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Chapter 12

Female Voices of Post-War Forced Displacement

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This chapter presents some of the findings of two oral history research projects about the experiences of post-war forced displacements: *Jugów: Memory and Oblivion* and *Krasne: Junction Station of Displacements*. It focuses particularly on the female perspective. In the course of these projects, a Polish-Ukrainian-German group of researchers conducted interviews with female inhabitants who had experienced or witnessed post-war forced displacements in two villages, Jugów in Poland and Krasne in Ukraine.

The history of displacements is very much the history of women, who had particular issues of their own to combat: poverty, starvation and diseases, having to undertake extremely hard work in order simply to survive and to support their families, and often being exposed to the danger of sexual abuse. These life stories of Jugów and Krasne women reveal many aspects of post-war life that have previously been left out of the history of forced displacement, but they are of great importance also for bringing about a better understanding of the wider experiences of that period.

The 1990s witnessed changes not only in the geopolitical map of Europe, but also began the long path of transition into democracy for the populace living in the former Soviet bloc. Moreover, it was a time of rediscovering ‘lost’ memories and filling in the ‘blank pages’ in the history of Central and East European societies.¹ Re-thinking the Soviet past in the post-Soviet context was

a necessary element in shaping the new identities of the region, which now manifested themselves as multi-ethnic, multi-lateral and more heterogeneous.

Women's history is part of this story. Until recently, women appeared to be marginalized in academic study, not only in history, but also in sociology, anthropology and literature. History appeared to be written with a capital 'H' and mostly discussed the stories of wars, great events and men. In recent decades, however, history has experienced a methodological and epistemological turn towards history written with a small 'h'. History now includes stories of everyday life, inter-ethnic relations, domestic economies and, moreover, women as active agents of change (sometimes referred to as *herstory*). As many examples show, the focus on the history of women demonstrates an alternative vision both of the past and of present realities. These are sometimes much more intimate histories, hidden for the most part. They tell us, for instance, about the way families survived through periods of poverty and hunger, where they found food and how they cooked it, how they struggled against illnesses and parasitic insects and what it meant to be permanently exposed to violence. In the Eastern European example, they also tell us stories about how women had to repel the attacks of their so-called 'liberators'.

Another example of rediscovering 'blank pages' in the history of the Central and East European region comes from the narratives about the movements of population which took place during and after the Second World War. For many decades, mostly as a result of Soviet socialist ideology that negated these experiences, this topic was ignored and neglected. Enforced migrations, however, have happened many times in the history of Europe and they are still happening today. They have had a huge impact on the lives of many individuals who

experienced them directly, on the lives of the following generations and on the culture of entire social groups. The long term impact of enforced migration is not easy to identify. It has persisted for many years in the form of stereotypes and prejudices that have prevented various national groups from developing good neighbourly relationships.

The perspectives of women's hidden and intimate experiences of on-going events and their stories about resettlement and forced migrations, which up to now have remained on the margins of mainstream historiographies, were joined together in our two oral history research projects.

Jugów: Memory and Oblivion and *Krasne: Junction Station of Displacements* were conducted by the following organisations from Poland, Germany and Ukraine: eFKa, Dobrowola, Respekt and Krona. The female inhabitants from the two villages of Jugów/Hausdorf in Poland and Krasne in Ukraine were asked about their personal experience of displacement, their specific memories of place, and the shape of their everyday lives in the pre- and post-Second World War reality.

In this chapter, we structure our discussion around the two issues: first, the specificity of Polish and Ukrainian women's experiences of displacement; and, second, the nature, quality and ethics of the methodology we chose. Before we outline our research findings and our main concerns with the project, however, a few words need to be said about the historical background of the two villages, Jugów and Krasne, and the historical context their inhabitants found themselves in at the end of the Second World War.

