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## **LIFE STORIES OF TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIAN WOMEN – REMINISCENCES OF THE SOCIALISM\***

### ABSTRACT

The Transcarpathian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lacks women's stories. We can get only limited number of information from the archives and libraries about women. There is little source of written material connected to women's activities and there every day lifes. In the past decades the oral history research methods has become increasingly recognized, which gathers information about past events by making interviews. What kind of information can we get from the narrative interviews? This is a question, wich has long been examined by scholars, untill today. This study presents the life of three Transcarpathian Hungarian women, with the help of the oral history methodology. My goal is to provide insight into difficult women's history through analysing their life-journey.

Keywords: Women's history, oral history, Transcarpathia, Socialism

### INTRODUCTION

The 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Transcarpathia was very diverse, as during this time there were a number of dramatic turns, the territory had been under new political concepts many times. After the First World War, the territory was separated from the mother country and connected to Czechoslovakia, and after the Second World War it was united with the Soviet Union. Thus, a new period in the life of Hungarians in Transcarpathia had begun, the lingering Soviet era. According to a 1946 census, the population of Transcarpathian Hungarians after World War II suffered great losses. While in 1941 they reported 233,840 ethnic Hungarian inhabitants, in 1946 there were only 66 000 people.<sup>1</sup> The population decrease was caused by the deaths on the fronts, the mass feeing and the deportation of Hungarian men in 1944.<sup>2</sup> Partly due to this the role of women in society and family life changed significantly. In many places, women became the breadwinners and the postwar labor shortage brought a significant increase in the number of female employees.

There are very little data about ordinary people, especially about women, and mostly only general information is available in archives and libraries. Very few written sources discuss their lives and activities. Women experienced the ter-

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<sup>1</sup> *Molnár József – Molnár D. István: Kárpátalja népessége és magyarsága a népszámlálási és népmozgalmi adatok tükrébe. Beregszász 2005. 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *Molnár J. – Molnár D. I.: Kárpátalja népessége op. cit. 11.*

ror of the World War and following events, just as everybody else, yet the ordinary woman, as a historical personality is missing from the Transcarpathian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To see the community life of the Transcarpathian Hungarian women, personal life stories, narratives must be collected and analyzed. This study undertakes the examination the lives of three Transcarpathian Hungarian women, using the oral history methodology. The genre of oral history research has been increasingly recognized in recent decades and has become one of the most common methods of microhistory research, which collects information about past events and lifestyle via interviews. It appeared around the 1920s, however, it was truly recognized and became widespread only in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the oral history research received a lot of criticism; however, making life interviews has since been recognized and gained popularity as a method of research for social sciences. There are oral history centers and archives in a number of countries, where efficient activity takes place.<sup>4</sup> The interviews are used successfully in several disciplines, including sociology, ethnology, history, anthropology, some differences occur only in the forms of application. To this day, many people question the reliability of oral history sources. Of course, sources of this kind need to be carefully revised, as well as the written ones. It is important for the researchers to compare the narratives with other types of sources, and to use them only afterwards.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we should remark, that the representatives of the genre are not aimed to prove what had been said, but to share the experience. Using the method of oral history we cannot be sure that those things had really happened, it rather helps us to understand the way that particular person experienced the events and what they think about what happened to them.<sup>6</sup> According to the historian Gábor Gyáni: „*The oral history provides information on the events of the past, which does not necessarily explain it, but is important from the point of view of understanding the past.*”<sup>7</sup>

Hereinafter I would like to present the result of the analysis of interviews, which I made in a Transcarpathian settlement, mostly inhabited by Hungarians, in August and September, 2014. It is important to stress that during the research interviews were made not in structured, but in unstructured (narrative interview) and semi-structured interview sections. I asked the interviewees to tell about their lives, which I recorded with an IC recorder. I tried not to interrupt the narrative with my additional questions, because sometimes the silence brings

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<sup>3</sup> Kovács Éva: A narratív módszertanok politikája. Forrás: szépirodalmi, szociográfiai, művészeti folyóirat 43. (2011: 7–8.) 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Vértési Lázár: Oral history. A szemtanúként elbeszél történelem lehetőségei. Aetas 19. (2004: 1.) 158.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 163–164.

