

“From Uzhhorod there is a road” to Lemkovyna:
Music and Identity Among the Lemkos

By

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A thesis in John W. Draper Interdisciplinary Master’s Program in Humanities and Social
Thought submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Arts & Science in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at New York University

8/16/11

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Wooden cross, found at the site of the former Lemko village of Javirnyk (Jawornik), Sanok County, Podkarpackie Province, Poland. Photo credit Peter Szechynski.

<http://www.twojebieszczady.pl/aktualnosci/zjawornika.php>

“My Lemko woman,
My queen
Do you exist, my love,
Or maybe not?
Or perhaps indeed you wait for me
And look for me somewhere.”

-From the poem “My Lemko Woman” by Mykola Horbal’, translated into English by Helene Turkiewicz-Sanko (Turkiewicz-Sanko 1997, 49)

To a large extent then, a mountain is a mountain because of the part it plays in popular imagination. It may be hardly more than a hill but if it also has distinct individuality, or plays a more or less symbolic role to the people, it is likely to be rated a mountain by those who live about its base. (Peattie 1936, 4)

“My shirt is closer to me than my vest; my shirt may be crude, but it is still my own.”
-Aleksander Dukhnovych, Rusyn poet and father of the 19th century Rusyn national awakening, speaking candidly of the Rusyn identity crisis in Slovakia (Plishkova 2009, 35)

“O Lord Almighty! Let us not forget - not today, nor tomorrow, nor ever - and help us to keep alive in our memory all the beauty of the countryside, and of the mountains, and of the rich, healing, and pure waters in our rivers: the Bystryj, the Poprad, and the Sian; and let us also remember the beautiful and charming scenery of the high alpine pastures, and the woodland pathways through the hills; and let us not forget the abundant places in the forest where we picked mushrooms, and the fragrant strawberry, blackberry, blueberry, and raspberry fields, and the timberland clearings where the cattle grazed.”

-Lemko poet Katerina Rusyn, from her poem “The Prayer of a Lemko Woman”, translated into English by Stephan K. (Rusyn 2001, <http://www.lemko.org/religion/prayer/index.html>)

Through the words of Lewis Medlock, a survivalist enthusiast who is propelled by disgust with the flaccidity and meaninglessness of modern middle-class life and fear of civilization’s devolution in the aftermath of nuclear annihilation, [in *Deliverance* author James] Dickey suggests that there “may be something important in the hills”, a way of life that will be wiped out with the coming of the new dam. To Lewis (and Dickey), the mountain folks’ very backwardness and social isolation has allowed them to retain a physical and mental toughness and to preserve a code of commitment to family and king that has long ago been lost in the rush to a commodified existence. (Harkins 2004, 206-207)

“I Was, Am, and Will Remain a Rusyn (*Ja Rusyn byl, jesm’ i budu*).... But those of our brethren beyond the mountains are not strangers. The idea of the unity of Rus’ is in all our hearts.” -- Aleksander Dukhnovych (quoted in Mysanyc 1993, 49)

It’s said that the times are changing. Borders around us shift under the pressure of the war; places we have known for as long as we can remember are called by new names.... (Foer 2002, 254)

<i>Ot Ungvara drazhka ide</i>	From Uzhhorod there is a road
<i>Strom kolo ney sadeni</i>	and there a tree is planted.
<i>Sadila ho moya frayeerechka</i>	It was planted by my girlfriend,
<i>Hey yak ya poshov do voyni</i>	oh, when I left for the war.
<i>Ya do voyni, z voyni nazad,</i>	I went to the war, and returned,
<i>mila sya te otdala.</i>	my dear one did not marry another.
<i>Dyakuyem ti moya frayirechka</i>	Thanks to you my dear girlfriend,
<i>Hey zhe ti za mnov chekala.</i>	Oh, you waited for me.

-Text selection from the traditional Carpatho-Rusyn song “From Uzhhorod there is a road”, featured on the Kruzhhok recording - "ZASPEEVAYMEH" - "LETS SING", copyright Jerry Jumba, 1993
<http://www.lemko.org/lih/music/kruzhhoks.html#OT%20UNGVARA>)

Introduction

John Boorman's 1972 film version of James Dickey's book and screenplay *Deliverance* made an indelible impression on generations of filmgoers. The basic premise finds four comfortably middle-class American South city dwellers planning a canoe adventure in the Georgia mountains. The ostensible leader of the little band, Lewis Medlock, an Atlanta Davy Crockett or Daniel Boone of sorts, wants to see the Cahulawassee River and the surrounding countryside before it disappears under the guise of progress and a new dam:

ED (gestures toward mountains): What's the life like up there, now? I mean, before you set up the post-H-bomb Kingdom Come?

