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How a gathering becomes a holiday. Modern social practices of migrants from flooded zones in Ukraine

*Jak spotkanie staje się świętem. Współczesne
praktyki społeczne przesiedleńców
z terenów zatopionych w Ukrainie*

Introduction

From the 1980s and '90s, the new humanistic studies evinced an obvious increase of interest in researching memory, remembrance and texts of oral culture associated with the recovery of the past by populations which had been in various ways deprived of it (Domańska 2010: 12). History revealed by individual or collective memories of ordinary people and conveyed orally, in natural familial or local contexts, makes it possible for scholars to discover personal experiences of individuals and their subjective, often extremely emotional ways of perceiving past events. As noted by Paul Thompson,

oral history “can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place” (Thompson 2017: 3), thus making it possible to discover images of the past which cannot be reached by other methods. This approach proved valuable also in the context of the restitution of remembrance of Ukrainian villages forcibly relocated from areas to be flooded in connection with the construction of hydroelectric power plants, and in the process of discovering practices applied in commemorating the events that the local communities still find harrowing.

In Ukraine, six hydroelectric power plants were built on the Dnipro in the period before and after the Second World War,¹ and another large plant on the Dniester, close to the city of Novodnistrovsk, was completed in the 1980s. Since it was necessary to create a large and capacious artificial reservoir in the vicinity of each of those plants, many nearby areas were flooded, their residents being forcibly relocated elsewhere. In the Soviet era, losses caused by these actions were never mentioned in the official media, in the public discourse in general, or in the academic discourse. In that period of history, the key issue to emphasise were economic benefits derived from the creation of industrial plants; social wrongs caused by their construction and functioning were disregarded. In the recent years, however, the history of the relocations from flooded areas, and the remembrance of those events, has increasingly often drawn the attention of Ukrainian scholars and journalists. In addition, reminiscences about the flooded villages are an important element of the day-to-day communication of their displaced residents, who in various circumstances recall the past. Annual gatherings in the vicinity of sunken villages constituted a special occasion for telling tales of bygone days. The practice of arranging such gatherings became common in the early years of the 21st century; with time, they became ceremonial events, gradually acquiring the ritual character of a holiday.

The aim of the article is to consider the practices of commemorating past experiences on the example of gatherings held in the vicinity of sunken Ukrainian villages by persons once relocated from them, and to examine the mechanisms and methods which permit us to perceive such a gathering as a festival. The source material used in these reflections are recollections of forcibly relocated persons as collected in the years 2012–2021 in the Poltava, Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, Kyiv and Khmelnytskyi provinces (*oblast*),² as well as materials published in popular-science studies concerning this issue (Kostiukova, Jevtushenko 2009; Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018; Myhniak 2018;

1 These are: Kyiv Hydroelectric Station (Vyshhorod Dam, Kyiv Reservoir), Kaniv Hydroelectric Power Plant (Kaniv Dam, Kaniv Reservoir), Kremenchuk Hydroelectric Power Plant (Kremenchuk Dam, Kremenchuk Reservoir), Middle Dnieper Hydroelectric Station (Kamianske Dam, Kamianske Reservoir), Dnieper Hydroelectric Station (Zaporizhzhia Dam, Dnieper Reservoir), Kakhovka Hydroelectric Station (Nova Kakhovka Dam, Kakhovka Reservoir).

2 Interviews conducted by Iryna Koval-Fuchylo.

Myhniak, Zuber 2019; Myhniak 2020; Horbniak 2020). The article presents the results of a linguistic analysis of those accounts in terms of lexical semantics.³

Forced relocations and the remembrance of the flooded villages has already been a topic of research interest. In Polish ethnology, an example is the study *Opowieść o utraconej wsi Maniowy* (Godyń 2015), written on the basis of research on the collective memory of a place that disappeared under the waters of the Dunajec Reservoir.⁴ In Ukrainian scholarship, in turn, the topic of forced relocations from areas to be flooded was researched in historical context, in reference to the construction of a cascade of hydroelectric power plants on the Dnipro (Horbovyi 2020; Babenko, Petrenko 2016).