<sup>6</sup> Bögre Zsuzsanna: Személyes történelem. Aetas 22. (2007: 2.) 224.

<sup>7</sup> Gyáni Gábor: Emlékezés, emlékezet és a történelem elbeszélése. Budapest 2000. 136.

deep and sometimes traumatic memories to the surface. However, at the end of the interview I asked some specific questions in order to clarify the story.

#### PROCESSING OF THE NARRATED LIFE STORIES

What can a narrative interview bring into the light? A deeper analysis of a narrative interview can help us understand an average yet very difficult fate of a woman, thus revealing and explaining similar stories. Memories, which we reveal to others, are being presented in the form of a consequent story. While analyzing the story of somebody's life we should consider the selective nature of a person's memory, because one usually remembers only the most significant facts and events. Moreover, the speaker sets up priorities among the memories, which tend to change over time. There are multiple methods for processing the narrated stories, but due to the uniqueness of every story they cannot be stereotyped. The researcher is alone with the analysis and should decide how to apply the available techniques.<sup>8</sup> Life stories can be generally divided into eight stages: early childhood, school age, teenage years, young adulthood, the working years, and starting a family. A person's life is full of turns and developments, which must be analyzed to define the changes the one undergoes over the years.<sup>9</sup> According to Péter Niedermüller, the fact that social sciences choose ordinary people as a subject for research, allows the understanding and interpretation of people's lives.<sup>10</sup>

„WHAT WE WENT THROUGH WAS WAY TOO MUCH”<sup>11</sup>

Ilona K.<sup>12</sup> was born on January 30, 1928, in an average family, she was the eighth child. Her father worked on the railway, while her mother was raising the children and doing the household work.

During the twenty years Czechoslovakian power (1919–1939) there were significant changes in the Transcarpathian education system. There were various school types of schools; there was a category of the so-called public schools: these were the four-year elementary schools, after graduating from which students could enter the four-year middle school or a high school.<sup>13</sup> Ilona got 8 years of education, in a Hungarian language middle school, where Czech language was taught. According to her, she was a good student: „I studied for 8 years, after the 4th year the teachers wanted me to go to high school or I could go to the middle

<sup>8</sup> Bögre Zs.: Élettörténeti módszer elméletben és gyakorlatban. Szociológiai Szemle 13. (2003: 1.) 156–157.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Niedermüller Péter: Élettörténet és életrajzi elbeszélés. Etnographia 99. (1988: 3–4.) 377.

<sup>11</sup> Ilona K. (Date and place: 30 September 2014, Bátyú).

<sup>12</sup> The original name of the interviewee was changed to preserve the anonymity.

<sup>13</sup> Fedinec Csilla: Magyar kultúra a két világ közötti időszakban. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009: történelem, politika, kultúra. Szerk. Fedinec Csilla – Vehes Mikola. Budapest 2010. 124.

*school. Since I had only excellent grades, they wanted me to go to a secondary school, but I told them that I didn't want to go, I wanted to farm.*"<sup>14</sup>

This attitude is understandable, since most of families in the region made their living by animal breeding and agriculture. Ilona's family had 25 acres of land before the introduction of the collective farm system, they possessed livestock as well: „*So many fields we had, 25 acres, so that after school in the afternoon we went to the field. We had to work a lot (...) we had a farm-wagon and horses then. As long as my father was alive, we had four horses, cattle and 30–40 geese. I worked so much during my younger years that it is a miracle that I'm still alive.*”<sup>15</sup>