LEWIS (smiling indulgently): Probably not too much different from what it's liable to be then. Some hunting and a lot of screwing and a little farming. Some whiskey-making. There's a lot of music, it's practically coming out of the trees. Everybody plays something: the guitar, the banjo, the autoharp, the spoons, the dulcimer. I'll be disappointed if Drew doesn't get to hear some of that stuff while we're up here. These are good people, Ed. But they're awfully clannish, they're set in their ways. They'll do what they want to do, no matter what.... Up here, people live with reality. And that matters, you can't tell me it doesn't.

ED: I'm not as sure about that as you are. Reality is pretty rough. Men have been trying to get away from it since the age of the caves.

LEWIS: That's their mistake. That's our mistake. You just wait. You'll see. The basic things are the big things. Every time I come up here, I believe it more. (Dickey 1972, 22-23)

When they arrive in the unspoiled wilderness, they are impressed with the beauty of their surroundings, yes, but quickly find the mountain people more than they bargained for. The film portrays the mountain natives as hopelessly backward at the least, and murdering rapists at the extreme. The innocent canoe trip turns into a race for survival. The mountains, the filmgoer is meant to understand, are dangerous. Enter at your own risk. In fact, you'd be better off forcibly

removing the highland denizens from their hovels and sanitizing the area... or flooding it entirely, wiping these treacherous hills and “hollers” from existence.

When I first viewed this film, I admit I found it compelling, although not as the cautionary tale the filmmakers may have intended. Readers of my project must understand, and perhaps must forgive me for being not only a scholar of mountains and mountain culture, but a descendent of mountaineers on both sides of my family. An early childhood spent in Tennessee’s Smoky Mountain foothills led me to see the mountains and the hardworking, hardscrabble people living in their shadows in a positive, if not wondrous light. Many years later, when I heard a Lemko cousin describe the Tennessee hills as similar to the undulating ridges of the Carpathian Beskids in Poland, I knew my course of study was clear – I must be a champion for mountains and mountain folk, and I must seek to understand negative portrayals of mountain folk, as seen in *Deliverance*.

Why are mountain people looked down upon in this way? Even the music of mountaineers can walk a fine line between beautiful and threatening to mainstream culture. In the journey of *Deliverance* from novel to screenplay to film, somewhere along the way was lost the beautiful guitar and banjo duet of the traditional song “Wildwood Flower” between Drew, the quietest and most thoughtful of the Atlanta quartet, and Lonnie, the albino mountain boy (Harkins 2004, 208). Instead, the film depicts the two musicians playfully alternating on the strains of “Duelling Banjos”, a 1964 record made in Portland, Oregon by Mike Russo and Ron Brentano (Dickey 1972, 28). Why change from a tender ballad, a true Southern ballad, first popularized by the Carter Family in the 1920s and 1930s and many other old-time and country musicians since, to such a fiercely virtuosic bluegrass song originally recorded in the Pacific Northwest, of all places?

The image of mountaineer as backward “hillbilly” is not a new one to popular culture, American or otherwise, as Anthony Harkins explores in his 2004 book *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. At times a threatening menace, at other times a clownish buffoon, the idea of mountain people as (usually white) other is a “construction both within and beyond the confines of American ‘whiteness’” (2004, 4). Harkins goes on to state that

“the hillbilly” served the dual and seemingly contradictory purposes of allowing the “mainstream”, or generally non-rural, middle-class white American audience to imagine a romanticized past, while simultaneously enabling that same audience to recommit itself to modernity by caricaturing the negative aspects of premodern uncivilized society. (ibid., 7)

This dichotomy between romanticization of and pitying the mountain folk is not only an American impulse. Zoila Mendoza’s 2008 study of the Peruvian *cuzqueno* mountaineers and how they became the champions of Peruvian culture, not just in Cuzco but abroad, is a good example of how the identity of the primitive *cholo*, when adopted by the intelligentsia “in an attempt to give it a positive connotation... convert(s) it into a symbol of pride in being a highlander (a *serrano*).” (6) She says this is an example of “folklorization” ... “whereby public forms of expression are selected as being representative of a whole region or nation and are staged and promoted as such.” (ibid.) The arts and music of the *cuzquenos* eventually became the officially sanctioned (whatever that may entail) folk culture of Peru itself, a phenomenon which Mendoza asserts aids in the development of national and regional identities (ibid., 76) and even benefits a state-sanctioned development of tourism to the mountain area, which is a

strategy used by other developing countries, which hold spectacles that try – as a way of proving their modernity and to outline national identities – to establish a continuity between the past and what is believed to be a living cultural heritage, either in international events or in their places of origin. (Mendoza 2008, 67).