As narratives about past experiences, remembrance stories are a very well researched text of folkloristic prose. As noted by Janina Hajduk-Nijakowska, the source of such stories is

the individual experience of a person who attempts to verbalise his/her own perceptions and emotions, to convey to others information about an event in which he/she had participated. This first attempt at "telling" others about an event is concurrently the first attempt at taming reality, at naming what this person had experienced, what he/she has been through (Hajduk-Nijakowska 2016: 64).

The manner of constructing such a story is, however, subject to enduring rules known from the local narrative tradition. The first of such individual accounts is usually co-created by the recipient of the narrative, who leads the narrator on, asks questions and actively participates in the making of the narrative. In the terminology of folklore studies, an individual account constructed in this manner and referring to the narrator's own experiences and related emotions is known as a *memorate*. A personal story which it conveys and which contains a certain interpretation of past events is then disseminated in wider social circulation, where it undergoes further "edition" and objectivisation in the process of folklorisation; it is supplemented with recurring images, associations, schemata of thinking, and with time acquires the form of a repeatable narrative structure, that is, a *fabulate* (Hajduk-Nijakowska 2016: 65). In this way, on the basis of concrete human experiences, there emerge narratives which evince the attributes of folklore, which cater to an important need to verbalise the often traumatic or difficult experiences, thus enabling their creators to tame those experiences. Also, those narratives constitute a basis for the emergence of a *sui generis* community of speaking, which makes it possible to exchange perceptions and emotions and to move

³ Folklorisation of the oral accounts concerning the relocations on the levels of motif, phrase and lexis, see: Koval-Fuchylo 2020a: 44–56.

⁴ More in: Koval-Fuchylo 2017: 110–112.

from helplessness to creative action, which means undertaking new activities in reference to the events of the past.

Narratives collected during research referred to difficult experiences associated with the obligation to leave homes located in the areas to be flooded. The interviewees often mentioned annual or occasional gatherings of relocated communities. They recalled images of their old villages and the earlier, sporadic gatherings of the local residents in the vicinity of their sunken homes. The collected interviews contain repeated formal solutions, motifs and narrative threads referring to the practices of commemorating lost places which evinced a clear similarity to the elements known from commemorative narratives. The act of conveying memories formed into repeatable speech structures and stable schemata of action contributes to the preservation of events as fixed in human memory (cf. Assmann 2013: 42). It also helps to intensify interpersonal relations within families and local communities, which increases the likelihood of reaching an inter-generational understanding (cf. Thompson 2017: 330).

Stories about gatherings

Wherefrom came the idea to organise gatherings in the vicinity of flooded villages and why this custom became widespread in the relocated communities are questions worth asking at the outset. In answering them, it is necessary to consider a number of important facts. Firstly, in all the researched relocated communities the custom of visiting the lost homes emerged directly after the deportations (i.e. in the 1960s on the Dnipro and in the 1980s on the Dniester). The new villages were usually not far from the old ones, so their residents were able to occasionally check on their old dwellings, to look whether they were still visible or had already disappeared under the rising waters. The relocated residents undertook such recurrent endeavours quite frequently and continued even after the abandoned villages had been completely flooded, using these occasions to tell stories of the lost life and the local landscape, by then surviving only in their memories. They came to the banks of the newly filled reservoirs, which they customarily called "seas", and tried to discern the locations of their homes and other village landmarks. Also, they carefully watched the changes of the water level depending on the season or the weather. They mentioned this during interviews:

When the Dnipro "goes away" they say that... well, not now, because those people have died, and back then they used to go to those places [and could see the foundations of their homes] (female, b. 1960);

So we never went away from the bottom ground [now they dwell uphill]. The place where we used to live was already flooded, but sometimes with more water, sometimes with less (female, b. 1938);

We, the children, ran to meet the water. We saw this water come. It was farther away here, then closer, closer, closer each day. And when the high water came, when there was a lot of it, all those sluices were already open, we could not be dragged away from this water (female, b. 1948).⁵