My interviewee's father died in 1944, leaving her an orphan at the age of 12. After the early death of their father, the elder brothers completed military service, so their mother had to take care of the children. According to her words, the situation was very difficult; they were very poor and had to work a lot. „*I have finished 8 classes; we lived at our neighbors' and the only thought that our mother was able to support us was that she was feeding four people. Two of them were from the village council and two teachers. They had lunch here and paid for it. My mother was able to raise a pig, we also had a cow, we fed four people, and that is how we lived.*”<sup>16</sup>

The Second World War left traumatic memories in the mind of every Transcarpathian. Germany and its allies were driven out of the territory of Transcarpathia and Ukraine, but it demanded great sacrifices.<sup>17</sup> The Eastern Carpathians operation took place in September – October, 1944. On 18 October, 1944 the Soviet army crossed the Carpathian Mountains, invaded Mukachevo on October 26, Uzhgorod on October 27, the next day they managed to occupy Chop, thus they expelled the invaders from the last Ukrainian settlement.<sup>18</sup> My interviewee remembers the bombing of Chop very well, as the settlement where she lived is only 24 km away from the town. In the village people made bunkers on their own yard, or rushed to the nearest neighbor during the bombing: „*When the Russians came through Chop, we went to the bunker, because there was a bombing and we always ran away from home in such cases. We opened the doors and windows and then went to the basement to Ernő O. People made bunkers, but there weren't men in our family, we were only three women, so we went there, but when the bomb was thrown near Szernye, everything was shaking (...).*”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ilona K. (Date and place: 30 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Oficinskij Román: Kárpátalja kérdése a második világháború végén, 1944–1945.* In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 214–215.

<sup>19</sup> Ilona K. (Date and place: 30 September 2014, Bányú).

After the Russian takeover a new era began in Transcarpathia – the Soviet system, which was being formed from autumn 1944 till the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the Communist Party took the power, accomplished the collectivization and destroyed the „*enemies of the people*”<sup>21</sup>. On November 19, 1944, the Transcarpathian Ukrainian Communist Party was formed in Mukachevo, which adopted the resolution of the „*Reunification of Carpathian Ukraine with Soviet Ukraine*.”<sup>22</sup> On June 29, 1945 the Soviet–Czechoslovak treaty was signed, which completely attached Transcarpathia to Soviet Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

The malenkij robot („*little work*”) of 1944 is vividly present in the memories of Transcarpathian citizens, it is hard to find a family whose members were not directly involved in this event.<sup>24</sup> A few years after the tragedy the Soviet power thought it was about time to frighten the generation which survived the 1944 deportation because of their young age. For this reason, the Transcarpathian Hungarian soldiers were declared unreliable, and therefore could not perform military service. Instead, they were taken to the Donbas coal basin, where they had to work in coal mines for three years.<sup>25</sup> The first team was launched in the spring of 1947; the age groups included those born in 1926, 1927 and 1928.<sup>26</sup> The future husband of Ilona K. was born in 1926, so he was conscripted as well. This is how she remembers the events of that time: „*The Russians came and gathered people to the camp. He was not taken to the camp, but had to go to work to the Donbas mines, so he was hiding for a while, he was my boyfriend at the time (...). There was a small place for him in the house, he was hiding there, and one Sunday morning the militia came while he was bathing and captured him. But he slapped one of the militiamen in the face, then escaped and was hiding, first in Szernye, then in some other places with his friends. And then they came to me once asking, where is Feri? They came here; they were looking for him in our house. They went to look in the attic, when they were coming down, they noticed he was lying in the wagon over there. I did not know he was there. He was arrested, taken to*

<sup>20</sup> Csanádi György: Sorsfordító évek sodrában. Fejezetek Beregvidék történelmi múltjából. Ungvár 2004. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: A szovjet időszak sajátosságai Kárpátalja történelmében. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 216.

<sup>22</sup> Kálmán Móricz: Kárpátalja sorsfordulói. Budapest 2001. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Botlik József – Dupka György: Ez hát a hon... (Tények, adatok, dokumentumok a kárpátaljai magyarság életéből 1918–1991). Budapest–Szeged 1991. 53.

