



Forbidden Mourning. Szolyva (Svaliava) – From Zone of Oblivion to Zone of Remembrance

Ferenc Bódi

Institute for Political Sciences, Centre for Social Sciences; Research Institute and Archives for the History of the Hungarian Regime Change. Budapest, Hungary. Email: [bodi.ferenc\[at\]tk.hu](mailto:bodi.ferenc[at]tk.hu)
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2362-3174>

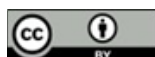
Received: 4 July 2022 | Revised: 11 September 2022 | Accepted: 31 October 2022

Abstract

From the autumn of 1944, Hungarians in Kárpátalja fell victim to the ferocious atrocities. Tens of thousands of civilians were taken hostage and deported by Soviet authorities to Russian labor camps. Mentioning the victims of “malenky robot” was forbidden, as it was adverse to the interests of the ruling communist elite in Hungary. It was only 45 years later, in 1989, that the process of unearthing the truth began. The Szolyva Memorial Park was established in the 1990s. In this study, we analyze an ideal type: the reconstruction of the collective memory of now minority Hungarians in Kárpátalja is a unique story, yet it can be interpreted on a universal level, that of mankind. From Szolyva’s story, it becomes abundantly clear that preserving collective memory is crucial in any community, especially for minority ethnic groups. Since Vico’s axiom states that a common higher truth reflects what is basically human, the fate of Hungarian communities in Kárpátalja represents themselves on a universal level. Freeing the ways to reconstruct the community’s collective memory had an impact on the process of regaining long-lost freedoms. While older generations finally regained the right to grieve, mourn, and remember their own past, younger generations had the chance to integrate the once-forbidden past into the pillars of their future, hence helping the re-emergence of Hungarian identity and reshaping the framework of the community’s existence from 1990 onwards.

Keywords

Transcarpathia; Szolyva Memorial Park; Hungarian Minority; Forced Labour Camp; Giambattista Vico; Cultural Memory; Collective Memory; Regime Change; Mourning Process; Minority Identity



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons “Attribution” 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Запретная скорбь. Свалява: из зоны забвения в зону памяти

Боуди Ференц

Институт политических наук, Центр социальных наук; Научно-исследовательский институт и архив по истории смены венгерского режима. Будапешт, Венгрия.

Email: [bodi.ferenc\[at\]tk.hu](mailto:bodi.ferenc[at]tk.hu) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2362-3174>

Рукопись получена: 4 июля 2022 | Пересмотрена: 11 сентября 2022 | Принята: 31 октября 2022

Аннотация

С осени 1944 года венгры в Закарпатье стали жертвами жестоких зверств. Десятки тысяч мирных жителей были депортированы в трудовые лагеря. Упоминание о жертвах «злой роботы» было запрещено, так как это противоречило интересам правящей коммунистической элиты Венгрии. Только 45 лет спустя, в 1989 году, начался процесс выяснения истины. В 1990-х годах был создан Мемориальный парк Свалявы. В данном исследовании мы анализируем идеальный тип: восстановление коллективной памяти венгров, составляющих теперь меньшинство в Закарпатье, – это уникальная история, однако ее можно интерпретировать на универсальном уровне, на уровне человечества. Из истории Свалявы становится очевидным, что сохранение коллективной памяти имеет решающее значение для любого сообщества, особенно для этнических меньшинств. Поскольку аксиома Вико гласит, что общая высшая истина отражает то, что в сущности является человеческим, судьба венгерских общин в Закарпатье представляет себя на универсальном уровне. Освобождение путей реконструкции коллективной памяти общины повлияло на процесс восстановления давно утраченных свобод. В то время как старшие поколения наконец-то вернули себе право скорбеть, оплакивать и помнить свое прошлое, молодые поколения получили возможность интегрировать некогда запретное прошлое в основы своего будущего, что способствовало возрождению венгерской идентичности и изменило рамки существования общины с 1990 года.

Ключевые слова

Закарпатье; мемориальный парк Свалявы; венгерское меньшинство; лагерь принудительного труда; Джамбаттиста Вико; культурная память; коллективная память; смена режима; траурный процесс; идентичность меньшинства



Это произведение доступно по [лицензии Creative Commons “Attribution” \(«Атрибуция»\) 4.0 Всемирная](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Introduction

Central-Eastern Europe is a typical transition zone in Europe, a continent with a long history and its many zones of oblivion. In this broad region where West meets East, and East meets West, the dominant ideologies of the 20th century constructed numerous cultural exclusion and frontier zones. The fact that they intentionally became zones of oblivion stemmed from several, often interconnected factors: borders of states were redrawn with a stroke of a pen; political regimes built on vicious ideologies emerged and collapsed and the long history of religious persecution and/or ethnic cleansing was continued by various actors. In my study I describe an “ideal type” story of a Soviet concentration camp set up in Szolyva, Kárpátalja (Trancarpathia, the Zakarpatska Oblast). It is a region that belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom for nearly a millennia, then became part of newly formed Czechoslovakia and after an interim it was annexed by and integrated into the Soviet Union. After the socialist political regime collapsed and the Soviet Union fell apart in December 1991 Kárpátalja became the most western part of independent Ukraine. By then the story of the tens of thousands of people who were deported to the Soviet labour camps for “malenky robot” and of whom many never returned home was out in the public domain. The local communities of Kárpátalja were at last allowed and able to grieve, mourn and remember all their loved ones who fell victim to the invaders – to the Red Army and Soviet authorities. The intended zone of oblivion turned into the place of remembrance where the memory of Hungarian and German victims were preserved for posterity.