We begin our discussion by stressing our theoretical perspective on understanding the concept of memory and its utility in investigating the shape of everyday life. Next, we examine the

methodological aspects of our project, namely the process of conducting narrative interviews, the (dis)advantages of the methods we used and the presence of a very strong emotional, intimate and close relationship with our respondents, which consequently raised questions about the ethical nature of our project. Then, in the final part of the chapter, we present the stories of the Jugów and Krasne women themselves, on the one hand, by introducing the specificity of both places and then giving voice to the women and their life stories, their families, households, neighbours and local communities.

One of the questions that remained in the background of our research project concerned the application of oral history and memory study methods themselves. Throughout the process of collecting our interviews and later analysing the data, we questioned the extent to which oral history was the most appropriate tool for this research. Is the human memory a reliable basis on which to attempt to reconstruct the details of everyday life in the pre-war period and during the war years? What are we actually presented with when we hear these women's stories? Do we hear the actual, memorised facts or rather an imposed projection?

Researching memory:

Memory can be investigated from many points of view, including in academia in history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, literature studies and many other disciplines. Each of these disciplines contributes a specific perspective to our understanding of how the human brain works, how it perceives reality, memorises it and then recalls it. However, here we would like to stress another element, namely the relationship between memory and the process of

identification, with certain groups of people, events, places and so on. We use this approach while discussing our research findings.

According to David Lowenthal, a common vision of the past is a necessary element in the process of identity building by those who treat the past as their own.² Thus, the question ‘who are we?’ also requires us to ask ‘who were we as a group in the past?; who were our ancestors?’³ A similar relationship can be observed between memory and space. On the one hand, space itself accumulates historical experiences, such as past events which were so powerful that they are still present in the landscape. In this sense, space is a kind of *model of* representation of the remembered past.⁴ On the other hand, space can be consciously created by those people who have the power to shape it and thus space shows only those elements of the past that somehow serve their needs. In this sense, space is the *model for* a kind of instruction to our memories, in which some of these memories are more visible and powerful than others. In case of our interviews, nostalgia seemed to be a central element around which women build their narratives. Longing for a home that no longer exists compounded by strong feelings and emotion of loss and displacement were a common element in stories told both by Poles and Ukrainians.

The methodological problem underpinning these ideas is how to measure people’s sense of bond with certain places. In this sense, two factors seem to be important: place attachment and place identity. By ‘place attachment’, Maria Lewicka understands ‘relations people develop with places’.⁵ For her, historical sites create a sense of continuity with the past and embody group traditions. The second factor, ‘place identity’, has a dual meaning. It refers, on the one hand, to the set of place features that guarantee the place’s distinctiveness and continuity over time, and,

on the other, an individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment.⁶ Thus, history here is not an objective fact, but an individual construct visible in forms of the 'concretisation of history'.⁷ In the case of oral history, the term 'subjectivity' also seems to play a key role. Here, we agree with Alessandro Portelli that subjectivity is a cultural form and process by which individuals express their sense of themselves in history.⁸

In this regard, one could ask what can be done with stories that are distanced from reality. Should we necessarily label them as so-called 'wrong' tales? According to Portelli, these stories are, in fact, the most valuable. They provide us with intimate knowledge of an individual's interests, dreams, desires or even fears.⁹ In terms of the way the narrator remembers certain issues, a crucial role is played by three factors (which we can call the mode of selection), namely politics, the life of the community and personal experience. Memory in this sense very often works in such a way as to heal the wounds of the past. The story then represents not so much the real facts about what actually happened, but rather the narrator's projection and imagination about them. In our case study of stories about displacements, one should understand them more as a representation of women's subjective view of the past shaped mostly by their post-war experiences (with a very strong socialist ideology) rather than the presentation of actual facts.

