

Protesting Retrospectively: Oral Memories and Social Practices of Migrants from the Areas of Artificial Water Reservoirs in Soviet Ukraine

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Abstract

Between the 1920s and the 1980s, Soviet Ukraine saw six large hydroelectric power plants constructed on the Dnipro River and one on the Dnister River. (1) The projects necessitated the creation of artificial water reservoirs, resulting in the destruction of a large number of old villages. The residents of these places were forcibly resettled. In the 1960s and 1970s, a time period that constitutes the main focus of this paper, the only form of protest to forcible resettlement was defiance: according to the state plan, while people were required to demolish their houses and build new ones in a specially designated place, many did not. Any other form of protest was dangerous in a totalitarian state. The weakening and further collapse of the Soviet regime altered the political climate, and Ukraine has since witnessed numerous expressions of discontent in the forms of strikes, rallies, collective statements, etc. These experiences led to a rethinking of the Soviet past and a search for protest where it previously had not existed. The present article focuses on narratives and social events that serve as creative responses to the forcible resettlement. It shows that these forms of protest have emerged as a result of changing perceptions of the feasibility of hydropower and an understanding of the losses caused by the flooding of forests, pastures, and farmlands. The present case study illustrates that protests, typically associated with immediate response to political events, can sometimes form retrospectively, and can be directly shaped by the processes of the formation and traditionalization of memory.

Introduction

Between 1927 and 1981, a number of hydroelectric power plants were constructed in Soviet Ukraine. Six large plants were built on the Dnipro River and one was erected on the Dnister River. The projects necessitated the creation of artificial water reservoirs resulting in the destruction of a large number of old villages. The areas along the Dnipro River alone saw the demolition of over 400 settlements [Horbovyj 2012: 321]. My interlocutors frequently mention that people initially did not believe that it was even possible to flood their village, asking “Where will the water come from?” or “Where is the Dnipro, and where are we?” When it became clear that flooding would occur, they had to accept the fact of resettlement and prepare for it.

Villages were relocated in a variety of ways. Most often, a number of villages were merged into one. Migrants could also resettle to other previously

existing villages. The villagers received plots of land where they could build a house. The state gave people money for construction, but the sums were small and insufficient. Since such a large number of individuals and families were moved at the same time, building materials became scarce, and it was difficult to find contractors to undertake the construction. No special time for construction was allotted: individuals had to attend to their regular jobs and could only work on building their houses after work hours and on weekends.

The relocation of villages from floodplains was a real disaster for their inhabitants. Ukrainians, especially the elderly, are strongly attached to their land. (2) Many villagers had already rebuilt their homes following the destruction caused by World War II and had established a relatively normal life. The mass relocation of entire villages was a difficult event, especially for senior residents. The real heartbreak was the relocation of cemeteries. According to popular Ukrainian belief, the dead must not be disturbed, and yet the villagers were now faced with the need to rebury previous generations. This act was perceived both as contempt for the dead and a danger to the living. Moreover, the physical appearance of new villages was not like the original ones. The old villages were located in picturesque spots near rivers, springs, lakes, straits, and forests, while the new villages were built in open areas, “in the steppe,” as people often remember today.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a time period that constitutes the main focus of this paper, the only form of protest to forcible resettlement was defiance: according to the state plan, while people were required to demolish their houses and build new ones in a specially designated place, many did not. Any other form of protest was dangerous in a totalitarian state. Moreover, people were wary of outright protest against the forced relocation at the time, as state repressions, the Holodomor (the state-manufactured famine of the mid-1930s), and the horrors of wartime were all still part of recent memory. While reflecting on the situation retrospectively today, many victims of the Soviet resettlement initiatives justify the lack of active protest at the time with a rhetorical question: “What would it [protest] achieve? We couldn’t change anything.” That is, no one protested, because it would not change the decision “from above” to flood these lands.