In her book concerning flooded villages in the Chernihiv and Cherkasy provinces, Kateryna Kuzmenko-Lisovenko published photographs of relocated villagers' gatherings held in the vicinity of a reservoir in the 1970s (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 70, 118). Those photographs, showing the residents of Stary Hlybiv and Okunyniv villages in the Chernihiv province as a *sui generis* documentation, clearly confirmed that by then the practice of going to the edge of the reservoir had a long tradition in the relocated communities. Interviewees hailing from three villages (Skorodystyk, Cherkasy province, Novy Tsybli, Kyiv province, and Bakota, Khmelnytskyi province) were adamant that regardless of the hardships in making the trip, they should take the scholar to the edge of the reservoir and show her where exactly their villages used to lie. The majority of the relocated villagers made such spontaneous trips to the river bank repeatedly and with time those trips acquired the character of an obligatory and even ritualistic activity. At the same time, however, for a long time after the relocation and flooding of the villages these events were absent from public discourse; they were spoken of only in family environments and in local communities.

At this point, it is necessary to consider what contributed to the activation of remembrance practices; where from came the need to preserve the history of the flooded villages? Why did the experience of the relocation and the disappearance of old villages, until recently absent from the collective memory, returned in the recollections of their former residents? Aleida Assmann, who researchers collective memory, notes that in the post-Soviet states, elements which constituted a taboo in the communist period could be named only after its fall, and that bringing back the memories of difficult experiences from the past may enable these nations to acquire "a responsible and critical view of [their] own history" (Assmann 2013: 20). Memory can prove very helpful in the course of transformative processes that bring those states from authoritarian to democratic systems (Assmann 2013: 14).

In the past, neither the top-level state authorities, who had initiated the process of constructing the hydroelectric plants, nor the local authorities were interested in turning the citizens' attention to the destruction of villages, farmland or objects of material culture. Only in the early years of the 21st century did it become possible to change the perspective on the experiences of the relocated population and the manner of speaking about them. Practices commemorating social traumas resulting from

5 All the quotations from interviews used herein have been translated into English based on the translation from the Ukrainian by I. Koval-Fuchylo.

the construction of hydroelectric plants were thus allowed to be implemented parallel with the process of constructing Ukraine's autonomy and the country's gradual democratisation. Such practices must also be considered in reference to the broader changes in the area of the culture of memory occurring in Europe, where "since the 1980s there emerged more open forms of presenting history" (Assmann 2016: 114): in the perspective of those changes, every individual experience may prove important to the process of reconstructing the shared past and understanding collective social practices referring to that past.

Descriptions of the gatherings of relocated residents of a given village as presented in research materials contain many stable and repetitive motifs, including, above all, turning the attention to the size of the participating group, turning the attention to the significance of the place and time of their meeting, as well as the role of the shared meal, the part played by music and singing in building the atmosphere of the event, the function of traditional attire, and the significance of the conversations about the past. With time, testimonies containing the above motifs became widespread in the broader commemorative discourse and began to function as larger, cohesive narrative forms:

A few years ago it was thirty years since the relocation. Here, in the valley, the same people gathered, they invited people from other villages. And they came here. And a man from Bakota, he lives in Khmelnytskyi now, he is an orchestra director. And he brought his musicians from there. Our people gathered, cooked fish soup, treated those people to it. There were so many people that time, so many! Here Taras [Gorbnyak], as he had been at work, sent out invitations, and those people from other villages came here. And then music played, and the tables were so beautiful. Then, after the food was eaten, because I was there at that time, by the water, there came a ship sailing, a big one. And the women put on embroidered shifts and boarded that ship, and the ship went round in a circle. They had gathered a lot of flowers and they threw them into the water, each in the place where they used to live. They sang songs (female, b.1957);

We had a meeting with other residents of the village. / When? / When 30 years had passed. The family. We all meet for Makoviya⁶ [the interviewee weeps] (female, b. 1982);

The first time, we met in the park. There were two large tables, we played checkers and chess. There was music: the accordion, the tambourine. / And this was during the Green Holiday? / Yes, during the Green Holiday. We sat, we recollected, we cried, we sang, we danced. / And how many people came? / About thirty. This year we probably had more than thirty people (male, b. 1945);

⁶ The feast of the seven Maccabean brothers, the holy martyrs (see Second Book of Maccabees, 2 Macc 7), which in the Ukrainian folk traditions is known as the feast Makoviya; on this day poppy seed is blessed.