<sup>24</sup> In November 1944, all Hungarian men between 18 and 50 had to appear at the village hall with their identity card, with one week's food, for three days of work. Men were taken to camps, first to Solyva and Sambor, then to Syberia and other areas of the Soviet Union. It is estimated that more than 40 thousand Transcarpathians were taken to camps, with terrible conditions. From 1946 they were gradually letting the survivors go home but about 70% of deportees never returned home. Botlik J. – Dupka Gy.: Ez hát a hon op. cit. 55–57.

<sup>25</sup> Molnár D. Erzsébet: A szovjet rendszer kiépítésének korszaka a kárpátaljai magyarság kollektív emlékezetében. Mediárium 5. (2011: 3.) 49.

<sup>26</sup> Kovács Elemér: Élőlátók. Ungvár–Budapest 1993. 107.

*Uzhgorod, and then after or 3 or 4 months was sentenced in Lviv (...) then took him to Donbas (...) but he escaped. Many were taken there, but many of them escaped back home.*"<sup>27</sup> From 1947 to 1949 12 thousand young people were sent from Transcarpathia to Donbas. Many of them escaped and were hiding instead.<sup>28</sup>

The next step of the Soviet system was the collectivization, the establishment of the collective farm system. Ilona K. said that they were forced to give their lands in 1948, afterwards she worked there as a milkmaid. This is how she remembers her job: *„I was milkmaid, I had 27 cows. I milked them by hand; sometimes I milked 320 litres a day. I milked three times a day. I also had to feed the cows; we received three bags of food which we soaked in water. I had to carry 40–50 buckets (...). We also received a lot of carrots, cows were given 30 kilos. We prepared it for the winter.*"<sup>29</sup> In addition, she worked on the kolkhoz fields, after a while she became a team leader, but did not receive salary for her work, only 150 grams of wheat every day. She also worked for three years in the village hospital as a cleaning woman.

In 1951 she got married. Her husband worked at the railway for a while, then he also joined the collective farm as well. They had three children. Her husband's mother did not approve their relationship, *„(...) my mother-in-law did not like me, but it did not matter to my husband, he wanted to marry me anyway. So we did not have a wedding party, only the two families were there, but later she liked me more (...).*"<sup>30</sup> With hard work, in 1957, they built their own house. At that time her husband began to drink alcohol, so Ilona had to do a lot of work. After many years of work, my interviewee became a strong and determined woman. Ilona K. retired in 1983, her husband in 1986, and he died two years later. This is what she said about the current situation in the country. *„I hear there's a war going on, you know that this is a big problem.*"<sup>31</sup>

*„THE WORLD WAS DIFFERENT"*<sup>32</sup>

My next interviewee, Rozalia S. was born on 17 February 1932, in a Protestant family. Her father was a farmer, her mother was a housewife. There were three siblings, two girls and a boy. Because of the war she studied at school for only five years. The family had ten acres of land, so they worked in the fields from their childhood. *„They put us on the wagon, and we went to the field to work, this*

<sup>27</sup> Ilona K. (Date and place: 30 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>28</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: Telepítéspolitika. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 252.

<sup>29</sup> Ilona K. (Date and place: 30 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bányú).

is how we grew up.”<sup>33</sup> Her father had a limp foot, which is why he was not taken to the army during the 1944 deportations.