The political climate began to change in the final years of the Soviet regime, and, since Ukraine’s declaration of independence, the country has witnessed numerous expressions of discontent in the forms of strikes, rallies, collective statements, etc. These post-Soviet experiences led to a rethinking of the Soviet past and the search for protest where it previously had been impossible. This article focuses on contemporary narratives and social events that serve as creative responses to forcible resettlement. I show that these forms of protest have emerged as a result of changing perceptions of the feasibility of hydropower and an understanding of the losses caused by the flooding of forests, pastures, and farmland. While protests are typically associated with an immediate response to political events, the present case study illustrates that they can sometimes emerge retrospectively and be directly shaped by the processes of the formation and traditionalization of memory.

This study is based on fieldwork, including participant observation and personal interviews, as well as published sources. Between 2012 and 2021, I conducted oral history interviews with individuals who had resettled from villages surrounding the Dnipro River in the Kyiv, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and Poltava regions in the 1960s and from villages along the Dnister River in the Khmelnytsky region in the 1980s. I also consulted published memoirs by authors who describe their village resettlement [Sorokova 2015; Mykhnyak 2018; Mykhnyak 2020; Kostiukova and Yevtushenko 2010]. (3) In addition, I observed numerous social gatherings commemorating forcible resettlements. These include annual or occasional meetings of former villagers beginning in the year 2000, the establishment of monuments and museums devoted to the flooded villages, and social swimming events known as “The Roaring Dnipro.” The idea of retrospective resistance to forced resettlement appeared prominently and repeatedly in this research. In what follows, I attempt to trace some trajectories of its formation.

Oral Memories: The Images of Old Man and Old Woman

Researchers of oral history are well aware of the fact that all memories eventually undergo review, editing, and rethinking. These processes are clearly marked in the memories of resettlement from the flood zones. Despite the constant variability of memories, remoteness in time causes what folklorist Stepan Myshanych calls “epic distance.” That is to say, there is a stability of autobiographical stories about a certain important event in the life of a person or community, by which memories acquire a “traditional form” [Myshanych 1986: 5]. When asked about protest, various narrators frequently communicated a story about an old man and an old woman who refused to relocate. When their former village was flooded, the couple was trapped on the roof of their house and had to be rescued, either by boat or helicopter. The recurring images and the repetition of similar motifs give grounds to classify these narratives as folklore. I view this story as a verbal traditionalized form of resistance. Through the use of this formula, present-day narrators infer protest during the time of resettlement. It does not matter to the narrators in which village this happened or who the old couple were. What is important is to know and tell others that there had been brave people who had not been afraid to resist the totalitarian system, had refused to leave their land, and, unlike the rest of their fellow villagers, protested against the resettlement of their village. They refused to relocate, claiming that they were prepared to drown rather than leave their home territory. Here are some examples of such accounts. Antonina Fedorivna Motailo shared the following story:

Одна баба з дідом у Самовиці... зробили землянку і в землянку увели корову і сами жили в землянці. І отаким хмизом накрили, бо воно в лісі, красиво. А тоді ж видали себе, бо топили, а там же димарь. А комісія як ходила, то найшли, то уже в послідню очередь їх переселяли. А хто не хотів хати валять, то валяли бульдозером

уже останнє время, бо надо було срочно, бо вже літом, ото весною в [19]59-ім до червня місяця всіх виселили. А після червня, хто не виселявся – нахально уже ходила комісія, перевіряла, де хто є, всіх виселяли. Вопше!

[One old man and woman in Samovytsa...made a dugout house and took a cow into the dugout and lived in the dugout. And they covered it nicely with bushes, because it was in the forest. But then they gave themselves away, because they were burning wood for heat, and there was a chimney. And as the commission was going through, they found them, and relocated them at the last minute. And those who did not want to demolish their houses, their houses were demolished with bulldozers at the last minute, because it was urgently necessary, because by summer, or in the spring of 1959, by June, everyone had been evicted. And after June, whoever hadn't resettled, the commission boldly went through, checked where everyone was, and resettled everyone. What a shame!] [AFM, 15 May 2012].

Mariia Ivanivna Hrechka related a similar, albeit shorter, account:

Казали, що там уже затопляли, а дід і баба не хотіли переселяться, казали: «Лучче ми потонемо». То не знаю, чи їх виселили, чи вони потонули. Люди не хотіли ніяк.

[They said that they were already flooding that area, and an old man and old woman did not want to move, they said: "We'd rather drown." I don't know if they were resettled or if they drowned. People did not want to [move out] [MІH 19 May 2012].