It is said that this tradition evolved in the '90s, some villages may have joined in later, but all in all, of seven of our villages on the left bank of the Dnipro and three from the right bank, which were a part of our Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district during the relocation, for instance Zarubyntsi, it is a village, their residents meet in places in which most of them now live. Each village has its own character, of course, but as a rule those were right-bank villages, people visited them, even by boat, going there by hired transports and by water (male, b. 1980);

It is the sixteenth year that we are meeting. First we gather at the station. We meet those who have come here at the station, we hire a bus and we go to the beach. We have a place there where we meet. We lay tables there, we cook fish soup and all the other things (female, b. in the 1940s);

We meet every year. Until the 2000s decade we gathered on the first of May, when there was some conveyance, we went there, to our land, but now we gather only in Zarubyntsi, and in Tsybli. In Tsybli, on the last Saturday in June (female, b. 1937).

Similar motifs and ways of constructing the narrative are visible also in the recollections of the relocated persons which were sent, in the written form, in answer to the call issued by the editors of studies concerning the sunken villages of Ukraine:

Now every year, on the first Saturday in August, as close to the feast of St. Elias as possible, as the parish in the village of Pidsinne used to bear his name, they meet in a fishermen's camp close to the Dnipro. Sadly, the number of original residents is growing smaller and smaller every year, but their children and grandchildren come. We talk, we recall our ancestral Pidsiniyani, its residents who have passed away, and we always begin our meeting with a favourite song about the Dnipro, which has become the anthem of the sunken village (Myhniak, Zuber 2019: 354);

Every year, on the first Saturday in August, the residents of Pidsinne gather at the bus station in the city of Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi, and then they go to the Dnipro [bank], to look from afar at the place where their ancestral village used to stand. The paths lead the former fellow villagers to Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi from far and wide. (...) They have met nine times already and are all of one mind: they want to continue that tradition (Myhniak, Zuber 2019: 380);

Since 2005, the meetings of village residents became a tradition. They gather annually, on the first Saturday in August, at the bus station, and then they go together to the bank of the Dnipro, where they reminisce about their little homeland, the village of Pidsinne (Myhniak, Zuber 2019: 412).

The history of the gatherings held by communities relocated from the flooded areas constitutes an important topic in the already mentioned study *Zatoplena prydniprovska tsyvilizacija. Istorija. Ludski doli* (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018) as well. A section concerning the gatherings of the former residents of Stary Hlybiv and Novy Hlybiv (Chernihiv province) contains about a hundred photographs from such commemorative meetings (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 161–187). Photographs of similar events are also found in all publications from the editorial series of studies on the flooded villages of the Pereiaslav district (Myhniak 2018: 201; Myhniak 2020: 567–571). There, the gatherings are described in a formal, solemn tone: “If you wish to know true patriotism, come to a meeting of former residents relocated from the flooded villages, who remember not only their late kinfolk, but also their villages, as dearest to them; they hold them not only close to their hearts but in their hearts” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 3). Interestingly, in the studies on the topic of the same flooded villages, but published earlier, there are no mentions of any gatherings of former residents (Lesyk 2007). Neither did the earliest field research, conducted in the year 2012 in the Poltava and Kirovohrad provinces, yield any information about such regularly arranged events. It is difficult to ascertain whether the meetings were not held in the researched areas at the time or whether their descriptions were not yet fixed as an element of the former residents’ narratives.

The gatherings related in the interviewees’ recollections can certainly be described as a commemorative practice, that is, as an assemblage of actions aimed at preserving the memory of important persons, events or places. Reports on the details of these gatherings become an element of the migrant groups’ collective memory. This is particularly evident in the case of the relocated community of the Pidsinne village, whose exceptionally active committee organises annual meetings and prepares topical publications or photographic exhibitions. Further on in this process, the dissemination of knowledge about the relocated persons’ experiences is closely connected with the formation of cultural memory, which

materialises in the form of libraries, collections, sculptures or architectural objects and is expressed through ceremonies, customs and rituals. Moreover, cultural memory as preserved over centuries must be continuously interpreted, discussed and updated, since its contents is absorbed by future generations and must answer to the present needs and challenges (Assmann 2014: 58).