Further,

a key image of in this neo-Indianist proposal of a regional and a national identity was that of the rebellious and bohemian *gorilazo* or *waylachu*, whose artistic skills, closely connected to the landscape and the land, were worthy of admiration and imitation. (ibid., 100)

So, if Lewis Medlock idealized the North Georgia mountaineers as being inherently musical in their own backward way, and the *Mision Peruana de Arte Incaica* (Peruvian Mission of Incaic Art) picked representatives from the Andean mountains near Cuzco to embark on a South American cultural tour (Mendoza 2008, 18), what does this say for the identity of the mountain people? Who determines their identity? In both of these instances, as well as in the 1965 Soviet film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058642>), which paints an idyllic portrait of the Hutsuls, a group of Rusyns living in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine – it seems as if the lowland majority creates an identity for the mountain minority. The film idealizes the true, pure love of the young protagonists Ivan and Marichka, while at the same time portrays the feuding villagers as something of a curiosity - Marichka's father killed Ivan's father. In her essay about Rusyns portrayed in cinema, Patricia Krafcik offers an excellent analysis of the pastoral, yet primal nature of the film:

Several elements in Paradzhanov's *Shadows* help convey an image of Rusyns as a peasant/pastoral people who love song and drink, possess strong emotions and a special bond with nature, and although they are Eastern Christians, they are wedded to their pagan past. These elements include the mountain landscape, wooden churches, the singing of traditional and authentic congregational plainchant, the forlorn wail of the *trembita* or Carpathian alpine horn, the eerie chopping sound of the mysterious and preternatural "invisible ax" (Rubchak, 51), genuine folk dances performed by ordinary locals, genuine folk customs connected with Christmas and fertility, a sorcerer, a witch, a young woman Marichka, who is in touch with other worlds, the use of the Rusyn language (here the Hutsul dialect), and a soundtrack rich in authentic folk music. The Rusyns are presented as a people inhabiting a distant corner of Europe, far away in the hoary Carpathians and, as an opening text on the screen proclaiming "forsaken by God and man." They have little or no contact with people outside their mountain world.

(Krafcik 2009, 237)

Like the North Georgia mountaineers encountered by Lewis Medlock and his friends, these Carpathian villagers walk a fine line for the film viewer between quaint oddity to marvel at and bogeyman to fear. Why? What is it about mountain cultures that are also minority cultures that inspire so much conflict for lowlanders? Who determines identity- the group in question, or an outside group with more power? How can seemingly marginalized mountain cultures create and nurture a sense of identity, a sense of a group Self, perhaps even a sense of their own nation, when seemingly insurmountable difficulties are stacked up against them?

Postmodern cultural theorists have a lot to say regarding the origins of nations and nationalist thought. Benedict Anderson, in his famous *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (2006, 6) The community and/or nation is imagined in the sense that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (ibid) While I agree with Anderson for the most part, I believe mountain cultures are faced with innate problems, geography being highest on the list, as evidenced in this quote by Christopher Boehm:

While unruly tribesmen inhabiting the higher ground may be a nuisance and may occasionally cause a more serious problem, they may also serve as a useful buffer between competing empires or nations that prefer not to share frontiers directly. (1984, 32)

The political marginality of mountain areas thus creates a problem for their communal and community imaginings. If lowlanders in distant political centers imagine mountaineers’

communities for them, the mountain people are faced with a dilemma: do they assimilate into the lowland culture or state, or do they keep their allegiance amongst themselves?

In his 2009 book *The Art of Not Being Governed*, James C. Scott describes his scholarship on the area of Southeast Asia he calls “Zomia”, the boundaries of which roughly cover the highland regions of several countries. Scott’s work explores the relationships between many different tribes of “Zomians” and the rulers of lowland cultures adjacent to them. He quotes the Vietnamese emperor Minh Mang, speaking in the early nineteenth century about his highland counterparts:

This land [of the Jarai and the Rhade] is a distant and remote place. It is a land in which they tie knots in strings to keep records. It is a land in which people make swidden fields and harvest rice for a living and a land in which the customs are *still* archaic and simple. However, their heads have hair, their mouths have teeth, and they have been endowed with innate knowledge and ability by nature. Therefore, why should they not do virtuous things. Because of this, my illustrious ancestors brought the civilization of the Chinese to them in order to change their tribal customs. (Scott 2009, 117)