The following is an excerpt from my (ІКФ/ІКF conversation with Mykhailo Lohvynovych Shepynoha (МЛЧ/MLCh), who also refers to an old couple:

МЛЧ: Було в районі, що дедушка один і баба осталися і сказали: «Не підемо і все». Село уже залило, а вони на хаті сидять.

ІКФ: То в якому селі?

МЛЧ: Кажись, у Придніпровському... а може, й Демки.

[MLCh: It happened in the region where an old man and old woman remained and said: "We will not go and that's all." The village was already flooded, and they were sitting on their house.

ІКF: So, in which village?

MLCh: It seems, in Prydniprovsk... or maybe Demky] [ChML, 19 August 2014].

Nadiia Illivna Zhmen'ko did not specify the age of the people, but her narrative conveys a similar motif:

Там даже було таке, що чула, те, що бувало, що сиділи даже люди, не хотіли виселятися, що сиділи даже на криші своєї хати. Їх примусово знімали звідти і вивозили.

[There was also something I heard, something that happened, that people were even sitting, they didn't want to move out, that they were even sitting on the roof of their house. They were forcibly removed from there and taken away]. [NIZh, 2 August 2014]

It is not only oral memories but also publications devoted to the flooded villages that provide similar references. For example, Kostiukova and Yevtushenko write, "The water came quickly, but in each village, there were certain owners who stayed in their homeland till the very end, even dug a dugout house in the tract above the reservoir and lived there for ages" [Kostiukova and Yevtushenko 2010: 4].

The generalized motif of an old couple protesting the resettlement was formed retrospectively under the influence of certain interrelated factors, including traditional rural beliefs and worldviews, Soviet-era propaganda at the time of resettlement, and present-day reflections on the event. I explore these influences in the subsequent sections.

Traditional Beliefs and Worldviews

Oral history not only sheds light on past events but also often reflects and communicates particular beliefs and worldviews surrounding the events. The formation of the image of an old couple who resisted resettlement can be partly explained by the additional challenges that resettlement brought to the elderly. These challenges are frequently addressed both in oral histories and written memoirs. For example, Mykola Yukhymovych Chyrkov explains why older people found it much harder to relocate than their younger family members and neighbors: "Оці старі люди, які переселилися на оце поле, – робить нема чого, для них безділля таке, вони з ума сходять, нема ні деревинки, нічого нема" [These old people who have relocated to this field – there is nothing for them to do, for them there is just idleness, they go crazy, there is not even a tree [in a new village], there is nothing] [MYuCh, 22 June 2019]. Similarly, during our interview, Andrii Petrovych Berezhnyi points out that the destruction of their houses was often the hardest factor for the elderly to accept. When I asked him whether he had heard of anyone mourning for their house, he replied, "Та канешна плакали. Так жаліли баби, діди за тим..." Yes, of course they wept

[for the destroyed houses]. The old women and old men felt so sorry about that] [APB, 19 May 2012].

Written accounts include similar remarks stressing that resettlement resulted in a deterioration in the health of the elderly. For example, Mykhniak writes, “My grandfather could not forget his land. My grandmother could not handle those difficulties and died” [2018: 219]. Similarly, Kostiukova and Yevtushenko point out, “It was very difficult psychologically for the old people to leave the place, and the younger, healthier ones adapted faster” [2010: 72].

The paired image of old man and woman in memoirs and in Ukrainian folklore is very common. “Once upon a time, lived an old man and old woman...” is a typical beginning for Ukrainian and other Slavic folk tales. In Ukrainian, the same word is used to denote old man and grandfather and old woman and grandmother. In these narrative accounts, the old man [*did*, *didus*’, less often *diedushka*] is always a positive character (I will discuss the grandmother motif in more detail below). My hypothesis is that the positive folk characters of the old man (and old woman) on the roof of a house protesting the destruction of their village has arisen in contemporary memories because, in the narrative tradition, the characters of grandparents are always positive. The grandfather is strongly connected with the land, is a caring master of his household, a skilled craftsman, and a knowledgeable benefactor for children.