Aims and Methods of Research

This study builds heavily on Max Weber’s “ideal types” in which an analytical construct is built to help us understand and evaluate historical phenomena. In its context the evolving concepts are able to represent an era through individual events and stories. The Soviet concentration camp set up in Szolyva in 1944 has its own unique stories of human suffering with many individual pains and sorrows. Aside from the brutal inhumanity of the given period and of such camps, the universal nature of the concealed or forbidden remembrance of suffering and grief needs to be highlighted.

In this paper I present the story of reconstructing Szolyva’s grief into collective memory. The process is one where historians have played and still play a key role. Historians are the ones who go from one village to another, following the doomed footsteps of each and every victim, unearthing the black boxes of remembrance and thus opening the way for local communities to mourn their lost loved ones.

My focus of attention in this piece is on the winter of 1944 in Kárpátalja, reconstructing the weeks and months of unrestricted use of force by the invading Soviet military machine. I mark the period that proved to be the sole prelude to an era in which the adaptation of Stalin’s predatorial methods led to the crushing of local

clergy, peasantry, intellectuals and representatives of the Hungarian minority. I also rely on news publications from the late 1980s and the early 1990s, which step by step followed the efforts and results of those who were willing to dedicate themselves to unearthing the long-forbidden truth. A work that evidently involved personal risks before the regime change of 1990.

Methodologically I start by setting up the socio-cultural framework of interpretation, recalling Giambattista Vico's axiom in which mourning, burial, setting a decent resting place and preserving the memory of the dead is the common denominator in all types of human civilization. He clearly states that without them mankind would fall into a pre-civilised beastly state. Consecutively I turn to the concept of liminality, developed by Victor W. Turnel and Arnold van Gennep, where the four most significant thresholds in our lives are birth, entering adulthood, getting married, and death. Using the same foundation, I quote Maurice Halbwachs's notion on the profound role of rituals in preserving a given community and its identity. We complete the framework of interpretation with Jan Assmann's hierarchy of memory types. This complex and deeply interconnected socio-cultural foundation helps me to frame Szolyva's own individual story into the Weberian sense of the word universal.

The implicit hypothesis of my work is that communities with their own defining identities survive through remembrance. According to Assman there are four types of collective memory: material, mimetic, communicative and cultural and this latter unifies the previously mentioned three. Given this assumption it is clear that a community can only preserve its identity if its cultural memory remains intact.

There are some who suggest that there is a connection between the identity of an individual person with his or her rock-solid convictions and the mad ideologies of the 20th century (Fromm, 1983, p. 157-181). But Italian Fascism and German Nazism emerged from a rather homogenous cultural background, while in Central and Eastern Europe no such ideologies materialized. For a millennia Eastern Europe was the melting pot of nations and so the vast area between Russia and Germany was quite heterogenous. On the individual level it frequently meant people with dual or tertial identities: speaking two or more languages, practicing different traditions, etc. Such an environment inherently led to a nurturing acceptance towards others, and so within a given community various group identities peacefully coexisted. Sitting in the Northeastern Carpathians Kárpátalja was a perfect example of such coexistence as no local identities tried to dominate each other. Yet acceptance of others requires stable self-identity both on the level of the individual and his or her community. My study puts ethnical changes of the region into a historical perspective in order to help a better understanding of the 1944-1945 context when Szolyva became a concentration camp.

I close my paper with the detailed account of how Hungarians, now a minority, were able to reconstruct cultural memory by establishing the Szolyva Memorial



Park, which is a place of remembrance not only for ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine but for all Hungarians of the Hungarian nation. The story of Szolyva, however, is not simply a case study since it is also a story about grief and remembrance on a universal level: one which echoes the misery and suffering of peoples in other regions and eras. The essence of Szolyva's own story from 1944 to the present is actually ageless and hence relates to other similar cases on the basic principles of human existence.

Socio-Cultural Framework of Interpretation

According to Giambattista Vico when we look at human history there are three principles found in every known culture. Irrespective of whether they were so-called barbaric or civilized people and regardless of the immense time and space between their existence: they all had some kind of religion, they all entered ceremoniously into marriage, they all buried their deceased loved ones.

Vico, being a philosopher and a historian living at the turn of the 16th – 17th centuries quoted the reports of the explorers of his time. These first anthropological records described people living in the depths of the rainforest, dwelling in the high mountains of the Americas, or on a remote island in the high seas. Assessing all this information Vico concluded that even the most cruel and savage people have no more sacred social rituals than religious worship, marriage and burial. In essence, drawing the conclusion of his two-decade long research on the history of various civilizations, he states in his *Principj di una Scienza Nuova*¹ that the common denominator of mankind, the most basic and most human quality is to be found in ceremonies. Vico says that in all known cultures, civilization was formed in and built upon on these three principles. In other words, these ceremonies set the framework for human existence (Gambarota, 2017, p. 99–144).

In Vico's axiom if similar principles arise where people are not acquainted with each other there must be a common higher truth in them, reflecting what is basically human. This common denominator is inherently rooted in mankind: these are the qualities which make us humans. In Vico's logic these customs must be preserved so that human nature does not turn back to its original state. A burial, a resting place and preserving the memory of the dead prevents man from turning back into a beast. Vico's reasoning is naturalistic and he compares not burying the dead to a state in which the lack of our customs led to some savage state where fields are not cultivated, cities are uninhabited, while the corpses of men and women are left on the ground feeding crows and dogs. He also depicts a vivid apocalyptic vision in which people feast on the flesh of the deceased like pigs. It could even be the setting of some modern dystopian movie where humans regressed into a beastly state losing all the virtues of their civilization. Vico derives the word humanity from the Latin verb *humare*, meaning "to bury", quoting Tacit who writes

1 Full title of the 1725 edition: *Principj di una Scienza Nuova Intorno alla Natura delle Nazioni per la Quale si Ritruovano i Principj di Altro Sistema del Diritto Naturale delle Genti* (Napoli 1725).

that burying our dead is the “innovation of mankind”. According to pagan beliefs the soul from an unburied body is doomed to roam the earth in vain. The ceremony of a funeral is basically the rite of making peace with the dead, who this way can find his/her own peace, not troubling the living anymore (Vico, 1979, p. 230). The ritual helps cross the fine line between certainty and uncertainty.