The discrepancy between memory and fact is indicative of the value of our understanding and interpretation of oral sources as historical documents. The discrepancy is not caused by faulty recollection or misrecognition of the past reality, but rather actively and creatively generated by the imagination in an effort to understand specific events and the course of history in general. Memory in this understanding serves three major functions, namely symbolic, psychological and

formal.¹⁰ The symbolic dimension expresses itself in the way that stories about displacements are shaped by the post-war experience represented by the whole group, for example, the inhabitants of a certain village. However, here, an interesting point is that in female stories the national component seems to be the most visible. Very often we heard remarks such as ‘we Poles’, ‘they Ukrainians’. Yet, in contrast to this, in most of the tales, women stressed that before the war national categories were not important; there was a high rate of intermarriage, mixed villages and so on. It is then an open question to what extent the national categories used by women during the interviews represent the actual system of classification or rather reflect their post-war understanding of the past.

Another function of memory is posed by the psychological factor. In this case, the dynamics, causes and chronology of the past event are manipulated in order to heal the feeling of humiliation and the loss of self-esteem. In our interviews, this is visible in the way that women talk about the Jewish inhabitants of their villages (whose mass killings they witnessed) and the terrible conditions they endured during the deportations.

In addition to these two elements, memory also serves a formal function. It helps to establish the timeframe marking processes, composing the chronology, and understanding the causes and consequences of certain events.

Methodology:

An international Polish-Ukrainian-German research team spent two weeks in each village talking to female inhabitants about their direct experiences of, or as witnesses to, enforced displacement.¹¹ It was especially important that the interviews should be conducted and analysed by an international team. According to Mary A. Larson, one of the important issues to consider in initial interviewer selection is whether the interviewer should be an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ relative to the group under consideration.¹² Our team was intentionally conceived as a Polish-Ukrainian-German group of researchers in order to combine the knowledge and views of both insiders and outsiders. The project’s aim was to try to show the historical issue of post-war forced displacement from an international perspective and without bias in favouring any one nation.

The official histories of Poland and Ukraine often present a politically-loaded view on the subject of displacement. The analysis of these events is often designed to show the best advantage of the given state, and it sometimes distorts the facts to shape the outlook advantageous to that particular country. This is another reason why it was so important to bring together participants from different countries. The three-country approach provided an international dimension to the project and prevented it from focusing on only one single historical viewpoint. Moreover, during the two parts of the project conducted in Poland and Ukraine, the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Poles and Ukrainians) had to exchange roles, which allowed the researchers themselves to examine a problem from more than one perspective and to take a broader view of the history of that period.

Polish-Ukrainian relations and experiences are very often presented in the histories of the two countries as antagonistic. The tragic events of the Second World War, such as the anti-Polish actions in Volhynia (Ukraine), the mass killings of the Ukrainian Uprising Army (UPA) and, on the other hand, revenge attacks by Poles on their Ukrainian neighbours, the Vistula Action (Akcja Wisła) and many other such episodes, have shaped our views of the difficult and extremely different positions of both nationalities. For this reason, the primary aim of our project was to combine somehow the stories of displacement told by Polish and Ukrainian women. Conducting interviews in Polish and Ukrainian villages presented us with a unique opportunity to analyse the extent to which women from different sides of the border tell similar or contradictory stories of their experiences. Can we find here one over-riding and very often tragic narrative of displacement? Or perhaps, after all, there is a specific Polish or Ukrainian way of experiencing, memorising and telling this story.

In our research projects we used the narrative interview method based on Fritz Schuetze's idea and further elaborated by Martin Bauer.¹³ Narrative interview is a qualitative research method which aims at eliciting a less imposed and more valid account of the interviewee's perspective. The influence of the interviewers is minimal and their role is confined to that of attentive listeners. Story telling follows a self-generating schema.