The titular *did* [grandfather, old man] became the basis for the word *pradidivs’kyi* [great-grandfather’s], which, in the memories, appears in the phrase *pradidivs’ka zemlia* [great-grandfather’s land], as exemplified in the following passage: “The village of Zarubyntsi was evicted completely off their original great-grandfather’s lands” [Sorokova 2015: 6]. The claim of the loss of land is the most important argument for the modern characterization of resettlement as an unjust, ill-considered decision, which led to greater losses than gains. Mykhailo Lohvynovych Chepynoha points out in this regard:

Такі землі затопить! Дуже шкода. Хай те Васиугання, що казали, там вічна мерзлота, хай би оте затопляли, а такі землі – поспішили. Поспішили, бо було на ура: «Дайош електрику, п’ятирічки!» І на Дніпрі, Придніпров’я – шість електростанцій потужних! Це ж багато дуже. Дуже багаті землі.

[How could they flood such lands! It is such a pity. Let that area of Vasuhannia, where they say, it is permanently frozen, let that place be flooded. They [the state leaders] hurried because there was a cry: “Give me electricity. The Five-Year Plan!” And on the Dnipro, in Prydniprov’ia – there are six mighty power plants! That’s a lot. These were very fertile lands] [MLCh, 19 August 2014].

The word *pradid* [great-grandfather] often appears in resettlement narratives to imply a close relationship to the land on which previous generations lived. For example, Oleksandr Hryhorovych Nykuliak points out, “Це пам’ятник нашим

пра-пра-пра-прадідам. Це наше село. Це хата була, а в кінці города текла річка” [This is a monument to our great-great-great-great-grandparents. This is our village. Here is where our house was, and at the end of the garden the river flowed] [OHN, 18 July 2014]. Connection with the land communicates a memory of the agricultural labor of the male representatives of previous generations, and their land management, as exemplified in the following written memories: “The people of Zarubynци were engaged in never-ending agricultural work” [Sorokova 2015: 19] and “Grandfather was a master. He had a mill, an apiary with 30 hives, he made wooden objects, all this with his own hands” [Mykhniak 2018: 210].

The list of stereotypical characteristics connected with the grandfather figure include wisdom, experience, unusual skills, and knowledge of various historical and everyday situations. Narrators often refer to the decisions of their grandfathers as correct, worthy of praise, and their deeds and actions as fit for imitation: “Grandfather Vasyl could read the fate of people in the stars and predict the course of events and natural phenomena” [Mykhniak 2018: 172]. Furthermore, an important feature of the grandfather figure is his friendly relationship with children: “My grandfather Hryhoriy and I went and brought the sheaves home and threshed them” [Sorokova 2015: 41].

The image of the grandmother [*baba*, *babusia*, less often – *babunia*, *babka*, *babushka*] in the memories is often paired with the figure of the grandfather but has its own original features. The grandmother is closely connected with the house. She is a caregiver who provides shelter and food. For example, Sofia Ihorivna Hych remembers, “Нас шестеро! І всі рвем шавель, і баба варить нам борщ” [There were six of us! And we all picked sorrel, and grandmother cooked us borshch] [SIH, 21 June 2019]. The role of the grandmother appears to be especially prominent in the memories of the post-World War II period. Since many men were killed in battle, women (including grandmothers) were forced to do both men’s work in the field and women’s work in the home. (4) For example, while describing her grandmother, Sokolova shares the following memory: “Like all widows, grandmother Liuda did both women’s and men’s work” [2015: 138].

In the narratives, the grandmothers are very hard-working; they are also masters of folk crafts, often weavers or embroiderers, as illustrated by the following recollections: “Grandmother Antonina put a machine in the house and weaved cloth” [Sorokova 2015: 121] and “Grandmother was gentle, good-natured, calm, knew how to embroider well” [Sorokova 2015: 163]. Like grandfathers, grandmothers are often friendly with children, and also often play a central role in their upbringing. Sofiia Ihorivna Hych remembers: “Нас виховувала баба. Мама, батько всігди на роботі.” [We were raised by our grandmother. Mother and father were always at work] [SIH, 21 June 2019].