In the concept of liminality, developed by Victor W. Turner and Arnold van Gennep the four most important liminalities thresholds in our lives are birth, entering adulthood, getting married, and death (Gennep, 1960). In their view rituals are here to help and to emphasize reaching and crossing these thresholds within the community’s own set of symbols. Anthropologists of the early 20th century drew similar conclusions from their own studies of primitive people as Vico did several centuries earlier. We can establish the fact that rituals are the inevitable vehicles of the survival and preservation of different peoples and nations. Their basic function is to cease and allay the fragmentation of time both for the individual and the society he/she is living in. As Turner himself put it:

“Liminal entities are neither here or there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and intermediate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transition”. (Turner, 1967, p. 95)

Nurturing, preserving and practising these liminal rites are the foundations of both the survival and the future of all societies. Losing liminal rites of passage means breaking down the fabric of social existence, which leads to losing the future of a given community. As a proven fact, rites are not just empty shells of a set of beliefs but they form the base of self-identification of any given community. Loss of liminal rites weakens both the cognitive and the emotional strength of a community, as the identity and immunity of communities feed on the energy of passage rites. The decay and/or the collapse of those rites that were sustaining the community, whether due to a voluntary departure from traditions and culture or because of outside pressure, result in the loss of identity. In the life and existence of minorities it is especially important to possess media (graph edges), which help to preserve the identity of the community. Schools and education are vital to preserving their native language. Churches are crucial for practicing their religion and maintaining their monuments, memorial places and traditions. We have to emphasize that belonging to a local minority group can also be an act of free choice, as the identity one is born into may change with the individual. In fact, one may preserve its own minority identity while choosing the identity of the majority as well. Such dual identities were very much present in Kárpátalja all through the ages. If an individual decides to identify only with the majority he or she leaves behind his or her minority identity voluntarily and becomes assimilated. However, when some majority deprives a given minority of its own original identity and pressures it



to identify with the majority it is a sheer act of violence as both individuals and the community as a whole are bereaved of their free will and of free choice.

Such an event equals removing an edge from a set of graphs, which creates chaos in an ordered set that previously had unambiguous relations (Gereben, 2001). The set loses its original pattern, a community its character and individuals their identity (their connection to the group). The very same happens in a political regime change, or in a shift of power, or in the case of an annexation. When this latter occurs, a state occupies another state by military force and then tries to assimilate its indigenous population into its own society. Melting the conquered into the conqueror may include banning traditional rites to atomize their society. Individuals lose their connections to each other; the inner structure of community becomes fragmented, losing its resilience and perseverance against challenging difficulties (Gereben, 1999). Thus, the invader restricts the subdued not only physically but also spiritually (Abruzzi et al, 1982). If we apply the mathematical model to communication, we find that in that context churches, priests, cemeteries and the intelligentsia are the preservers of rites (Smith, 1991). When they are removed like an edge from a set it leads to a halt in practising the rituals, and so they fade away with time. The community then loses its own identity, the qualities that defined the group and its members and hence dissolves into the world of its invaders. In the worst case they become pariahs, a despised group of outcasts (Biczó, 2004).

According to Maurice Halbwachs a child brought up in complete isolation has no memory. Halbwachs, the inventor of the concept of collective memory, suggests that though it is always the individual who recollects his/her own memories, the ability to remember things is a collective product (Halbwachs, 1992). A human being living in society is only able to remember the past that is relevant to the framework of his/her present, and so he/she forgets the things that bear no such relevance. In our memory only those things are preserved, which are valuable in and for our present. This selection process does not only reconstruct our past, but organizes our present and future. (Halbwachs, 1992). In his grandiose work of *Between Memory and History* Pierre Nora explains that in our age past swiftly becomes history in the present. Remembrance in our fast-moving world has a constrained role in the individual's memory. Remembrance manifests itself in places of remembrance and in the rites closely connected to them. The "sanctities" and relics of this objectified remembrance together with the places that reserve them have their special meaning and importance in a given community. (Nora, 1996). To provide some famous examples: the Kazan Cathedral in Saint Petersburg dedicated to the holy icon of Our Lady of Kazan, the Hill of Crosses in Šiauliai (Lithuania), the Santa Maria de Montserrat in Catalonia (Spain), for the Hungarians Csíksomlyó in Transsylvania (Romania), or for Slavic people the San Clemente al Laterano in Rome (Italy). These sacred places and the rituals they preserve bridge the space between past and present. They are the places of continuity where

the individual can encounter the profound experience of belonging to a larger community.

In Jan Assmann’s view remembrance is closely connected with identity and with the tradition building that preserves this group identity. He differentiates four types of collective memory: material memory based on objects, mimetic memory where objects recall events from ancient history, communicative memory in which transmission of information from one generation to another is key and cultural memory that unifies the previously mentioned three types (Assmann, 2011).