The outbreak of World War II brought a critical period to the lives of almost all Transcarpathian Hungarian families. This is how Rozalia S. recalls the occupation of Chop „It lasted more than two weeks. There were battles around the town, and every night they came and sent 3–4 soldiers into every house, and we had to give them food and drinks, wash their boots, dry their clothes. They kept coming to our house as well.”<sup>34</sup> At the time of the bombings everybody went into the bunkers. „At four o’clock people left their houses and went to the shelters (...). We took everything with us, my mother put our clothes, documents and everything necessary in a bag. In the middle there was a large space, and we lay or sat around it next to each other. This went on until the occupation of Chop was finished.”<sup>35</sup> During the liberation of Transcarpathia the occupation of Chop turned out to be a difficult task, the city was strong, three hundred soldiers from the Ukrainian special troop No.17 lost their lives here.<sup>36</sup>

The Russian occupation is still a vivid event in the memories of the eyewitnesses: „(...) we were looking out of the window when the Russian soldiers came, we had to give them bags, they went to the attic and took whatever they wanted. We couldn’t do anything about it. They wanted to take our cow, but the three children began to cry, my brother embraced the cow’s neck and started yelling, one of the Russian soldiers was so sorry for him, so they didn’t take it. There were good people among them as well, just like in modern times: there are good people and there are bad people.”<sup>37</sup>

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Transcarpathian villages underwent a complete transformation. The state restricted, and later completely abolished the private property. In 1946 there were only two kolkhoz farms in the area, however, by the beginning of 1950 this number increased to 532, they included 82% of the country farms and 84% of the agricultural lands.<sup>38</sup> This is how Rozália S. recalls the confiscation of the private lands and agricultural goods: „The kolkhoz was established, everyone had to give their lands, the crops, all the equipment, they took everything. Everything had to be given away; we were making some money in the kolkhoz, that was all we had.”<sup>39</sup> The father of my interviewee died in 1948 when she was only 16 years old, since her brothers were

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: Kárpátalja kérdése op. cit. 215.

<sup>37</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bányú).

<sup>38</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: Mezőgazdaság. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 277.

<sup>39</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bányú).

younger, she had to help her mother support the family: „*My mother and I worked hard; she was the farmer and the housekeeper as well.*”<sup>40</sup>

People who were unwilling to give their property to the kolkhoz, and were wealthier than the average, possessed more land and property were declared kulaks. Thousands of people were put on trial with no particular reason, and in most cases were sentenced to three years of imprisonment and confiscation.<sup>41</sup> My interviewee confirmed this fact: „*(...) my uncle was declared a kulak, he was the father of Éva Sz. He was imprisoned in the Mukachevo castle for eight years because he had a lot of land.*”<sup>42</sup>

From 1949 Rozália S. worked at the kolkhoz as well, she was digging, gathering the harvest, and after a while she became a team leader, „*(...) they said that if you have cleaned one hectare, you would receive three hundred kilograms of the crop. Every day we reaped 80 acres, at four o'clock we were already awake.*”<sup>43</sup> In 1952 she got married. Her husband was a tractor driver in the kolkhoz. From that year young Hungarian men were obliged to perform military service for three years.<sup>44</sup> My interviewee's husband was drafted into the army as well: „*(...) when Géza was taken to the army in 1952, they were gathering them in Szolyva, they took him to the army for three years. I had lived with him for only one month and two days as a wife.*”<sup>45</sup> During that time Rozália S. worked at various places. „*I worked in Berehove, just to earn money. There had been jobs available, I worked at a construction site, in the sewing factory, just to have money for living, because people were hardly paid by the farm: we received 200–250 grams of wheat.*”<sup>46</sup> After her husband returned, they had two daughters; she had worked only as a housewife since because her husband did not let her work.

Religion has always played a very important role in the life of Rozália S. At her older age she was a presbyter for eight years, and she was a cantor for eleven years. The atheism was the official state doctrine in the Soviet Union. There was strong atheist propaganda, in education as well. Priests were persecuted, churches were closed, and the property of the church was confiscated. In fact, the teachers at schools were obliged to tell schoolchildren the church was anti-scientific.<sup>47</sup> This is what interviewee said about the anti-church propaganda: „*I had proper Eucharist, 32 of us were born in 1932, we had the Eucharist given by the priest in 1946. My daughters told the catechism to the presbyters (...). There was a prohibition; they did not want the Church. Those who were the*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Csanádi Gy.: Sorsfordító évek iop. cit. 192–194.