Our group conducted the narrative interviews according to a three-phase model: phase one – introduction (introducing ourselves, our aims and the topic of our interest, creating a friendly, encouraging atmosphere); phase two – main narration (with no interruptions; only non-verbal encouragement to continue telling the story); phase three – questioning phase (clarifying points

in the story, specifying certain issues to fill in the gaps of the story, eliciting new and additional material beyond the self-generating schema of the story). The starting point of the main narration was the request: 'Tell me about your life'. Interviewees could then choose what they wanted to relate. The main narration was not interrupted until there was a 'coda'. The interviewer abstained from any comment other than non-verbal signals of attentive listening, that is an occasional nodding and other encouragement to continue the narration.

The interviews were conducted mainly with women who were born in the first third of the twentieth century and who remember the displacements of the 1940s. More than forty interviews were conducted in Poland and Ukraine. The total running time of the audio and video recordings is about 70 hours. The subject of the interviews was forced displacements during and after the Second World War and the main themes were as follows: everyday life and intercultural relations before the displacements took place; making the decision to leave and preparation for departure; travel to a new place; resettlement, including looking for a house and food; integration with the local populations; and, finally, the possibility of returning to their native land.

In order to find respondents, several methods were used. First of all, there were announcements published in local newspapers saying that we were looking for women who had experienced forced displacement and would like to tell us their stories. Secondly, the coordinator of our project contacted the village head to obtain the support of the local authorities, and other members of the group talked to the local priest. However, the most efficient way to attract new respondents to the project was simply by asking existing contributors to tell us about other displaced people who lived in the same village.

Most of the women were willing to talk and the interviews with them could last several hours, sometimes until we ran out of space on our cameras. Some of the women in Ukraine told us they had been waiting their whole lives for someone to listen to their stories and were now happy finally to have an audience to listen to them. Nevertheless, there were also women who refused to talk about the past and offered no further explanation for this; others admitted that they were still afraid of the secret services and other authorities. In any case, those women who did talk to us sometimes did not themselves realise the importance of their stories, of what they had lived through, until the end of the interview or even until their viewing of the final film. The discoveries they made helped them and their families to reconsider their own lives and even to appreciate some of its parts much more than they had done previously.

In most cases, women did not mind the presence of film cameras or audio recorders; very soon after they started talking they forgot about them altogether, plunging into an atmosphere of a friendly talk, fully entrusting their life stories, together with all of the intimate details, to the interviewers. The stories were often difficult to tell emotionally, as all the painful memories of their complicated past had to be recalled and relived. During the interviews, despite the fact that sadness could change into laughter and a good joke could follow the most heart-breaking episodes, at the most touching moments in the narrative many of the women could not help crying, and neither could the interviewers.

Without doubt, after the interviews, we felt greatly attached to the women we talked to, as if, through listening, we had become a part of their life story and a part of their family. The

relationships with women we had so recently met suddenly turned into very close associations and remained so, even after the project was finished. Moreover, the emotional bond and the attachment that we felt towards the women intensified the feeling of ethical responsibility we bore: the imperative to share their stories and to ensure their voices were finally heard.

The Setting: Jugów and Krasne:

Jugów (Hausdorf), a small village in the Lower Silesia region, is a place where the local population changed completely after the end of the Second World War. Its German inhabitants were forced to leave and the new Jugów inhabitants came mostly from South-West Ukraine, with their Polish and Ukrainian origins, language and traditions. The Germans left the material evidence of their long history behind in Jugów; the newly arrived brought their own customs, memories and their sense of not feeling at home in the new place.

The small town of Krasne in Western Ukraine (40 kilometres from Lviv) was part of Poland before the Second World War. It was inhabited by Ukrainians, Poles and also Jews. Some Poles were colonists, having been resettled in this territory in the 1920s by the Polish authorities with the intention of strengthening Polish culture in Western Ukraine. This fact had already resulted in inevitable conflict between Polish settlers and Ukrainian inhabitants, which emerged during the 1930s. Then, during the war, a number of Poles were exiled to Siberia by the Soviet authorities (NKVD), while others were eliminated by the Ukrainian national liberation movement (UPA). After 1945, the surviving Poles, including those returning from Siberia, were displaced to the Western part of present-day Poland, namely to territories from which the

German inhabitants had earlier been removed by the communist authorities. At the same time, many Ukrainians were displaced from Eastern Poland (that is, from territories to the west of the Curzon line) to Western Ukraine. Almost all of the Jewish inhabitants were exterminated by the Nazis.