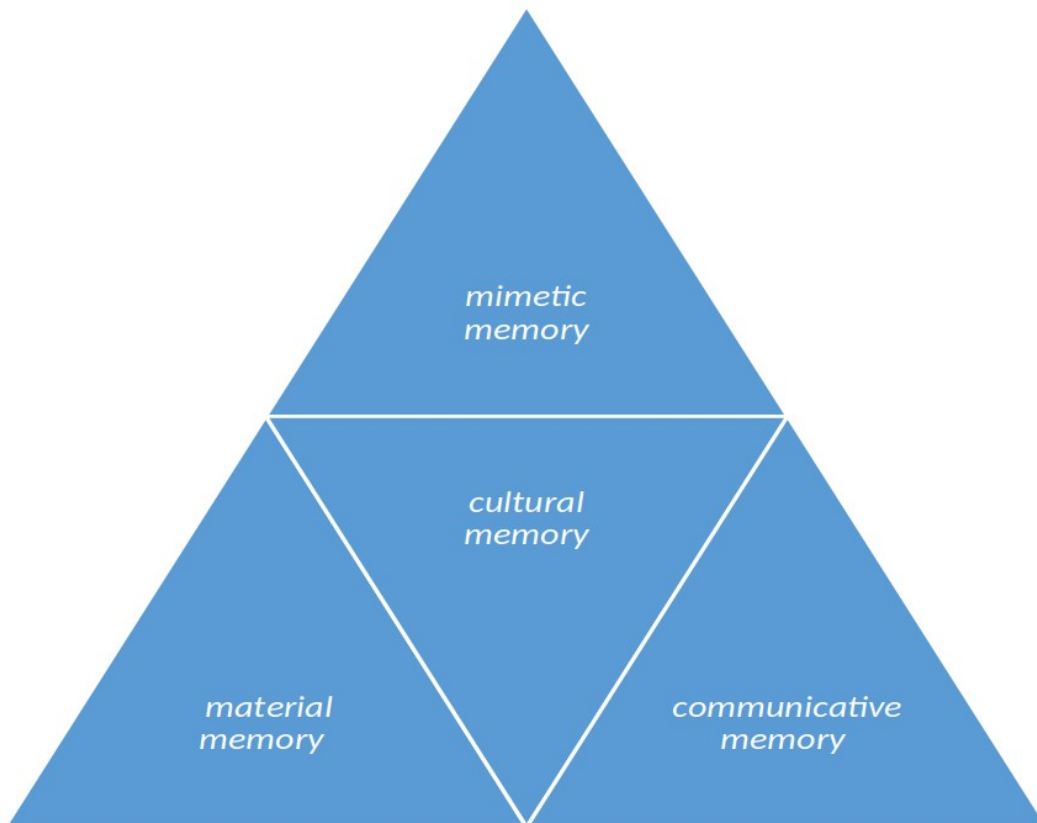


Figure 1. Assmann’s hierarchy of memory types. Source: our editing by Assmann

As a renowned Assmann states that the role of cultural memory is to link the past to our present. Similarly to Vico’s axiom he concludes that the most ancient form of recollecting our past is remembering our deceased loved ones. Community does not let their memory fade into the void, rites of remembrance are the means to evoke them and to preserve their memory in the present, and so they remain the part of the community. The repetition of reoccurring rites carves the dead into the minds of the living. This is mimetic memory. Preserving personal belongings and items of the dead evolves them into relics while burial sites peg out a given location, thus these are sacred sites of pilgrimage, thus material memory. Preserving the memory of the dead in an oral and/or a written way (including artists, scien-



tists, etc. as “men of the words”, or “guardians of remembrance”) is communicative memory. Last but not least cultural memory makes the memory of the lost one’s part of the community’s own identity. And so past and present meet and merges amending the fragmentation of time. It is even more important when dramatic painful events of the past – natural disasters, wars, subjugation and suffering – are reactivated in the community’s present. In cultural memory remembering the dead starts with the rituals of mourning and continued by the preservation of burial sites and memorials.

What modern dictatorships had in common – whether it be Russian Bolshevism, Italian Fascism or German Nazism – was the effort to eliminate the memory of their opponents. Total physical and spiritual annihilation of “the enemy”, however, is not the product of the Modern Age. Erasing the past is an ageless ambition of those who seek-grab-hold onto power. In ancient Egypt the last pharaoh of the 18th dynasty, Horemheb¹ did his best to wipe out the memory of the “heretic ruler” Akhenaten² who introduced monotheism. (David, 1975, p. 88) Erasing Akhenaten’s sculptures, pictures, inscriptions etc. is one of the earliest examples of launching a new era by destroying the memory of the old regime. Hence erasing the past seems to be continuous in human history, being an effective tool for rewriting history, as the reconstruction of the deleted memory is only possible after those who have erased it are gone. Opportunity for the rehabilitation of the erased past decreases with time. Yet if a chance arises to re-carve the erased names on the wall of remembrance it may bring reconciliation and give comfort to later generations. The rapture in time dissolves together with the trauma of the given community. Nonetheless autocrats and dictators often try to prevent a memory of their victims to emerge by hiding their remains, following the principle of “no corpse means no crime committed”. In effect they forbid their victims to be buried while also disallowing tombs or monuments to be erected to preserve their memory.

In Vico’s view and concept the history of mankind follows the course of “corsi e ricorsi”, cycles of growth and counter cycles of decay, and so men often fall back to some beastly state while society collapses, and people lose their human character (Vico, 2020, p. 129–132). In such a counter cycle all become enemies, and in this savagery the more powerful subdues each and every one who in their grasp who is weaker. This horrifying image is described by Thomas Hobbes³:

„...ostendo primo conditionem hominum extra societatem civilem, quam conditionem appellare liceat statum naturæ, aliam non esse quam bellum omnium contra omnes; atque in eo bello jus esse omnibus in omni...”⁴

1 Horemheb, was the last pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty of Egypt (1550–1295 BC).

2 Akhenaten was an ancient Egyptian pharaoh (1353–1336 or 1351–1334 BC), the tenth ruler of the 18th Dynasty. Before the fifth year of his reign, he was known as Amenhotep IV.