Furthermore, grandmothers are depicted as knowledgeable individuals who share interesting stories about the past and family. They are also seen as the carriers of traditions and beliefs. Nadiia Illivna Zhmen’ko remembers her grandmother in the following way:

Я пам'ятаю, баба розказувала, ніколи в житті не можна прив'язувати себе до кладовища, – що не можна отак, як оце зараз: ось людина лежить, і біля неї місце залишене.

[I remember, my grandmother told me, never in your life should you tie yourself to a cemetery, you can't do as it is done now: here lies one person, and near it another place is kept [referring to the contemporary practice of reserving a place in the cemetery]]. [NIZh, 2 August 2014]

Considering the views of both grandmother and grandfather figures in traditional rural culture, it is not surprising that it is precisely this image that has become a prominent traditionalized motif in retrospective protest narratives about the resettlement of flooded villages.

The Influence of Propaganda

Whether they are communicated implicitly or explicitly, the images of an old man and an old woman, or that of old people in general, is prominent not only in the folk worldview but also in the mass propaganda associated with the Soviet resettlement initiatives. Considering the overall resistance to relocation, the state had to resort to propaganda campaigns involving officials, activists, artists, and a variety of other creative forms including song writing and cinematography. People had to be convinced that a better life would begin in a new place and that relocation was necessary for the good of the whole country. Thus newly-composed songs appeared dedicated to the construction of hydroelectric power plants. One example is “Дніпрельстан” [Dniprel'stan], written in the 1930s by Iaroslav Hrymailo (1906–1984) [Nud'ha 1960: 171–172, 371]. Hrymailo, who describes the Dnipro as “proud rebel,” writes that on the banks of this rebellious river came detachments of workers to convert the power of the Dnipro into electricity and to force the river to also become a worker. Another similar creation, “Пісня про каховське море” [Song about the Kakhovka Sea], was written by the famous Ukrainian poet-singer Teren' (Terentiy) Germanovych Masenko (1903–1970) in 1952 and published in Masenko's collection of poems *Весняні журавлі* [Spring Cranes] in 1956 [Nud'ha 1960: 372]. In this song, the creation of artificial reservoirs is presented as a victory over dry winds, the realization of dreams, and, owing to these changes, the Dnipro will flow in a new way.

The idea of conquering the Dnipro, fighting the elements, and claiming victory over nature did not resonate with the elderly; this attitude requires young, hard-working, and adventurous individuals. Indeed, young people, as my interlocutors were at the time, often saw resettlement as an opportunity to move to a new home and to acquire new friends. At the time, many of them believed the propaganda about a new life and about how the Dnipro would now serve the people. The idea that old people are not very open to change is not new in traditional culture. It is reflected in numerous proverbs and sayings. For example, the proverb “Старе дерево не пересаджують, молоде дерево гнеться, а старе

ламається” [You cannot transplant an old tree, a young tree bends, but an old one breaks] implies that elderly people do not tolerate change well.

In the official discourse on the necessity and usefulness of artificial reservoirs, senior residents were often portrayed as being guilty of resisting and delaying resettlement. They were frequently viewed as individuals who did not understand the importance of what Ivan Lukovych Man’ko referred to as “державної ваги будівлі” [statewide significance of construction] [ILM, 31 July 2014]. This idea was clearly articulated by the renowned Soviet Ukrainian screenwriter and film producer, Olexandr Dovzhenko, in his screenplay *Поєма про море* [Poem of the Sea]. It was then further reinforced in the film of the same name, made in 1958 by Yuliya Solntseva, Dovzhenko’s widow [Solntseva 1958]. Literary critics of the time presented the image of Dovzhenko as a promoter of the new man-made sea. Their main attention was focused on the “theme of glorifying the laborer” [Koba 1979: 184], “the power of the human spirit” [Pisarevsky 1959: 20], and the “renewal of nature” [Ryl’sky 1959: 110] in connection with the construction of the dam and the artificial sea. Discussion of these themes was no accident, as they are present in Dovzhenko’s *Poem of the Sea* and in his diaries. It is obvious that this attitude was, so to speak, ordered by the state: to create a work that would glorify the new, monumental Soviet construction.