The main and most important reason for organising the gatherings of former residents of the flooded villages, as well as the basis for the introduction of various forms of commemoration (e.g. publishing memoirs, erecting roadside crosses or chapels), is the desire to preserve the memory of the lost villages and the existence of the their residents; this is confirmed in many of the cited interviews:

We must preserve the national memory of our ancestors, because no-one will protect our land but us (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 149);

This book is an attempt to preserve the memory of our homeland's past, to tell the story of the Zarubyntsi community's life, and to turn the contemporary people's attention to the problems of the historical, cultural and spiritual heritage of our region (Sorokova 2015: 2);

This book is an appeal to everyone: remember! (Kostiukova, Jevtushenko 2010: 2).

In the narratives of the interviewees, the gatherings of the former neighbours from the flooded villages clearly acquire the features of a holiday. An attempt to sacralise their place and time is evident; the communal event is actively attended by members of closest families and of the local community, whose aim is to preserve the memory of the past and to continue the shared tradition. The ceremonial character of the preformed actions is further highlighted by certain elements that co-create the general space of the event.

Sacralisation of the place and time of the gatherings

Locations selected for those carefully arranged gatherings are certainly not accidental. Close to the water, in the vicinity of the sunken villages, they are special places, in which the act of conveying memories is supported by actions related to the process of sacralisation. Tables are laid, around which the participants gather to eat a ceremonial communal meal, talk and observe how the old landscape had changed. The importance of the selection of the place for the event was verbalised with particular eloquence by the residents of Pidsinne: "We began meeting in 2004. We met in a café. There was a café in Pereiaslav. Well, we did not like the café and we decided that we shall be meeting on the bank of the Dnipro on the first Saturday in August. We bring tables there, now we sit at the tables" (female, b.1949).

In all the known cases, the gatherings are held on the bank of the reservoir. Some communities it takes a long and arduous journey to get there; but only in those places does the event make sense:

For a few consecutive years, on the last Saturday in June, the former residents of the villages of Stary Hlybiv and Novy Hlybiv, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been gathering on the bank of the Kyiv Reservoir [...]. In order to get here, we had to overcome many obstacles. To the border of the Tuzhar and Hlybiv lands, we came each by their own transport or by buses hired by the organisation. Then we changed to two tractors with trailers and a GAZ-66 car adapted for transporting passengers (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 149).

It may be assumed that in many cases the selection of the place resulted from the already mentioned spontaneous practice of regularly going to the bank of the reservoir in order to observe the changes in the water level and discern the location of the lost home:

On the day of the meeting we saw our friends from the old village, whom the misery of the relocations had scattered over various parts of the country (...). Far away, under the water, we found the places where once lay our yards, gardens, favourite cherry or poplar trees which used to shelter so many dreams of the future; and now, only bitter memories (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 128).

With the passage of time, many relocated communities began to raise memorials, chapels or crosses in the gathering places as material forms of commemorating the past. For instance, in the village of Syvky (Chernihiv province) a “memorial cross at the entrance to the village” was restored (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 106) – “Three priests came to the [ceremony] of raising the cross and blessing it. (...) All those present felt great anguish because of the lost ancestral village of Syvky. (...) The cross is a sacred memorial which reminds people that once a village had existed here” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 106). A cross was placed also by the former residents of Novy Hlybiv: “In the year 2010 the first meeting was held, which gathered 500 residents of Hlybiv and members of the Chernihiv community. A few years later a cross was raised near the foundations of the now destroyed Novy Hlybiv village club” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 146). In addition, the relocated community raised a chapel in the place of traditional gatherings: “We must preserve the national memory of our ancestors, because no-one will protect our land but us. We hope that Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, whose icon was placed in the chapel by which the relocated residents meet, will help us in our endeavour” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 149). It is evident that the participants in these gatherings treat them in a very special manner: not only as an event bearing the marks of a holiday, but also as a very important mission undertaken with the aim of preserving “the national memory” of their ancestors.