3 Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan, sive, De materia, forma, & potestate civitatis ecclesiasticæ et civilis*. 1651,

4 “I demonstrate, in the first place, that the state of men without civil society (which state we may properly call the state of nature) is nothing else but a mere war of all against all; and in that war all men have equal right unto all things”.

Hobbes' meaning can be interpreted as a notion suggesting that raw force rules in human affairs when there are no restricting agents such as law, state, civilization, etc. at work. This "everybody against everybody" is evidently identical to Vico's counter cycle of decay. In human history World War 2 (1939–1945) was the worst presentation of Vico's cyclical history an era in which a ferocious struggle of inhuman beasts ruled the fate of mankind.

Russian anarchist and socialist Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin held a hopeful view on human nature, believing that solidarity was a natural law in human existence. Contradicting Hobbes, he stated that in a power vacuum instead of "everybody fighting everybody else" solidarity and mutual cooperation have a chance to rise. In Europe by the 19th century many intellectuals viewed the all-powerful centralised state as a problem, and they deemed the lack of central power not a threat but an opportunity. Famous Russian writer Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was a Christian anarchist and he also differed from Hobbes. Due to his literary career Tolstoy's ideas influenced many people far beyond the Christian community (Higgs, 2015).

'Spiritus loci' – Place and its Soul

The events described in the following are set in Kárpátalja, in Transcarpathia, a region with troubled fate, belonging to the Hungarian Kingdom for nearly a millennia, now known as the Zakarpatska Oblast' part of Ukraine. This 13,000 square kilometres of land was home to Hungarians and to various Slavic people from the 9th century (the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin), and today is a region where various ethnicities – Hungarians, Rusyns, Ukrainians, Romanians, etc. – live together. During the 18th century lots of German settlers arrived from Western Europe, while Romanians settled in from the south. In the 19th century Ashkenazi Jews fled here from the antisemitic 'pogroms' of the Ukrainians. After being on the losing side of the Great War the Hungarian Kingdom was severely punished by the unjust Treaty of Versailles and Kárpátalja became part of the newly formed Czechoslovakia. Though in 1938 the First Vienna Award gave the territory back to Hungary, it did not last long as after the advance of Stalin's Red Army it became the westernmost part of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union had collapsed a regional referendum was held and so Zakarpatska Oblast' became part of Ukraine. During the same vote "a special status of self-governing territory" was decided upon, but the Ukrainian government took it off the agenda.

In the early Modern period Kárpátalja played an important role in the evolution of a genuine Hungarian independent movement. It was home to the Rákóczi family, who from the 16th to the 18th century gave five Princes of Transsylvania, regional rulers with the will and ambition to preserve Hungarian independence against both the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. Being a multi-ethnic region of the Hungarian Kingdom, it was also a multilingual and multireligious area. Calvinists



and Lutherans joined Catholics in the 16th century, while a unique Greek Catholic community emerged in the 18th century. Russian Orthodoxy came with the Slavic people from the East and the South while the Ashkenazi brought their faith during the 19th century. Founding new schools and providing tuition there – similarly to the developments in the Hungarian Kingdom as a whole became a solid tendency in the 16th–18th centuries, and so dozens of new schools popped up in the region. These schools, however, did not only teach and educate followers of their own faith; it was quite regular to have a Catholic child in a Lutheran school or in a Calvinist institution, and vice versa. (Kosáry, 1983) Within local communities pluralism was reflected by often having two or more churches of different religions in the centre of the village. The legal foundation for such religious diversity was established by the Edictum of Torda in 1568 (recognizing multireligious rights in Transylvania), and the Catholic Habsburgs were repeatedly forced to renew these rights in various later treaties (Barta, 1994, p. 247–300).

Meaningful political compromise made a peaceful coexistence possible between different ethnicities and religions and so there was no part in the cultural memory of the various ethnic and religious groups of Kárpátalja that would have preserved bloody hostilities, conflicts or oppression. (Terdik – Demján, 2020) Even at the height of the 1848–1849 Hungarian revolution and war of independence when in many other parts of the country ethnic conflicts erupted (Slovaks, Serbs and Romanians revolted against Hungarian rule) this region remained intact, even more so, it backed the new sovereign Hungarian government against the Habsburgs. (Spira, 1980, p. 22) This type of balance was still preserved in the period when Transcarpathia was a part of newly formed Czechoslovakia (1920–1938). There were several factors that helped maintain the pluralist structures: borders could be crossed; sanctity of private property suffered no harm so ownership of lands together with the deep structures of local economy were left unchanged. Religious freedoms were preserved. The multiparty system also lived on in the Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy.

