



Narratives of Ukrainian Women about the Refugee Experience

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The war in Ukraine has unleashed the largest refugee wave in Europe since World War II. According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, there are currently 8 million refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. 50,000 Ukrainians, mainly women under 40 and children, have arrived in Finland since the war broke out. The number of Ukrainian war refugees in different parts of Europe is high, for example, in France it is 119,000. Among the EU-countries, Poland has by far the largest number with 1.5 million Ukrainian war refugees (see Statista 2023; Migri 2023).

As an expert of folklore study and because people started telling their experiences, I began recording my native nationals' stories in exile. I conducted 30 interviews in Poland. Then I transferred with my children to Paris. In France, I continued my job and made 40 interviews. Next I started to collect Ukrainian war refugees' stories in Finland. Now I have 33 records. My project *Narratives of Ukrainian Women about the Refugee Experience* focuses on the role of oral stories and other cultural texts, that is, native poetry, vernacular literature and internet-folklore in these times of crisis. It's scope of concern is the verbal and nonverbal means in refugees' personal accounts. The main task of my project is to record and preserve oral history autobiographical stories about the experience of wartime survival, and the experience of a refugee from war and adaptation in a new place in a foreign country; the collection of this information will allow me to analyse the peculiarities of the narrative tradition about refugees as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Place of Recordings

The first and mandatory condition for recording an interview is the search for narrators. For conducting such interviews abroad during the war, I was lucky that there are people who organized places where Ukrainians who have fled from Ukraine can meet their compatriots, communicate, Ukrainian children can play together and speak in a language they understand. The Lodz Cinema House became such a place for Ukrainian refugees in the Lodz Region in

Poland. In Paris, there is an ancient Ukrainian place at 6 Palestine Street. Here, on the first floor, there is the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Saint Simon (Patriarchate of Constantinople), the Simon Petliura Ukrainian Library is on the second and third floors, and the premises of the public organization "Ukraine for All" is on the fourth floor. My daughter Anna and I came there for classes every Sunday. Here, children are taught the Ukrainian language, clay sculpting, drawing, appliqué, weaving, papier-mâché, French language, and so on are organized. Beginning in March 2023, I recorded interviews in Helsinki. The Cultural Center of the Society of Ukrainians in Finland has been operating there for a long time. There, children draw, sculpt from clay, learn the Finnish language, and so on, and I am recording interviews with Ukrainian women.

Central Aim

My main goal during the interview is to hear what the narrator herself wants to tell me about herself, what she feels is important to her for me to hear. I have several interviews where I hardly asked any questions, only listened, sometimes clarifying something. Nevertheless, I have a prepared rough list of questions. These are:

1. How did you know about the war?
2. What were your first thoughts after war started?
3. When did you decide to leave home?
4. What do you know about the fate of others?
5. What was your the evacuation way?
6. Why did you choose Poland / France / Finland?
7. How did you manage to settle down here?
8. Does your child / Do your children go to kindergarten or school?
9. What new experience did you gain, what did you learn?
10. What do you want to tell about your life during the war?

Future Studies

My future studies of the Ukrainian narrative tradition about the experience of refugees from the war will primarily have a philological orientation. I plan to carry out the scientific analysis of these narratives in the context of everyday life, so the work will include the following points:

1. Describe the peculiarities of the respondents' self-presentation strategy: which events are the main focus, what is said little about, what is not said at all. On this material, distinguish categories of storytellers: experts, victims, winners, etc.
2. Determine the plot line of the story: how the narrator constructs the events of the story, what is said first, what provokes the emergence of the next plot, which organizing principle prevails: chronological, emotional, or cause and effect. Define favorite topics and taboo topics. Already at the present stage of research, the following favorite topics of autobiographical narratives can be

- identified: the beginning of the active phase of the war, the first days of the war, gathering for the road; difficulties of the evacuation road; help from unknown people; health problems; and peculiarities of adaptation in a new place. Stories about conflicts in the new country of residence are taboo; there are expressions of awareness of achievements, new experience from staying abroad. Women do not talk about their current family situation, however, if a woman's husband participates in military operations, then there will be a short or longer story about him in the story.
3. Features of the nomination. How are the main and secondary characters of the story named, what vocabulary is used to name events and phenomena? Which loci are named in the interview, which toponyms, microtoponyms are used? I trace the word-form in the nomination, in order to determine which morphemic means are used to convey emotions.
 4. Determine what hierarchy of values is built in the stories, what acquires the highest value, what former values have become irrelevant.
 5. Main images, concepts of narratives: war, road, Ukraine, foreign side, and group and individual portraits of the story.
 6. To determine the main stereotypes and ideas of narrators. How important is the social and intellectual environment of the narrator, the region of his origin?
 7. Determine the influence of the Ukrainian narrative tradition on ways of verbalizing experience. What features of a folklore work have stories about the lived experience of forced departure abroad as a result of fleeing from war? Identify folklore sources for the emergence of recurring plots and motifs.
 8. Comparison of stories about today's refugees with narratives about other forced resettlement due to natural and man-made disasters, state policies, etc.
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