During the twentieth century, this kind of ethnic cleansing and exchange of population was applied by central state authorities in order to establish and re-enforce national borders. Two earlier examples of this in Europe were the Armenian Genocide (1915) and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1923). The genesis of ethnic and class cleansing is considered to be related to the emergence of the nation-states: ‘the two great totalitarian systems, within which forced resettlement for ethnic or class reasons was treated as a widely applied tool of the population policy in the occupied and annexed territory’.¹⁴

During the Second World War, deportations and replacements affected mostly the civilian population, especially women and their families because most of the adult men had been recruited into the army. Women, who had to take care of their families, deal with social upheaval, famine, violence and rape, became the silent heroes of this time. They were ‘silent’ because women in general and until recently have had little voice in mainstream history, which has been written mostly by men. One of the methods by which women’s voices can be restored is oral history. Interviews are valuable as sources of both knowledge concerning the past, and of the new interpretative perspectives on it:

Unquestionably, most people throughout history have learned about the past through the spoken word. Moreover, for generations history-conscious individuals have preserved others' first-hand accounts of the past for the record, often precisely at the moment when the historical actors themselves, and with them their memories, were about to pass from the scene.¹⁵

The main questions raised during our investigations were: what is remembered by the present-day inhabitants of Jugów, Krasne and the surrounding areas about the displacements? Do the respondents remember Polish, Ukrainian, German and Jewish inhabitants and their deportations / displacements / escapes / exterminations? Who came to the village after the war? How did they create a new life for themselves under the Soviet regime? What is their historical and social consciousness? What traces of the multi-cultural past remained after 1945?

As an outcome of the projects, there are two documentary films created for educational purposes: *Jugów: Memory and Oblivion* (2011) and *Krasne: Junction Station of Displacements* (2012).

The objective of this chapter and these films is to compare the histories of forced displacements as it was experienced by the inhabitants of these two villages in Poland and Ukraine.

Stories of Displacement:

As we mentioned earlier, there were three very important problems we kept in mind while gathering and later analysing the collected material. The first was the problem of the extent to which all Polish and Ukrainian displaced women told the same story or whether there was any

specific national component in their narratives and, finally, whether there were any stories told by only one of the groups.

In relation to the first theme of everyday life and intercultural relations before the displacements, we were told more or less the same stories by Poles and Ukrainians about living in peace and respect with each other:

We got on well together and were friendly with each other before the war. There were strictly Polish villages and strictly Ukrainian villages, but there were mixed Polish-Ukrainian villages, too. There were often mixed marriages, people celebrated holidays together, there were both Catholic and Orthodox churches in the villages and everyone respected each other's beliefs.

Similarly, respondents made such comments as, 'We had big households, a lot of cattle and everyone who worked well lived well'. At the same time, we also noticed a tendency to idealise their native lands by both Polish and Ukrainians (for example, life was much better back then, people were never sick, women had many children and never needed to go to maternity hospital or doctors, and so forth).

Surprisingly, the beginning of the Second World War was not described as anything special by any of the women, perhaps with the exception of Mrs Golszewska, who was a military nurse. In fact, the war itself was hardly ever mentioned. What is more, for some of the interviewees, the

impact of the war was felt much later than the incidence of the war itself and the respondents sometimes dated their own wartime experiences as starting only from the mid-1940s.

Although some people were taken to work in Germany, most interviewees insist that, on the whole, this was not a bad experience; they were never hungry or abused and the Germans treated them well. Some women told us about the German soldiers who stayed at their houses. The Germans shared food with them and played with their children. One Ukrainian woman said that when the German army was withdrawing, the German soldier who had been staying with her family asked her mother to pray for him, so that he would arrive back home safely.

