

## Images of Memory near the Carpathian Watershed: A Photo Essay

After the transformation period in Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 1990s, history, memory and identity became essential elements for the politics of the countries in this region. As noted by Robert Traba (2012: 27), one reason for this was that after the Second World War in this part of Europe we had to deal with a programmed system of forgetfulness, silence and repression. After the socio-political transformations in the countries known as people's democracies that used to form the Eastern Bloc, there was an eruption of memories, or, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko put it (2011: 67), *memories* in their different aspects were *unfrozen*. History and memory were clearly instrumentalized by nation-state policies, as in the times of people's democracies, albeit with different accents. Both history and memory began to be used to activate voters, but also to mobilize citizens in the face of, for example, armed conflict, an excellent example of which is Ukraine after 2014. Moreover, in some countries of the region, memory and history became the subject of legislative work to establish elements of the past that should be commemorated, and also historic figures and events that should be forgotten. Anthropologist Sharon Macdonald, author of *Memorylands...* (2013a), notes that memory has become a specific obsession in Europe, which is clearly seen inside museums and beyond. Outside museums, the preoccupation of Europeans with memory manifests itself, for example, in building and destroying various kinds of monuments, but also in historical re-enactments, in culinary heritage, and finally in the traditions produced. Macdonald argues that without understanding the phenomenon of memory, it is difficult to understand contemporary Europe. The perspective offered by ethnologists-anthropologists may be helpful in this (Macdonald 2013b: 33). These specialists, exploring local worlds, local contexts, and dense narratives, who listen to the voices of so-called ordinary

people not heard in the centres, allow us to perceive alternatives diverging from or even negating the official politics of memory and history. Their studies also show that local worlds of social memories are not only heterogeneous, but also contain multidimensional interpretations of the past.

In these local spaces (Traba 2013) we are dealing with a kind of polyphony of memory, which in my opinion is additionally visible and perceivable, especially on the peripheral borderlands of nation states. In these areas, different interpretations of the past and different politics of memory presented by neighbouring countries often overlap, and the past is often an element strongly influencing relations between countries (Głowacka-Grajper 2018: 926). As a consequence, these areas, on the one hand, become spaces where nation states are clearly present, but on the other hand, they are also spaces in which memories of the past created before the establishment of state borders and before the introduction of the current politics of memory exist. Additionally, in the borderland context, the existing and phantom borders are not only places of memory alone, but their surroundings are also impregnated with national symbols and commemorations. Despite the uniting Europe, borders and borderlands are still key to commemorating the past. In local worlds, borders are not just demarcation lines, but also lines that affect local identities, practices and social experiences. On the other hand, memory in borderlands resonates with a polyphony of voices because of border shifts, migration, smuggling or matrimonial relations. In these spaces we can clearly see the clash of 'official' memories preserved by nations and states, with unofficial 'folk' or grassroots memories of minority groups.

The photo essay presented to readers is, due to editorial limitations, a shortened visual report on the project entitled: *Broadcasting from the Forgotten European Borderlands: The Carpathian Watershed in the Polyphony of Voices*.<sup>1</sup> This was not a standard research project, but its goal was to popularize research conducted in or regarding various borderlands of Central and Eastern Europe. The primary objective was to prepare photographic and audio documentation that presents in an attractive way, including selected social media channels, various dimensions and images of memory and commemoration in the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland. I gathered documentary material on each side of the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland during four field visits between June and October 2021. The material I have collected consists of over a thousand photographs, and about six hours of soundscape recordings and interviews recorded in the field.

The borders of Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine meet at the top of Kremenets (1221 m a.s.l.) in the Eastern Beskids, called Bieszczady in Polish. Although, unlike the peaks most frequently visited by Polish tourists in this mountain range,

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<sup>1</sup> This project was implemented using funds from the Center for Culture and Governance in Europe, University of St. Gallen under the programme: GCE-HSG Research Dissemination Grant: Borderland Studies in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea Region. Results of field work are available at the project website [www.wododzial.pl](http://www.wododzial.pl).

Kremenets itself does not offer breathtaking views, it is an important point on the map for many mountain hikers. Many of them probably want to see and experience the place where the borders of three countries meet. This place is marked with a magnificent granite/marble obelisk installed, as reported by people living in Nova Sedlica (a village in Slovakia located at the foot of Kremenets), thanks to the efforts of local foresters and supported by local businesses and residents. Kremenets is a mountain peak where the borders of three states meet but is also a peak lying directly on the Carpathian watershed. This watershed separates the basins feeding the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The watershed divides not only the catchments of the European seas, but also, symbolically, the memory of this area, which at the beginning of the 20th century was within the borders of one large state, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With time, however, the Carpathians and the watershed running along their main ridge transformed from a peripheral space into a strategic borderland (Dabrowski 2020: 848) of the emerging and declining states: the Second Polish Republic, the Polish People's Republic, the First Czechoslovak Republic, the USSR and Czechoslovakia, which for now are the current borders of Slovakia, Ukraine and the Third Republic of Poland. Not long ago, the area at the foot of the Carpathian watershed was a multicultural peripheral region for cosmopolitan centres. "Bloodlands" (Snyder 2010), the Holocaust and the Samudaripen,<sup>2</sup> as well as mass deportations of people, including Poles and Ukrainians (Pisuliński 2017a, 2017b), transformed this area into the periphery of nationalist countries (Zhurzhenko 2011). Nowadays, within a 50 km radius of Kremenets, we can find many traces of people that used to live in these areas (abandoned cemeteries, traces of non-existent villages, etc.), as well as commemorations referring to the now non-existing states governing this land. Although the borderlands of nation-states do not vanish from the politics of memories of nationalizing centres, regimes of state memory and commemoration arrive here incomplete and in a selective fashion. Nevertheless, both the central and local authorities are exploring the history and memory of this area for elements around which they are trying to build reconciliation.