Another form of the sacralisation of the gathering places is their idealisation,⁷ evident in the names and epithets given to them – “divine beauty” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 61), “the Dnipro civilisation” (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 3), “paradise” (Myhniak 2018: 2) – and in the descriptions of the lost village as an ideal place:

We grew up among clean waters and grasses, among woods and little springs overgrown with ivy, sedge, reeds, water lilies (...). And how beautiful grew the vines, willows

⁷ More on this issue in: Koval-Fuchylo 2020b.

and shrubs of many kinds! (...) What a joyful and merry childhood this was, how our land raised and nursed us (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 84).

Many more of such descriptions can be found in memoir testimonies.

Another typical motif found in memoirs are accounts of how an appropriate time for the gatherings was selected: "Usually they meet for the feast of their church patron. For this, we have [Saint] Elias. Today they already say the village day – the first Sunday in August, yes – the feast of the church patron. But they arrange such a meeting that more can come, also from far away" (female, b. 1982). In the villagers' descriptions, the most appropriate date to arrange a gathering was the day on which the indulgence fair had been held in their original village. This principle is not obligatory, however. In the village of Komarivka (Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district), the patron was Saint Nicholas, whose feast is not suitable for open-air events since it falls in wintertime. It also proved problematic to hold ceremonial gatherings on working days, when many residents were held up by their professional duties. It was decided to hold the gatherings on the Green Sunday (i.e. the Sunday of the Green Week):

It is said they began meeting in [20]13. / Those relocated ones? / On the Green Sunday, the Holy Trinity,⁸ / So that was when their feast had been? / No, the feast was for Saint Nicholas, twice a year. / Why this way? Maybe because it is a remembrance service for the dead? Why did they choose it? / I'll tell you why, because the Green Sunday is always a Sunday, so everyone can come. Not all of them can, but most, and otherwise – most are at work, far away. And they come from all Ukraine (male, b. 1945).

Currently the day of the meeting is fixed so as to enable the professionals to attend. It is best when the selected day is free from work. In the villages where the indulgence fair had been held in summertime, the appropriate day for the relocated community's gathering is still the feast of the patron. Arranging the gatherings in a specially sacralised space and in the time free from work clearly elevates the status of the event to the level of a holiday, during which the order of everyday existence is suspended.

The participants

The quoted passages from the interviews allow us also to discern some organisational regularities of these events, which include a voluntary character of participation, involvement and large turnout. The fact that the participation is voluntary and the members of community are earnestly involved is underlined by such expressions as "the gathered people themselves", "the active people", "let us meet". The active character

⁸ In the Eastern tradition, the feast of the Holy Trinity is held on the Sunday of the Pentecost.

of the community's participation is additionally highlighted by the frequent use of active verb forms applied in the description of the events: the members of the community gather, invite, come, bring, cook, treat, meet, arrive. The interviewees were also careful to stress how considerable had been the number of participants, for instance: "Many people, there were over thirty persons, so many persons, very many. There were never less than fifty persons" (female, b. 1949).

The emotional state of the participants – always joyful and solemn – is as crucial as the special character of their attitudes: "Everyone was in a good mood, people embraced and wept for joy at the meeting" (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 149). These positive emotions are very important: "Our conversations prolong everyone's lives" (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 57). The interviewees emphasised that the gatherings were attended by people of various ages: "The relocated ones arrived with their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to show them where they little homeland had been, to breathe its air" (Kuzmenko-Lisovenko 2018: 57). In other words, the current organisers of the gatherings are trying to pass this tradition on to their descendants in the hope that the memory of their lost village would remain important to later generations as well. Research has shown that persons who take part in these celebrations constitute a community that needs a broader social space to demonstrate their "collective identity in the anonymous, individualised democratic society" (Assmann 2014: 254). The festive status of these gatherings is also confirmed by the fact that orchestras, choirs, members of the clergy and members of the local authorities actively participate in the events.

The identifying features of a holiday

In their testimonies, the relocated persons stressed the ceremonial nature of the activities they practised. This is confirmed by remarks on the ceremonial features the use of which corroborates the transformation of an ordinary gathering into a holiday: the music playing, beautiful tables, women wearing embroidered shifts, the instruments: accordion, tambourine. The collected testimonies indicate that communal feasting, singing, music-making, taking group photographs and talking about the past are obligatory elements of each gathering.