The next themes – preparation and travelling to a new place – were also described in a very similar way. Both Ukrainians and Poles travelled by train in cattle or freight wagons, in practically the same terrible conditions. There were several families in each wagon, with no toilet and no beds; people slept on hay, which was dirty and full of bugs. Many people fell ill, and some of them died, especially the elderly. One of the women remembered arriving in Ukraine in the winter months to witness dozens of frozen bodies of old people being unloaded from the train in sheets and buried somewhere in a pit.

As people were not able to take much food with them on the train, they were constantly hungry. Poles and Ukrainians said they had only dried bread, sometimes milk, and many of them told us identical stories about trying to cook a warm meal when the train came to a halt, but then having to stop and pour everything away as the train started off again.

Then, having arrived in a new place, both Ukrainians and Poles experienced difficulties not only as a result of poverty, hunger and cold; all of the respondents told us about their difficulties in being accepted in the new locations. Local Ukrainians called the newcomers ‘the displaced’ or gave them nicknames depending on the dialect they spoke. One of the Polish women who had been displaced to Jugów told us: ‘Back in Ukraine they were always calling us “Mazury” [“the Polish”, but with a sense of pejorative], but when we came to Poland, Polish people kept calling us Ukrainians’. Both Poles and Ukrainians were subjected by the Moscow-based Soviet authorities to deportations to Siberia during and after the Second World War. As a result, in general, the image of Russian nationals proved to be negative in both countries. During the interviews in Ukraine, for example, Russians were not usually identified as such, but in most cases they were referred to pejoratively as ‘Moskali’ [literally ‘Muscovites’, but with a derogatory meaning towards all Russians].

A further issue that was talked about in similar ways by not only Ukrainians and Poles, but by Germans as well was the expectation that they would one day return home, the belief that they were leaving their original lands for only a short time and to which they would be able to return soon.

After being informed about the displacement, people were given different amounts of time in which to pack up their belongings, ranging from as much as a few weeks to as little as only half an hour. This decision did not depend on the country or nationality, but whether, first, it was the beginning or end of the deportation programme, and, second, on the particular circumstances of

the deportation. We could also distinguish between more and less ‘voluntarily’ displacement.

Mrs Martyniuk, a Ukrainian woman displaced from Poland in 1944, recalled:

The decision came from the authorities. It was an order and we were forced to leave.

During the first wave of displacement people were given three days to get ready; during the second wave they had only half an hour. We had only half an hour. What are you able to prepare during this short time? Mother took our clothes, put everything on us to wear; we were like onions with all those clothes on us in layers. Mother took some bread too. We had a carriage and put everything on it. And we walked behind the carriage, like cattle, hungry, cold, in tears...

Mrs Novosad, also displaced from Poland, told us the story of her family’s escape:

And we were supposed to be killed. They [Poles] decided to kill all of us [Ukrainians] on the Monday after the Trinity holiday. The head of the village told us he didn’t want to be responsible for our deaths and told us to go three kilometres away along the road to the Ukrainian lands. Ukrainians wouldn’t hurt us and the Poles would let us go. He said that everyone who *wanted* to go could go. (italics ours – KK, OL)

From Polish as well as Ukrainian women we heard and recorded stories about partisan bands attacking the civilian population during the night, plundering their houses, torturing people and killing entire families, even babies, if they were of a different nationality. The difference here between Polish and Ukrainian stories lay in the fact that Polish women told us that only Poles

were killed and expelled by Ukrainians, and Ukrainian women said that Polish bandits killed Ukrainians in Poland, whereas Ukrainian bandits were, in fact, doing the same to Poles in the present-day West Ukrainian territories.