The Fifth Seal¹

It was in October 1944 that with the advance of the Red Army Transcarpathia became an active war zone. NKVD² and SMERSH³ corps of the 4th Ukrainian Front soon started capturing military aged men, and some 25–28.000 of them were taken

- 1 “Then the Lamb opened the fifth seal. I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they had proclaimed God’s word and had been faithful in their witnessing. They shouted in a loud voice, “Almighty Lord, holy and true! How long will it be until you judge the people on earth and punish them for killing us? Each of them was given a white robe, and they told to rest a little while longer, until the complete number of their fellow servants and brothers were killed, as they had been.” *Revelation 6: 9-11.*
- 2 The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Народный комиссариат внутренних дел) abbreviated NKVD was the interior ministry of the Soviet Union.
- 3 SMERSH (СМЕРШ) was an umbrella organization for three independent counter-intelligence agencies in the Red Army formed in late 1942 (or somewhat earlier), officially announced only on 14 April 1943. The name SMERSH was coined by Joseph Stalin himself.

away from the region for “a few days work” or for “military verification”. Archival evidence proves that from 1944 to 1946 nearly 60.000 men were kidnapped and forcefully relocated to the Soviet Union. (Dupka, 2014) Soviet authorities clearly acted on ethnically motivated grounds as the majority of these men were Hungarians while a minority of them were Germans. One might say that Soviet occupation of Kárpátalja started with ethnic cleansing. In his top-secret command from 12 November 1944 general Ivan Yefimovich Petrov obliged all men between the age of 18 and 50 to turn up at local Soviet military commands. NKVD took most of the men showing up for “examination” to temporary local concentration camps where they were organised into foot regiments and marched to the deep eastern parts of the Soviet Union. (Dupka, 2009). With the progress of the Red Army’s conquest from the winter of 1944 mass deportation was introduced all over Hungary. To make the bitter and helpless situation even worse, Soviets took not only military aged men but also females and elderly for “malenky robot” (“just a little work”) from the regions west of Kárpátalja to Russian forced labour camps. In the concentration camps of Kárpátalja an epidemic soon broke out due to winter cold and hunger, leading to the death of thousands. The largest camp was in Solyva (today Svaliava) where the dead were buried into mass graves, and onto which later houses were built without relocating the remains of those poor souls. (Dupka, 1993). Research into Kárpátalja’s loss of life during WW 2 only started from 1989. Data now clearly suggests that from among the circa 30.000 people who lost their lives 13.000 men were fighting as soldiers: 4000 in the Hungarian Royal Army, 7000 “volunteers” in the invading Red Army, and 2000 as part of the Czechoslovak division. All the others died at some point of their deportation, so many more people became the victim of inhuman Soviet measures than in combat. After Transcarpathia became annexed and dissolved into the Soviet Union state terror targeted other groups too: the Rusyn people, men of the clergy of various faiths and the intelligentsia as a whole came under attack. Most of the people who were taken for a “malenky robot” to the forced labour camps of Soviet-Russia never made it back home. Those who after all made it back home were forbidden to talk about their sufferings and victims of the deportations could not be commemorated prior to 1990.

Breaking the Silence

It was well into the Gorbachev era when in May 1989 the local Soviet (the local council) of Ungvár (Uzshorod) set up a compensation committee to represent the victims of the 1930s and 1940s and of Stalin’s reign of terror. The committee which primarily focused on political retribution had its Hungarian section. Mikhail Gorbachev’s glasnost’ (“openness”) made it possible for the citizens of the Soviet Union to remember those who fell victim in 1944 and onwards to the tyranny of Stalin’s regime. In the exploration of truth and in the healing process the



newly formed Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség (Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association – THCA)¹ had a definitive role. Meanwhile in Hungary a regime change was taking place. This brought with it louder and louder demands from opposition groups and newly formed parties to rehabilitate and compensate the victims of the communist dictatorship. On 16 June 1989 in Budapest Nagy Imre the martyred prime minister of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence was reburied in a mass public event, setting the tone for the future.

The developments in the Soviet Union and Hungary finally made it possible to hold a memorial conference in Beregszász (Beregovo) commemorating all those who fell victim to state terror after 1944. On 18 November 1989 this conference discussed the question of raising monuments in the Hungarian parts of the country to those whose names and stories were concealed, hushed and forbidden for more than four decades. Organizers of the conference launched a fund raiser to establish a memorial park at the very place where once the concentration lager of Szolyva (Svaliava) stood. A year later in November 1990 the foundation stone of the memorial park was laid in the ground once belonging to the lager's cemetery. The Wailing Wall was initiated in November 1994. In the centre of the park, we can find a set of partial and complete circles representing the levels of Dante's Inferno. Ten years later, on 20 November 2004 (marking the 60th anniversary of the start of the deportations) a burial ceremony with a eulogy was held, and after thorough research and investigation in the archives the names of 5500 Hungarian and German victims from 120 settlements were ingrained into the marble on the walls of the monument. In November 2014 more new names were added, and today some 12.000 names from 440 towns and villages are preserved and displayed at the site, which had acquired the status of a ritual place. (Dupka, 2014).

On a wider national level, it is important to note that in 2012 the 25th of November was made Memorial Day of Soviet-deported Hungarian Political Prisoners and Forced Labourers. In 2017 the Hungarian National Museum built its own Malenky Robot Memorial Space next to the Ferencváros railway station in Budapest. This permanent exhibition is dedicated to all Hungarian citizens who were taken by force to Soviet labour camps from all over the country. Following decades of diplomatic efforts, it was only two years later in 2019 when the Russian State Military Archive (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenni Voennyi Arkhiv) provided its own records on Hungarian soldiers and civilians taken to the former Soviet Union. This digital database holds records of a staggering 681955 people. After experts of the Hungarian Research centre for Linguistics had translated the Russian texts to Hungarian a public database was launched on 25 February 2021, and it is now an extremely valuable source for researchers. In November 2021 the National Archives of Hungary set up a Gulag and Gupvi Research Group to make the most

1 Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association – founded on 26 February 1989 in Ungvár (Uzhgorod) – is a national social organization that protects the cultural, political and social interests of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia.

possible detailed research on the fate of Hungarian prisoners of war in Soviet-Russia.