The communal meal is usually prepared by selected persons, who had once been residents of one village, as well as their children and grandchildren. Let it be remembered that in traditional cultures, sharing meals had always fulfilled important ritual, communal and communicative functions. During a meal, wishes of health and happiness were exchanged. In addition, a feast served to confirm and cement the results of undertaken actions or concluded events; it emphasised the significance of ritual behaviour and completed it (Valentsova, Uzniewa 2012). The meals shared by the relocated communities must also be viewed as an act that cements the group, helping a once

united and now scattered community to uphold mutual relations, feel their unity and preserve the group identity. The recurrent presence of certain dishes confirms the ritual character of the feast. This is, first and foremost, the fish soup, *ukha* or *jushka*: “Our people gathered, cooked the *ukha*, treated those people to it” (female, b.1957); “There, we lay the tables, we cook the *jushka* and all the other things” (female, b. lata 40.); “A fifty-litre cauldron of soup will be gone” (female, b. 1949). The fact that fish soup is prepared and eaten as an obligatory dish is not accidental, but rooted in cultural and historical conditions. Fish and various fish dishes used to be a frequent element in the diet of the relocated communities, linking them with their former villages which had been located on river banks. The fish soup is thus a *sui generis* link to the past, an update of it and an attempt at recreating it. Other fish dishes are also prepared for the communal feast: “The *prosil* fish, every year. It is Sonya that makes the *prosil* fish. / Is this the name of that dish? / It is a special dish. Fish soup and fish. We like herring. So, to the frying pan, salt it, and then place it on the tables” (female, b. 1949).

Communal singing has also acquired a ritual form at these gatherings. This is especially true of those communities where there is a social committee overseeing the preparation of the festivities. For instance, the first song to be performed at a gathering of the former residents of Pidsinne is usually the village anthem. The participants know it by heart and disseminate it also in the written form:

We sing, there is music, boys from the village play the accordion. We sing a lot, we sing a lot. Gathered at twelve, during the day they are already by the Dnipro. By then we have the soup ready. Then we all get up, take photos. We have a village anthem:

Dnipro, you flow eternally,

Dnipro, dear to the heart.

Wide waters, clean valley (female, b. 1949).

The text of the anthem is a contamination of two works: *You Flow Eternally* and *The Song of the Dnipro*. The first part (its authors Teren Masenko (lyrics) and Platon Maiboroda (music)) is the song written in 1949. The second part (its authors, Yevgeny Dolmatovsky (lyrics) and Mark Fradkin (music)), written in 1941, was one of the most popular songs of the Second World War. It was recommended to be performed by frontline choirs and its authors, Yevgeny Dolmatovsky (lyrics) and Mark Fradkin (music), received important state awards. After the war the song, in both its Russian and Ukrainian version, entered the repertoire of folk and amateur ensembles; it was often sang at various celebratory gatherings. In the official Ukrainian policy of remembrance, the Second World War has always been an important topic, never absent from the general public discourse. And since forced relocations and the feeling of loss had been an inseparable part of the experience of war, a wartime song – widely known and not weighted with any ideological or political connotations – proved useful

in the commemoration of the flooded village of Pidsinne. In addition, this song contains many links and direct references to the output of Taras Shevchenko and folk songs, which contributed to its status in the musical repertoire of the Dnipro villagers. Of course, the gatherings of relocated communities on the river banks created a natural performative situation for this kind of repertoire; but the main reason why *The Song of the Dnipro* had been included in the village anthem was its solemn, poignant tone and the fact that its words referred to heroic deeds. Singing the anthem gives the gathering of the relocated community a special status and the character of a holiday.

Another obligatory – and very popular – element of the commemorative practices under discussion is taking group photographs. They fulfil the participants' wish to materialise the memory of the given gathering. Those photographs are also shown at exhibitions and published in books and albums on the topic of the relocated villages.