Despite the intentions of the official propaganda machine behind Dovzhenko’s work, he still skillfully managed to convey the popular perception of the flooded villages as a “new grief,” in line with the following entry in his diary: “I remember SN and his wife and the words ‘Our new sea – our new grief.’ This is how the people talk about the sea” [Dovzhenko 2004: 375]. (5) The screenplay and the subsequent film devoted much attention to the tragedies behind the construction of the hydroelectric power plants in the region. In the film, the tragedy is especially powerfully captured in a scene depicting an old woman mourning for her house.

Soviet creative works of this kind have reached many Ukrainians. The relationship between traditional rural worldviews and professional cultural products at the time was undoubtedly reciprocal. In the case of Oleksandr Dovzhenko, his screenplay is informed by imagery from actual rural life while his creative product further reinforced this very imagery. Noteworthy is this regard is Dovzhenko’s other work, *Зачарована Десна* [The Enchanted Desna] written in 1956 [Dovzhenko 1956] and then developed into a film by Yulia Solntseva [Solntseva 1964]. While not related to the construction of hydroelectric powerplants, *The Enchanted Desna*, based on Dovzhenko’s childhood memories, addresses the theme of natural flooding. It includes a scene showing villagers climbing onto the roofs of their houses in order to escape the rising water. Considering the ongoing importance of Dovzhenko’s legacy in Ukrainian culture, it is safe to hypothesize that the image of the old couple on the roof of their flooded house in present-day narratives about resettlement could have at least partly been shaped by his work.

This fact gives me grounds to further hypothesize that, in addition to rural folk worldviews discussed in the previous section, Soviet cultural products, often informed by traditional views, played a role in traditionalizing and solidifying the image of the old man and the old woman in present memories devoted to resettlement. It is not surprising that this image has now become a requisite symbol of protest against the loss of native villages. After half a century, this desperate resistance of the “little” person has become a poetic image of protest against the destructive system.

In my opinion, the image of the old couple in these narrative accounts follows trajectories of formation that are similar to those of legends [e.g., Degh 1996]. While they are undocumented and, thus, not historically verifiable, such accounts still carry the power of truth. It is the component of general contextual truth that has helped to solidify and traditionalize the old couple motif.

Present-day Reflections on The Past

Understandably, the Soviet state authorities responsible for the construction of the hydroelectric power plants and the associated flooding were not interested in publicizing information about any potential problems. In addition to resettlement-driven trauma, this construction project was responsible for the destruction of “thousands of hectares of fertile *chernozem* [black earth],” for inhibiting wetland formation and the elimination of forests and habitat for birds and animals [Koba 1979: 182]. It was not until the early 2000s, when various initiatives aimed at drawing public attention to the liquidation of villages, the destruction of fertile lands, and the loss of the historical memory, culture and identity of old settlements were organized in Ukraine. Today these initiatives include annual or occasional commemorative meetings of the former residents of flooded villages; exhibitions of photographs and publications about these sites; archiving and conservation of data on the flooded settlements in the forms of books and memorial markers (e.g., signs, crosses, and chapels); attempts to organize museums dedicated to the flooded villages; and the promotion of these activities and related information in the media. An excerpt from my conversation with Vasyl Mykytovych Reveha (BMP/VMR) sheds light on the restoration of memory about this page in the history of the region as a very recent phenomenon:

BMP: Займатися вплотну Комарівкою ми стали, коли вже діти почали працювати в музеї [в *Національному історико-етнографічному заповіднику “Переяслав”*].

ІКФ: Як ви можете розказати про цю історію? [...]. Яюсь відновлюється пам'ять? Бо, я так розумію, що тривалий час про ці села нічого не було.

BMP: Взагалі забули, що вони й були. Ніхто ніде не згадував...

[VMR: We started working closely on Komarivka [a flooded village] when the children began working in the museum [National Historic-Ethnographic Reserve “Pereyaslav”].

IKF: How can you tell this story? Is the memory becoming restored somehow? As far as I understand, for a long time there was no information about these villages.

VMR: In general, people forgot that they even existed. Nobody mentioned it anywhere] [VMR, 20 June 2019].

What contributed to the growing interest in this page of history and the increasing need to commemorate the flooded villages? Why were the collective resettlement experiences forgotten for such an extensive period of time and only now appear on the agenda of former villagers? While theorizing about commemoration of traumatic experiences, Aleida Assman, a scholar of collective memory, concludes that commemoration processes require that:

[...] a community of memory is developed that not only combines [...] a particular] anniversary date with specific concerns and a clear message but also succeeds in generating its message by having it anchored in relevant institutions. [Assmann 2016a: 196-197].

