women. Indeed, the repertoire of the women’s habitual conversations includes a fair amount of personal stories reflecting the variety of events, situations, special cases and people’s experiences. These very stories – isolated and dispersed – are perhaps the only ones which survived, precisely because of their very private nature. They – despite their

fragmentary character – could become a good starting point from which to reconstruct the local memory of Poles.

There is one more reason to pay special attention to gender aspects in oral historical research in Ukraine today. Currently women constitute the absolute majority of those who could provide first-hand accounts of bygone events. Indeed, the higher life expectancy of women as compared to men<sup>98</sup>, and their relatively better health often determine the prevalence of female interviewees in virtually every oral history project without regard to the research topic. Consequently, a scholar has to be aware of the fact that, nolens volens, all kinds of specific women's perspectives and experiences are coming to the fore in their stories, and this is ultimately reshaping (gendering) our knowledge of the past.

Life experiences and memories of men and women – survivors of the same events – proved to be different as well. For instance, the stories of *ostarbeiters* – eastern forced laborers in Nazi Germany – disclosed the highly gendered nature of their experiences and subsequent recollections. So the stories narrated by men often address the issues of power and authority between workers and the German management; the rules and regulations of work (and their transgressions); episodes of resistance, etc. At the same time, women's stories are focused mostly on relationships among workers and with the local people, and unconventional ways of survival. There are more details of everyday life, of personal encounters: because of their sex women were exposed to a different kind of endangerments, related to their sexuality and reproductive function. In general, numerous oral historical research projects recently conducted in Ukraine proved the category of gender to be essential for both fieldwork and the following analysis. Gender peculiarities of historical experiences, memories and storytelling should not be neglected in research on displaced Polish culture in Lviv, either.

## Concluding remarks

The history of Poles and Ukrainians in Lviv is really controversial, and either side has a truth of its own. One cannot deny that “even in the convoluted and multifaceted East European context Lviv exemplifies a city of different, at times polar, experiences and interpretations. Its history and historiography were, and to a large measure still are as much hostages to ethnic and national experiences, perspectives, exclusiveness, and denial” (Grabowicz 2000:313-314). The reconciliation of two national versions of history is possible only when the mutual will and readiness are clearly expressed and equal efforts from both sides are made. In the search for missing historical memories, of attempting to reconstruct the past from the dispersed scraps of individual recollections, scholars have to be aware of those at times unpredictable consequences this may lead to. Possible political uses and abuses of those retrieved historical narratives in the context of long-term tensions between the nation's stakeholders are more than real. Indeed, scholars doing research in similar circumstances repeatedly warn about certain “dangers” that the restored memory could bring about. Avishal Margalit points out that “memory breathes revenge as often as it breathes reconciliation”. (Margalit, 2002: 5). With regard to this Maja Zehfuss refers to Ilana R. Bet-El comment on the situation in the former Yugoslavia: “Words of the past became weapons of war.” This “danger” of memory may appear even more acute given the alleged scope for manipulation, though distortion is often by no means necessary to incite a desire for revenge (Zehfuss 2006: 217-218). In the case of Lviv, however, some scholars are more optimistic as another development seems to be more probable. “Ukrainian culture is indubitably dominant in Lviv today, and no other culture – its former rival – can threaten it anymore”, Maciej Janowski claims. “Paradoxically, this situation

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<sup>98</sup> Women normally live up to 72.5 years and men up to 60.5 years on average in Ukraine today.

comprises certain potential opportunity: when the other cultures stop endangering they could become a source of enrichment” (Janowski 2002: 24 [my own translation]).

This idea does not seem paradoxical in the context of *ideological decolonization of memory* as defined by Pierre Nora (2005). The phenomenon is typical for countries liberated from totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, where societies turn to the memories previously destroyed or distorted in favour of those regimes, so the numerous historical counter-narratives could be publicly voiced, heard, appreciated. Ukraine could be a good example of such a decolonization of memory, as a general democratization of Ukrainian society after 1991 created an opportunity for public discussions on history and strengthened academic debates on problematic pasts and the politics of memory of the former regimes (Sereda 2008: 75). This process – although sometimes arduous, controversial and slow – is still an inevitable and irreversible step on the Ukrainian way towards becoming a fully-fledged nation.

Contemporary Ukrainians are facing several challenges, and one of them is the necessity to retrieve from oblivion and to appreciate the displaced narratives of the other nationalities; to ultimately grant them their proper place in the national and local histories. The first step towards this goal would be to recognize that something is really missing from the collective memory. To accomplish this, the Ukrainian nation has to put itself at a certain distance from its past and have an impartial look on it from afar. This task, however, is very difficult to put into practice, especially taking into account the adolescence of the nation and rawness of its grand narrative. “Outsiders may have an easier task here”, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka suggests, “but it is often up to insiders to construct plausible alternatives to the once legitimate interpretation of the events” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 115). In this regard, an international research project could become an external stimulus which might give impetus to further research on undeservedly forgotten parts of Ukraine’s history.

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