Conclusions

The annual gatherings of the relocated communities have already gained the status of holidays. Stories about them are an important element of commemorative narratives pertaining to the difficult experiences connected with the forced abandonment of ancestral homes and villages caused by the construction of hydroelectric power plants. Narratives conveyed within the group confirm the ritual enacted in actual life, to which the participants give a ceremonial form (cf. Connerton 2010: 41–71). The gatherings constitute an important social action which, like any act of commemoration, "reproduces a *commemorative narrative*, a story about a particular past that accounts for this ritualized remembrance and provides a moral message for the group members" (Zerubavel 2011: 237). On the level of community life, commemorative practices make it possible to introduce new interpretations of the past, while at the same time the repetitiveness of the forms of the story contributes to "the formation of a *master commemorative narrative* that structures collective memory" (Zerubavel 2011: 237). To the members of the local communities these annual gatherings, being commemorative ceremonies, are an important source of knowledge about the difficult experiences of the past; they release and sustain the local group memory – not only among the relocated persons themselves, but also among their descendants and all those interested in history and the consequences of the relocations. In this commemorative practice, the spontaneous and fallible memories acquire an external buttress in the form of rituals and symbols (cf. Assmann 2014: 252) which clearly evoke the space-time of a holiday.

The annual repetition of festive gatherings creates an important communal experience, and their celebration provides an impulse for reflection on the issue of the group identity. Hence it is natural that these gatherings result in the emergence of new forms of cultural memory, such as books about the sunken villages or the initiative to create a related museum; those, however, require separate scholarly attention.

List of flooded villages mentioned by the interviewees

- Bakota, Kamyanets-Podilskyi district, Khmelnytskyi province;
- Chudiaky, Cherkasy district, Cherkasy province, relocated with its name intact;
- Komarivka, Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, Kyiv province;
- Pidsinne, Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, Kyiv province;
- Sahunivka, Cherkasy district, Cherkasy province;
- Skorodystyk, Irkliiv district, Cherkasy province, relocated partially;
- Tsybli, Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, Kyiv province;
- Zarubyntsi, Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, Kyiv province.

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Summary

The article presents the modern practices of remembering sunken Ukrainian villages at annual or periodic gatherings of migrants from flooded areas in various regions of Ukraine. It describes the subsequent stages of organising such events, from spontaneous visits to the flooded place to a solemn meeting of the villagers on the banks of the reservoir. It also discusses the ritualised mechanisms and means by which an ordinary meeting of group of people is transformed into a festival through the sacralisation of the gathering's time and place (by building memorials, such as chapels, crosses or monuments, the publication of memoirs, organization of exhibitions, etc.), through the appropriate selection of participants and the use of suitable identifiers of a celebration time (e.g. a shared meal, musical accompaniment, the performance of special songs, the use of national costumes, the taking of memorial photographs).

Keywords: remembrance practices, resettlement from flooded areas, gatherings of migrants, sacralisation of place and time, common meal, modern ritual forms

Streszczenie

W artykule zostały przedstawione współczesne praktyki upamiętniania zatopionych wsi ukraińskich, podejmowane w trakcie corocznych lub okazjonalnych spotkań przesiedleńców z terenów zalanych w różnych regionach Ukrainy. Opisano kolejne etapy organizowania tego rodzaju działań, od spontanicznych odwiedzin zalanego miejsca do uroczystych spotkań mieszkańców wsi nad brzegiem zbiornika wodnego. Ukazano zrytualizowane mechanizmy i środki, dzięki którym zwykłe spotkanie grupy ludzi nabiera charakteru święta poprzez sakralizację czasu i miejsca spotkania (budowanie obiektów pamięci, takich jak kaplice, krzyże, pomniki, publikację wspomnień, organizację wystaw itp.), dobór uczestników, wykorzystanie odpowiednich identyfikatorów świętowania (wspólna uczta, akompaniament muzyczny, wykonywanie pieśni okolicznościowych, użycie strojów ludowych, pamiątkowe fotografie).

Słowa kluczowe: praktyki upamiętniania, przesiedlenia z terenów zatopionych, spotkania przesiedleńców, sakralizacja miejsca i czasu, wspólna uczta, współczesne formy rytualne

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