Keeping in mind "the temporality of the landscape" (Ingold 1993), the presented photographs, taken in villages lying at the foot of the Carpathian watershed, show both monuments and other traces of the history recorded in local landscapes. Some of these images can be analysed for many aspects. One example is a photograph of a former border post from the time when the border between the Second Polish Republic and the Czechoslovak Republic ran along the Pikuja range. Although both countries ceased to exist after World War II, their symbolic traces can still be found today in the Carpathian valleys, where numerous border posts have become part of the tombstones in local cemeteries. Other examples are

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<sup>2</sup> The Samudaripenem, also called the Porajmos, was a planned extermination of Roma and Sinti carried out during World War II by the Third Reich. The policy of the Nazis was to completely eliminate Roma and Sinti, like the Jewish population, from European society.

photographs showing the multidimensionality of the commemorations with Soviet origin, for which once in pre-war Ukraine people made attempts to give them a Ukrainian character. The history is also voiced by abandoned fruit trees, which are sometimes the only traces of homesteads and villages that no longer exist.

To end this short introduction to the presented photo essay, I would like to express my hope that through these photographs I will be able to signal the polyphony of memories functioning on each side of the official and phantom borders running along the Carpathian watershed. In the context of the war in Ukraine that has been going on since February, it can be assumed that after its end, and perhaps even during its time, the monumental landscape of the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland will undergo further transformations. Perhaps the remains of monuments of Soviet origin will eventually disappear from the Carpathian valleys, and instead commemorations of Ukrainian heroines and heroes fighting the Russian invasion will emerge.

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Fot. 1. A post from the border of Galicia and the Kingdom of Hungary on the Radoszycka Pass (Poland-Slovakia)



Fot. 2. Commemoration of the first battle of Sich Riflemen at the Uzhok Pass (Ukraine)



Fot. 3. Ossuary with skulls of World War I soldiers in the village of Osadne (Slovakia)



Fot. 4. Cemetery of World War I soldiers in the village of Topol'a (Slovakia)





Fot. 5. Cross in memory of the victims of Talerhoff in the village of Karpatske (Ukraine)



Fot. 6. An old post from the Polish-Czechoslovak border, now a part of a tombstone in the village of Verkhnie Husne (Ukraine)



Fot. 7. An old post from the Polish-Czechoslovak border, now a part of a tombstone in the village of Lybokhora (Ukraine)



Fot. 8. Jewish cemetery in the valley of the Uzh River, near the village of Luh (Ukraine)





Fot. 9. Jewish cemetery in the village of Topoľa (Slovakia)



Fot. 10. Remains of fortifications of the Arpad Line in Zhornava (Ukraine)



Fot. 11. Memorial plaque related to the liberation of the village of Lubnia (Ukraine)



Fot. 12. Fragment of the commemoration from Verhnie Vysotske associated with World War II placed in the Soviet era with an “adaptation” to modern times (Ukraine)





Fot. 13. Fragment of the commemoration from Turka associated with World War II placed in the Soviet era with an “adaptation” to modern times (Ukraine)



Fot. 14. Gravestones of young communists from the village of Nova Sedlica killed by partisans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1945 (Slovakia)





Fot. 15. A monument in memory of Soviet soldiers in the small town of Stakčín (Slovakia)



Fot. 16. A monument in memory of Soviet soldiers in the village of Vyšná Jablonka (Slovakia)



Fot. 17. Ruins of the Greek Catholic Church of St. Demetrius in the non-existent village of Caryńskie (Poland)

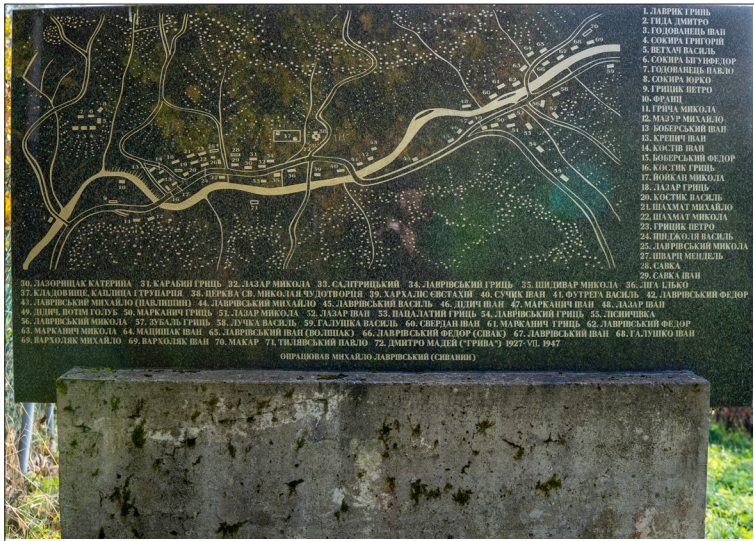


Fot. 18. Fragment of cellar remains in the non-existent village of Jaworzec (Poland)





Fot. 19. Old apple trees on the grounds of the non-existent village of Jaworzec (Poland)



Fot. 20. A memorial plaque with a simple map of the village of Dołżyca before the displacement of the local people in 1947 (Poland)



Fot. 21. Cast iron crucifix ingrown in a tree at the cemetery in Łupków (Poland)



Fot. 22. Old apple trees on the grounds of the non-existent village of Dara (Slovakia)





Fot. 23. The gravestone of a soldier – a victim of the war in Afghanistan, the village of Vyshka (Ukraine)



Fot. 24. A plaque in memory of a soldier killed in the ATO zone in the Russian-Ukrainian war, the village of Karpatske (Ukraine)