<sup>42</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bátyú).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Molnár D. E.: A szovjet rendszer op. cit. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bátyú).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: Állam és egyház. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 287–288.



*members of Komsomol, or pioneers, communist party members were not allowed to get married in church. At the schools teachers gave worse grades to those who went to the church (...). Our church was never destroyed, but we weren't allowed to sing in the streets. Church bells were pulled only when somebody died, but the communists were not buried by priests.*<sup>48</sup>

The husband of Rozália S. died in 1991. Since her retirement she spends time with her grandchildren, takes part work of the local pensioners' club. For example, they established the local village museum where old tools, furniture, dishes, photos and other interesting objects are exhibited, which try to bring people closer to their history. The members of the pensioners' club choir perform at various events in the village. The interviewee ended her story with the following words: *„It was a different life then. Everything was different, but there were good things too. People understood each other better in the old times.*<sup>49</sup>

*„NOBODY CAN WISH TO ENDURE WHAT HAPPENED AT THOSE TIMES*<sup>50</sup>

Emma I. was born in 1934. Her family had been seriously affected by the war because her father was in the army for eight years, took part in the first and the second world war, besides he was taken away to the Samborsk camp in the autumn of 1944. Her mother was a housewife, was raising four children. About the difficult childhood she told: *„I had a difficult childhood, I don't even want to remember those times. I do not even like to think about it, because I was the eldest child in the family, and I did the hardest work (...). I was a very little girl, but I had to work. I went to the field to dig, gather beans, potatoes, helped the others.*<sup>51</sup>

The events of World War II live vividly in the memory Emma I.: *„(...) when the bell was ringing in the church, because that's where it was installed, everyone had to leave their houses. We had to leave the door open, and then we went to hide under the bridge. While we were under the bridge, a huge bomb was dropped nearby, and everybody was told to make a bunker in the yard at home, because a bombing was about to come.*<sup>52</sup> There wasn't a man in the house, so her mother dug the bunker herself, and the children helped her. They had a very hard time during their younger years: *„There were times at my young age when we had supper in the evening and in the morning we had no food in the house. Mother told us that we had nothing more to eat (...). Sometimes went to the fields to gather sunflower and other plants, we carried it on our backs. We put the*

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<sup>48</sup> Rozália S. (Date and place: 28 August 2014, Bányú).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

*plants to dry so that we could make a fire later. Such a miserable childhood we had.*"<sup>53</sup>

During World War II the Jewish people suffered the most in Transcarpathia. According to the 1941 census about 14% of the region's population, which is 115,908 people, belonged to the Israelite community. The territorial distribution of the Jews was mixed.<sup>54</sup> According to Emma there were many Jewish families in the village, many of them became victims of the deportations. This is how she recalls her memories: „*I was in the first grade when the Jews were taken away; I was sitting next to a Jewish girl. A man came to our class and asked who Mariska P. was. She was a little girl; they made her stand up and took her away.*"<sup>55</sup> The approximate number of deportees in Transcarpathia was around 85–87 thousand people, most of them were taken to the Auschwitz extermination camp.<sup>56</sup>

Emma I., just like the other two interviewees, identifies the beginning of the Soviet era with the entry of the Russian troops, this is how she remembers it: „*(...) when the Russians came, they cleared everything from the yard, collected everything from the attic, took away everything and left nothing.*"<sup>57</sup> After her father returned he started working at the kolkhoz. But the family's situation did not get better until the early 1950s, „*(...) great misery was then, they paid 26 rubles for pasturing the cattle, running through the village, through the railway, often barefoot because we did not have shoes. Oh, God save everyone from such a life, we also brought him lunch, prepared by our mother. Life was very difficult and it is hard to talk about it now (...).*"<sup>58</sup>