Recent initiatives of migrants from the flood zones reflect such endeavors. Research on these initiatives should be considered in the context of changes in memorial culture in the wider European context. As Assman points out:

[...] since the 1980s, more open forms of representation of history have emerged, and they blur the seemingly obvious distinction between fact and fiction, as well as between history and memory. What is new here is that individual experience is also recognized as an opportunity to understand the emotional and other equally important dimensions of history [Assmann 2016b: 187].

My fieldwork experience with migrants from flooded areas and analysis of publications about flooded villages leads to the conclusion that contemporary symbolic forms of protest against flooding reflect the desire to preserve and construct the memory of former villages. This goal appears in the annotations to such publications, and even in their titles. Examples include Kostiukova and Yevtushenko’s book title *Незатоплена пам’ять* [*Unflooded Memory*] and Mykhnyak’s description of his edited volumes as “a real spiritual memorial to the lost villages of Trakhtemyriv and the Monastyrok” [Mykhnyak 2018: 4] and as “a kind of monument to them [the flooded villages]” [Mykhnyak 2020: 6].

The semantics of protest are also visible in a symbolic memorial complex dedicated to flooded villages. For example, a monument to the villages of

Khudiaky and Taldyky, located in the current village of Khudiaky, in the Cherkasy region, opened on 14 October 2009. It depicts houses being demolished by a wave of water. This image emphasizes the semantics of destruction. It is important to remember that, in fact, no building was flooded or demolished by water because all the buildings were dismantled and used for the construction of new houses due to a shortage of new building materials at the time. It can be argued that the image on the monument either reflects a situation that has been psychologically experienced by the settlers or that it conveys the emotional side of history, blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, to put it in Assmann's terms. They interpret resettlement as destruction. Mariia Ivanivna Ievtushenko reflects: "І мені дуже подобається він, цей пам'ятник: хати, ніби їх залива вода. Хати – мов вони перекинулися, наче вони перекидаються на воді, ці хати" [And I really like it, this monument: the houses are flooded. Houses, it is as if they are overturned, as if they were overturned on the water, these houses] [MHe, 12 June 2021]. It is clear that human logic will always protest against unjustified destruction and annihilation, which is how migrants now interpret the flooding of their villages. This idea is apparent in the memories of my research participants. Such considerations, as well as reflections on a possible return to the old place, a constant motive in the memories, are also an indirect, albeit retrospective, form of resistance to forced relocation.

Conclusion

A temporal distance from an experienced event causes the formation of cultural memory about the past event in the collective consciousness. This memory defines a set of basic motifs, plots, and images. Cultural memory in the course of history undergoes constant interpretation, discussion, and updating as its content is understood by future generations, and it must satisfy current needs and challenges. Researchers of oral history identify two important trends characteristic of autobiographical memories. First, these memories are subject to new self-review, editing, censorship, and reevaluation. What a person says about themselves today will be more or less different from their story in ten or twenty years. Secondly, the content of self-presentation, vision, and evaluation of the past is influenced by social processes that occur in a particular time. These two characteristics of memories—variability and dependence on historical circumstances—are reflected in the stories about resettlement from villages flooded by the construction of reservoirs and hydroelectric power plants. These factors influence the images of protest against flooding and the resettlement of villages, albeit retrospectively. These are reflections on the (in)expediency of hydroelectric power station construction and flooding of surrounding lands, the construction of monuments and memorials to flooded villages, and the publication of books about these settlements. In oral memories, the idea of protest is embodied in the folkloric image of an old couple who refused to move and remained on the roof of their house until the flood arrived. The presence of such an image in the memories indicates a desire to disagree with the resettlement and flooding of

numerous villages and agricultural lands. Whether verbal or action-driven, these forms of protest communicate the idea of resistance via people's desire to preserve the memory of former villages. The present case study illustrates that protests, typically associated with immediate response to political events, can sometimes form retrospectively, and can be directly shaped by the processes of the formation and traditionalization of memory.