On the other hand, Polish interviewees often expressed tangible sympathy for the Germans. Mrs Szafranska, displaced to Jugów from Ukraine, said, 'They [Germans] had to leave just like us, for the unknown. They had as little time as we did and could take only a few things with them'. They regarded Germans (the women and old people who were displaced from Jugów) as victims similar to them.

In the stories about resettlement it was evident that people lived in extreme poverty in Ukraine and in Poland, having to change houses a few times, with several families all living in one house. At first they had to beg for food. Children, especially girls, had to hire themselves out and work for local people in order to obtain food or a little money. They worked in the fields or looked after children. The end result of this was the fact that girls, especially those who were a little older, were deprived of an education and the opportunity to study. Most of these girls did not have the opportunity to obtain a higher education and some did not even finish school, whereas their brothers did.

In some of the stories we heard in Jugów, however, the situation appears to have been somewhat different. The first to arrive in the former German territory were able to occupy the better houses that had been left with all of the possessions and stores still in place, with machines, utensils, clothes, food, and so on. They could make use of all of these things. Sometime later, many of

empty rich houses were plundered and destroyed. On the other hand, in Ukraine those who had come from large houses and were part of a big household before displacement and then tried to claim the right to bigger houses on arrival risked being labelled as ‘kulaks’ (ideologically suspect wealthier peasants) and were in danger of being sent to Siberia for being ‘too rich’.

The interviewees provided a range of answers to the question asking if they still wanted to return to their original native lands. Some regularly went back, but others had never returned to their original village since they had been displaced. Many admitted to being fearful about returning because of everything they had experienced since their displacement.

The interviewees also reported their differing recollections of violence. In Krasne, the interviewees related very few stories about violence and rape, unlike in Jugów, where the interviews revealed stories of many incidences of rape on the way to Poland and at the beginning of the resettlement process. Only the Ukrainian interviewees told us about the extermination of the Jews by the Germans. These stories were rather short and women told them to us only reluctantly.

We heard about the practice of conspiracy letter writing after the displacement only from Ukrainian women. They were not able to send letters abroad describing their true life in Ukraine because of the way in which the censorship operated in the Soviet Union. Mrs Sadova remembers a letter sent to Poland where her father wrote to his family: ‘We live very well here, like Mr X’, but, in fact, she explained, ‘Mr X was the poorest man in the village back in Poland’. Another woman was afraid that her sisters would be arrested and deported to Siberia if they came

from Poland to visit her, but she could not write to them about this directly. Thus, the women never saw each other again and the sisters in Poland felt hurt because they had not been invited to visit.

Many interviews with Ukrainian women revealed stories about the Komsomol (the Communist Party youth organisation), and that they refused to join the organisation because of their religious beliefs. The consequences of their refusal to join included physical and psychological violence.

All of these stories about the displacements were recorded and have thus been saved for future generations. What was also interesting for us to try to discover is if the inhabitants of Jugów and Krasne intend to pass on their memories of the period of displacement and resettlement to their children, grandchildren and others. Most of the women have shared their life stories with their families. A few years ago in Busk, near Krasne, the Monument of Sorrow was erected. (see Figure 12.1) The monument commemorates all of the people who died during the displacements, regardless of their religion or nationality. The monument was initiated and paid for by local people who had experienced displacement. [FIGURE 12.1 NEAR HERE]

Figure 12.1:

The Monument of Sorrow, Busk



Conclusion:

The history of European post-war displacements is mostly a female history. Women played a key role in the displacement process, organising their families, gathering their belongings together, looking for houses, for food, protecting themselves and their children. They had responsibility for taking care of the family and the household. Our project has shown that these women, who at first appeared to be hidden actors in the resettlement process, were not simply the victims of this difficult time, but were themselves survivors, fighters and heroes.