Mending “Ruptures in the Flow of Time”

Text Unearthing the once concealed past was and is not an easy job as many of the officers who executed the orders to gather and deport people from Hungary to the Soviet Union were still alive. Some of the Hungarian partisans who once followed direct orders from Stalin’s NKVD held high offices in the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), and even after Hungary’s regime change their offsprings were not in favour of bringing the truth to light. Needless to say, the same situation (and approach) was very much evident in the Soviet Union and then in Russia and Ukraine as a cobweb of powerful figures were inherited and preserved from the Soviet era. In Hungary a peaceful regime change included a price where no high-ranking Communist officials were ever accused of committing any crimes, thus those responsible for the terror imposed on their own nation suffered no harm at all (Kahler, 2014). Concerning compensation for their sufferings during the “malenky robot” period, victims (and their heirs) were at last able to acquire information about those who never returned from the labour camps. People were allowed both to mourn and to raise monuments for their deceased loved ones. Individual stories now emerged into the collective memory of the communities and so Hungarian society has a chance to insert and integrate this horrifying brutal and sad story into the nation’s cultural memory. The right to remember helped humanize a once completely dehumanizing experience and so Hungarians are now able to mend “the ruptures in the flow of time”. More than three decades after the autumn of 1990 when in Badaló (Badalovo) the first such solemn occasion was held (people risked being there only because MTV, the Hungarian national broadcaster made a report about the event)¹ communities of the villages and towns of Kárpátalja can now come together to commemorate and honour the memory of all they lost to tyrannical foreign oppression.

Strange, puzzling and thwarting as much as it may have been it was the deputy-head of KGB of Kárpátalja, Colonel Aleksey Mihailovic Korsun² who provided the first official information to Hungarian civil groups. Scientific research started following a five-piece article in Izvestia entitled “Five Days in the Special Archive” which triggered an official request for further detailed information on behalf of Hungary’s government. The first hand over of such data included the names of 83 people from Badaló, and it was from this list that it became clear that most of the dead buried in some Soviet labour camp were not prisoners of war

1 Kárpátalja. 1990/15. <https://magyaramagyarert.hu/karpatalja/karpatalja-1-evfolyam?task=document.viewdoc&id=14>

2 Aleksey M. Korsun was born in 1941 in the Kharkiv Oblast, and was assigned to Kárpátalja in 1981. Till 1991 he was the deputy of the KGB in Kárpátalja. Colonel Korsun asked for a permission to study files on the Hungarian and German prisoners of war and civilians taken to the forced labour camps of the Soviet Union.



but ordinary civilians. Soviet authorities opened personal files for the camps' forced labourers, and so filled out a form on each of them. These forms contained 40 questions, and so a valid set of data was recorded on the Hungarian and German captives. Beyond their basic identifications these records held information on their social background, state of health, etc., and when they died both the cause of death and the place where they were buried were documented. From then on transferring the files held by the State Archive of the Russian Federation was continuous, and so the story of the deported – from village to village, from one town to the other – became accessible. After a while local Russian archives opened up too, making research on the 1944–1953 period more detailed and vivid. Contemporarily with these events recording the individual stories of “malenky robot” survivors had begun, applying thorough socio-anthropological methods. The first centre of scientific exploration was the research group of Szolyva Memorial Park, led by György Dupka, a renowned Gulag-Gupvi expert. Following 2010 the Institute of Sociological Studies at Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute launched its own scientific program to unearth the once forbidden past. Beyond them in the last three decades there were several other individual projects on the very subject led by historians or sometimes writers, publishing their own results.¹ The era of Stalin's tyranny is now also under examination in various PhD theses at leading Hungarian universities such as the Eötvös Lóránd University (Varga, 2008) and the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Dupka, 2014) in Budapest, or the University of Debrecen. (Molnár, 2015).

Conclusion

Text Key political changes in Eastern Europe have made it possible to remember events stretching from Autumn 1944 to Winter 1945. The collapse of Soviet type communism in Hungary and in the whole of the Eastern bloc in 1989–90 and finally the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. The fall of communist dictatorships gave Hungary and Ukraine a chance to reconstruct their own collective memory and remembrance.

The monuments and memorials dedicated to preserving the memory of the victims are termed material memory, while the commemorations and rituals connected to them are communicative memory. Symbolic burials of the long deceased was an act of closing the past through which Szolyva became a part of cultural memory, helping the Hungarian minority of Kárpátalja to preserve its own unique identity. At the same time as their local story emerged, it entered and integrated into the identity of the about 15 million people, strong world-wide Hungarian

1 I have to emphasize the fact that when this long journey began in 1989–1990 those who made the first steps also helped to recreate freedoms lost to forty plus years of Communism. People like the historian György Dupka at the Szolyva Memorial Park, Fodó Sándor chairman of the Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia, Colonel Aleksey Mihailovic Korsun and Tamás Markovits editor of the weekly newspaper *Kárpátalja* all made their individual effort to excavate truth from its shallow grave. These men were not simply drifting with the events but clearly had an active role in shaping them.

nation. Kárpátalja with its history is now clearly a focal point for Hungary and its government.

Reconstruction of the humanized world in Vico's sense is now completed. Unearthing the once forbidden and hidden truths, along with rebuilding and renovating the integrity of memory were not simply acts of freedom but they themselves were also recreating freedom. Though recalling a memory is a process of the individual yet there is no remembrance without community – as there is no community without collective memory. Collective memory is not simply a reflection and common understanding of the past but is also a key factor in shaping the future. As an example of Halbwachs' concept of collective memory, the Hungarian minority in Kárpátalja was able to establish schools, churches and other institutions serving its future yet ones rooted in its past. These structures help and helped ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine to preserve their identity as a community against the ebbs and flows of political impulses by the ruling majority.