NOTES

- 1 All geographic terms are transliterated from the official Ukrainian spelling.
- 2 For more information, see [Koval-Fuchylo 2018].
- 3 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Ukrainian and Russian are my own.
- 4 While women did work in the fields, traditionally they spent most of their time tending gardens, caring for children, and doing other domestic work.
- 5 SN appears in the original.

LIST OF FLOODED VILLAGES

Bakota, Kamyanyets-Podilsky region, Khmelnytskyi oblast

Calabarok, Novogeorgievsky region, Kirovograd oblast

Khudyaky, Cherkasy region, Cherkasy oblast

Komarivka, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi region, Kyiv oblast

Konylivka, Kamyanyets-Podilskyi region, Khmelnytskyi oblast

Kryvchany, Kamyanyets-Podilskyi region, Khmelnytskyi oblast

Morozivka, Hlobyne region, Poltava oblast

Penkivka, Novogeorgievsky region, Kirovograd oblast

Pidsinne, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi region, Kyiv oblast

Sahunivka, Cherkasy region, Cherkasy oblast

Skorodystyk, partially flooded, former Irkliiv region, Poltava oblast, now Cherkasy oblast

Vyunyshche, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi region, Kyiv oblast

Zarubyntsi, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi region, Kyiv oblast

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INTERVIEWEES

Berezhnyi, Andrii Petrovych (Бережний, Андрій Петрович), migrant, born in 1950 in the village of Morozivka. Recorded in the village of Novoselivka, Kremenchuk district, Poltava region on 19.05.2012.

Черуноха, Катерина Андріївна (Чепинога, Катерина Андріївна), born in 1931 in the village of Skorodystyk. Recorded in the village of Skorodystyk on 19.08.2014.

Черуноха, Мухайло Логвинович (Чепинога, Михайло Логвинович), born in 1929 in the village of Skorodystyk, ex village head, teacher, school director. Recorded in the village of Skorodystyk on 19.08.2014.

Chyrkov, Mykola Yukhymovych (Чирков, Микола Юхимович), migrant, born in 1957 in the village of Vjunyshche, higher education, veterinarian. Recorded in the village of Cybli Perejaslav-Khmelnytskyi district Kyiv region on 22.06.2019.

Hrechka, Mariia Ivanivna (Гречка, Марія Іванівна), born in 1927 in the village of Novoselivka, Kremenchuk district, Poltava region. Recorded in the village of Novoselivka on 19.05.2012.

Nych, Sofiia Ihorivna (Гич, Софія Ігорівна), migrant, born in the village of Pidsinne. Recorded in the town of Perejaslav 21.06.2019.

Ievtushenko, Mariia Ivanivna (Євтушенко, Марія Іванівна), born in 1948 in the village of Sahunivka, migrant. Recorded in the village of Khudiaky Cherkasy district Cherkasy region. 12.06.2021.

Motailo, Antonina Fedorivna (Мотайло, Антоніна Федорівна), migrant, born in 1937 in the village of Kalabarok. Recorded in the village of Hlynsk, Svitlovodsk district, Kropyvnytskyi (Kirovohrad) region on 19.05.2012.

Man'ko, Ivan Lukovych (Манько, Іван Лукович), migrant, born in 1948 in the village of Skorodystyk. Recorded in the village of Skorodystyk on 31.07.2014.

Nykuliak, Oleksandr Hryhorovych (Никуляк, Олександр Григорович), migrant, born in 1929 in the village of Konylivka, bookkeeper. Recorded in the village of Horaivka, Kamianets-Podilskyi district, Khmelnytskyi region on 18.07.2014.

Reveha, Vasyl Mykytovych (Ревага, Василь Микитович), migrant, born in 1945 in the village of Komarivka. Recorded in the town of Perejaslav 20.06.2019.

Vasylyshyna, Hanna Petrivna (Василишина, Ганна Петрівна), migrant, born in 1927 in the village of Vakota. Recorded in the village of Horaivka, Kamianets-Podilskyi district, Khmelnytskyi region on 18.07.2014.

Zhmen'ko, Nadiia Illivna [Жменько, Надія Марія], born in 1960. Recorded in the village of Skorodystyk on 02.08.2014.