After the school years she began to work in the office of the village council. But she did not like to sit in the same place, nor did she like the other employees who were a lot older than she was, so with great difficulties, but she finally achieved that the president let her go from work. After that she had to study to become a tractor driver. At that time women's teams were organized, they were trained to become tractor drivers; in the soviet times women often had to do men's work. According to the historian Eszter Zsófia during the socialist period female tractor drivers were trained to become a symbolic example which was supposed to prove women of being equal with men and being able to perform the same work with the same performance.<sup>59</sup> My interviewee recalled this as follows: „*We studied and worked on tractors. There was an older woman, we worked as her assistants. And there was a large garage, they showed us all parts*

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> *Strak Tamás*: Holokauszt Kárpátalján. In: Kárpátalja 1919–2009 op. cit. 184–185.

<sup>55</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányó).

<sup>56</sup> *Strak T.*: Holokauszt op. cit. 190.

<sup>57</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányó).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Tóth Eszter Zsófia*: Kádár leányai. Nők a szocialista időszakban. Budapest 2010. 58.

*of the tractor in the cold garage, then the teacher explained everything, later we had to practice the repair work. Oh, I cried so much, and my mother cried with me, I never thought that I would have to do this kind of work at such a young age.*”<sup>60</sup> It is clear from the above passage that earlier it was not usual for women to do men’s work, the traditional female roles were the normal ones.

Emma I. got married in 1956. Her husband worked at the railway for forty years. During the school years it was mandatory for all students to enter the Komsomol youth organization, but getting married at the church was not allowed. The registration services, including birth, marriage and death entries were taken away from the Church and given to the public authorities. This made possible to perform the wedding ceremony outside the church.<sup>61</sup> This is what she told me about their wedding day: „(...) *there was no great feast, the brides went by foot along the street. There was accordion music, it was simple, but it was nice. I didn’t have a bouquet from shop, mine was made from peonies, the clothes were borrowed (...). When we got married, I was working at the village council. We signed the documents in the office, then went to the church, when we came back there was a large delegation in the front of the office. I told Pista that be something bad was about to happen because Komsomol members were not allowed to get married in church, but when we got there the first secretary of the Komsomol came to me, kissed me, and congratulated. I was relieved.*”<sup>62</sup>

After the marriage they managed to overcome the difficult financial circumstances. She worked at the sovkhhoz<sup>63</sup>: „*I worked there for four years, we had to take care of the crops, but it was good, because they paid for the work, so we could support the family.*”<sup>64</sup> The parents helped them to build their house. Meanwhile, their two children were born, but unfortunately only one of them survived to adulthood, which was a huge trauma in Emma’s life. Despite the difficult younger years, the child’s death, and later the death of her husband, she still works: „*Oh, it was a miserable, hard life, but it is over, thank to goodness, but at that time it was easier to find a job, unlike now, if somebody wants to work, they have to travel abroad.*”<sup>65</sup>

As a conclusion, we can say that radical changes have taken place in the life of Transcarpathia, in 1944 the entry of Soviet troops resulted in a new political, social and economic life in the region. It is important to note that during the Soviet era, people lived under the pressure of ideology, people could not speak openly about the changes, and in fact, it is not certain that the available written

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<sup>60</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>61</sup> *Oficinszkij R.*: Állam és egyház op. cit. 288.

<sup>62</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>63</sup> Sovkhhoz (Russian: szovjetszkoje hozjajsztvo–soviet agriculture) State-owned farms in the Soviet Union.

<sup>64</sup> Emma I. (Date and place: 1 September 2014, Bányú).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

sources give a true picture of the event of that time. But this era is extremely interesting, because one can talk to those people that lived during the period of communism. This study presents the lives of three Transcarpathian Hungarian women of the same generation. During the examination of their life stories a lot of similarities can be observed. What are the narrative interviews good for? These individual stories provide interesting and valuable information about past events, make history more colorful and combined with the official documents also make it easier to understand it.