References | Список литературы

- Abruzzi, W. S., Brown, J., Durbin, T. E., Fidler, R. C., Hardesty, D. L., Hinton, P., Hurlich, M. G., Kennedy, J. C., Levine, H. B., Veiga, U. M., Moerman, M., Pelt, F. L., Ross, E. B., Vasulu, T. S., & Winterhalder, B. (1982). Ecological Theory and Ethnic Differentiation Among Human Populations [and Comments and Replies]. *Current Anthropology*, 23(1), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1086/202777>
- Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511996306>
- Barta, G. (1994). The Emergence of the Principality and its First Crises (1526–1606). In B. Köpeczi, G. Barta, I. Bóna, L. Makkai, Z. Szász, & J. Borus (Eds.), *History of Transylvania* (pp. 247–300). Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Biczó, G. (2004). *Asszimilációkutatás – elmélet és gyakorlat*. [Research of Assimilation—Theory and practice]. MTA PTI Etnoregionális Kutatóközpont. (In Hungarian).
- David, R. A. (1975). *The Egyptian Kingdoms*. Elsevier Publishing projects SA.
- Dupka, G. (1993). Egyetlen bűnük magyarok voltak. Emlékkönyv. A Sztálinizmus Kárpátaljai áldozatairól (1944 – 1946). [Their only sin was their Hungarianness. On the Transcarpathian Victims of Stalinism (1944 – 1946)]. INTERMIX. (In Hungarian).
- Dupka, G. (2009). *Népünk temetője: Szolyva* [Our People's Cemetery: Szolyva]. Kárpátaljai Magyar Művelődési Intézet. (In Hungarian).
- Dupka, G. (2014). *A kollektív bűnösség elvének alkalmazása a kárpátaljai magyarokkal és németekkel szemben, a 4. Ukrán Front Katonai Tanácsa határozatainak végrehajtása az NKVD-jelentések tükrében, 1944–1946*. [How the principle of collective guilt was carried out against the Hungarian and German populations of Transcarpathia (on the strength of the execution of the decisions of the Military Board of the 4th Ukrainian Front in 1944 – 1946)] [Doctoral (PhD) dissertation, Pázmány Péter Catholic University]. <https://doi.org/10.15774/PPKE.BTK.2014.014> (In Hungarian)
- Fromm, E. (1983). *Escape from Freedom*. Avon Books.



- Gambarota, P. (2017). *Giambattista Vico, the Vernacular, and the Foundations of Modern Italy. Irresistible Signs*. University of Toronto Press.
- Gennep, A. V. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. University of Chicago.
- Gereben, F. (1999). Identitás, kultúra, kisebbség [Identity, culture, minority]. *Osiris-AKM*. (In Hungarian).
- Gereben, F. (2001). A vajdasági magyarok nemzeti és kulturális identitás [The National and Cultural Identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina]. *Kisebbség Kutatás*, 10(3), 388-400. (In Hungarian).
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. The University of Chicago Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/978022674497.001.0001>
- Higgs, R. (2015). Tolstoy's Manifesto on the State, Christian Anarchy, and Pacifism. *The Independent Review*, 19(3), 471-479. JSTOR.
- Kahler, F. (2014). Az Igazság Canossa-járása avagy a rendszerváltoztatás és az igazságtétel történetéhez. [The Truth of Road to Canossa or to the history of political regime change and justice.]. *Antológia Kiadó*. (In Hungarian).
- Kárpátalja 1. Évfolyam—Magyar a Magyarért Alapítvány [Transcarpathia Year 1—Hungarian for Hungarians Foundation]. (1990). *Magyar a Magyarért*.
<https://www.magyaramagyarert.hu/karpatalja/karpatalja-1-efolyam?task=document.viewdoc&id=15> (In Hungarian)
- Kosáry, D. (1983). *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* [Culture in Hungary in the 18th century]. Akadémiai Kiadó. (In Hungarian).
- Molnár, D. E. (2015). *Kárpátaljai magyarok a Szovjetunió hadifogoly- és munkatáboráiban (1944-1953)*. [Hungarians in Transcarpathia in the prisoner-of-war and labor camps of the Soviet Union (1944-1953)] [Doctoral (PhD) dissertation]. University of Debrecen. (In Hungarian).
- Nora, P. (1996). *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Vols. 1-Conflicts and Divisions)*. Columbia University Press.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National Identity*. Penguin Books.
- Spira, G. (1980). A nemzetiségi kérdés a negyvennyolcas forradalom Magyarországon [The issue of nationality in the Hungary of the Forty-Eighth Revolution]. *Kossuth Kiadó*. (In Hungarian).
- Terdik, Sz., & Demján, Sz. (2020). *Mankovits Mihály (Michael Mankovits) festőművész (1785 - 1853)* [Mihály Mankovits (Michael Mankovits) painter (1785-1853)]. *Magyar a Magyarért Alapítvány*. (In Hungarian).
- Turner, W. V. (1967). *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*. In *The Forest of Symbols* (pp. 93-111). Cornell University Press.
- Varga, É. M. (2008). *Magyar hadifoglyok és internáltak a Szovjetunióban az oroszországi levéltári források tükrében (1941 - 1956)* [Hungarian prisoners of war and internees in the Soviet Union in the sources of Russian archives (1941-1956)]. *Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*. (In Hungarian).
- Vico, G. (1979). *Az új tudomány*. [The New Science]. Akadémiai Kiadó. (In Hungarian).
- Vico, G. (2020). *The New Science* (J. Taylor & C. R. Miner, Trans.). Yale University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt1sgbh>