Our research highlights that the stories told by both Ukrainian and Polish women are in many respects similar. They centre around feelings of loss and nostalgia, which then generated perhaps idealised images about the places left behind, about their previous homes, neighbours and villages. Furthermore, both groups reported appreciating living in a multicultural environment by

stressing the number of intermarriages between families of different nationality and simply good relations with others. Of course, one needs to take into consideration that this very much idealised picture is also framed by the war and post-war experience of rising nationalism and ethnic violence. Nevertheless, these kinds of stories give an interesting insight into the shape of everyday ethnic relations in pre-war Poland in which perhaps the ethnic component was less important than we have hitherto considered it to be.

Memories and nostalgia about leaving home are stronger, especially in comparison with the experience of displacement and the process of inhabiting new places. In both cases women mentioned the negative attitudes expressed towards them by their new neighbours. Although their relationship never turned into open violence, for many years resettled families were discriminated against and alienated from the public life of their new villages.

Last but not least, a few words should be said about the project outcomes. In our methodological overview we stressed a very important aspect of our project, namely the careful and delicate process of looking for women willing to tell their stories. We wanted to be sure that the women, first, understood that they were voluntarily participating in the project and, second, that the gathered material would be used only for project-related purposes.

The key element in any research project is its ethical side. For us, the most important issue was to ensure that the women respondents understood the themes of this project, its shape, outcomes and their very important role in it. That is why the most important goal of our project was to create two films which later could be shown in both villages before their planned presentations in

any other places. We wanted to hear the women's opinions and feelings about the films as well as seeking their approval (or otherwise) to show them to a wider audience.

To our great pleasure, the films were very well received and appreciated, not only by the women who had been interviewed, but also by their families, who often discovered a new and underestimated part of their own family history, saw their mothers, wives or grandmothers in a totally different light as a result of viewing the testimonies. This made these meetings very special, enlightening and touching both for the interviewees and the interviewers and re-enforced the importance of this topic for their present-day communities.

All in all, post-war forced displacement was a common experience for many people in Europe. Ukrainians, Poles and Germans shared this experience, regardless of their nationality. Nobody particularly gained from it, but most suffered. None of these women wanted to leave their own land to be sent to occupy somebody else's houses. In almost every case, displacements were accompanied by extreme poverty, hunger, illness, violence and death. As Jervis rightly claims, history is 'a stream of disappearing traces'.¹⁶ Listening to these women we wanted to prevent those traces from disappearing completely and to rescue them from oblivion. Their life stories help us to become aware of what this transfer of population was really like, to examine the root of hostility between nations and maybe shatter some of the persisting stereotypes.

¹ See, for example, Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

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- ² David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985.
- ³ Lowenthal, *Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 42.
- ⁴ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretations of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 90.
- ⁵ Maria Lewicka, 'Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory: Restoring the Forgotten City Past', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, no. 28, 2008, p. 212.
- ⁶ Lewicka, 'Place Attachment', p. 215.
- ⁷ Dunja Rihtman-Augustin, 'The Monument in the Main City Square: Constructing and Erasing Memory in Contemporary Croatia', in Maria Todorova (ed.), *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, New York: New York University Press, 2004, p. 180.
- ⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastuli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. ix.
- ⁹ Portelli, *Death of Luigi Trastuli*, p. 14.
- ¹⁰ Portelli, *Death of Luigi Trastuli*, p. 26.
- ¹¹ 17 to 31 July 2010; 2 to 15 July 2012
- ¹² Mary A. Larson, 'Research Design and Strategies', in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (eds), *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2007, p. 111.
- ¹³ Martin Bauer, *The Narrative Interview: Comments on a Technique for Qualitative Data Collection*, London: LSE, 1996, pp. 2-8.
- ¹⁴ Piotr Madajczyk, *Czystki etniczne i klasowe w Europie XX wieku. Szkice do problemu*, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2010, p. 185.

¹⁵ Linda Shopes, 'What Is Oral History?', in *Making Sense of Evidence* pages on *History Matters: the US Survey Course on the Web*: available online: <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu>> (accessed 13 January 2013).

¹⁶ Jo Collins and John Jervis (eds), *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 11.