The mountainous areas of Minh Mang’s realm have become a charity case. The emperor views these people as noble savages - residents of the innocent mountain paradise the lowlanders have imagined for them – and yet worthy of coercion towards entering the “proper” culture. But why should the Zomians submit quietly? Often times, then mountain areas become borderlands to fight over, and, according to Don Funnell and Romola Parish, “it is in this situation that political marginalization becomes a critical issue as, having, once been relatively autonomous, these territories find themselves subject to extractive economic activity and often suffocating legislation” (2001, 222) such as the building of a dam which would wipe out mountaineers’ livelihoods and their very homes? Or, lacking the physical nature of water flooding mountain valleys, government-sponsored legislation such what came to be known as the *Akcja Wisla*

(Vistula Operation) in Poland, which essentially made it a crime for the gentle Carpathian highlanders known as Lemkos to exist as they had for many centuries? “In this way, the Lemko dilemma would disappear, since the answer to the question of national identity - Rusyn, Lemko, or Ukrainian? – would be: Pole.” (Duc’-Fajfer 1993, 95) I’ve now approached my ultimate topic for this paper: the Carpathian mountain minority population nominally known as Lemkos or Lemko Rusyns, the group self-identity of whom I will explore through the lens of culture and specifically music. But, let me pose a few more questions first.

In his 1986 article “Of Other Spaces”, Michel Foucault imagines a new sort of place, or community if you will, to borrow Anderson’s term. He contrasts the dreamlike utopia, or “[site] with no real place” (24) with what he calls a “heterotopia”, a real place that is yet “outside of all places.” (ibid) Using Foucault’s logic, we can imagine any number of heterotopias in Western society. To me, however, these dream spaces of Foucault’s are too safe, too sanitized. What about the dream spaces of a minority culture? What about a mountain borderland, for instance? Perhaps the lowlanders perceive of the mountains as a heterotopia, a beautiful space for them to escape to, with its luxuriously “rustic” ski lodges or “quaint” old-time cultural museums. All the while the lowlanders completely ignore what is really going on the mountains- often extreme instances of cultural isolation, marginalization, and even ostracization.

So I turn now to Ngai Pun’s take on Foucault’s term. Pun invents the term “dyscape”, a “dystopian landscape” “which implies too much pure imagination, and thus unreal when it juxtaposes to utopia.... the term, dyscape is a kind of ‘spatial real’, too real to be accepted in any mapping of domination.” (2002) Lowlanders cannot impose a dyscape on the mountains; instead perhaps they dream of a very utopia that can never exist. Do the mountaineers create their own dyscape? Pun goes on to describe the dyscape further, suggesting the emphasis on

a kind of spatial form that is always there, though with its unpleasant presence. It is a kind of spatial form the state never wants to see, wants them [to] exist, and yet fails to remove them. (ibid)

The state fails to remove the dyscape! The lowland majority, cannot fully understand, cannot fully imagine what really goes on in the mountains. The mountain culture will live on, clinging stubbornly to the slopes of the hills and crags like mountain laurel in the North Georgia mountains or *chervona ruta* (red rue) in the Carpathians (Wanner 1996, 153). Back to Pun: “[the dyscape] is a minor scale of resistance and always political[ly] contested, making the technology of domination always a dream, if not a lie, for the state, and revealing the most [rich] of everyday practices.” (2002)

Thus, mountain traditions will continue. Perhaps we can apply historian Eric Hobsbawm’s term “invented tradition” to this tenacity of spirit:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (1983, 1)

Placing Pun’s dyscape in a mountain region, a borderland, “politically contested” to the core, would those mountain peoples revel in their invented traditions because the state wanted to use them as an example of a continuous, quaint “folk” culture? Would the mountaineers silence their traditions to appease the dominant force of the ruling regime? Or, perhaps, would both of these situations occur diachronically, with the mountaineers finally celebrating their own ways, which they have perpetuated all along, possibly in secret, as they concurrently invent new traditions which are meant to rediscover a sense of continuity the mountaineers may have lost?

Turning back to my topic at hand, the Carpatho-Rusyn mountain people most commonly known as Lemkos, my answer to this final question is: yes. I must state at the outset that as a scholar, I feel a great deal of unease imposing any sort of arguments upon an academic study of a group of people, especially a group with a history of subordination and oppression like the Lemkos. I'd like to think of my approach like gazing through a stained glass window versus peering into a microscope. A microscope focuses light directly upon an object on a slide, in order for the scientist to pick apart every minute detail of the object in an inherently ordered and rational way. Objects seen through stained glass are not so clear, rather, each hue and shade of the glass combined with the scattering of the light gives the object a sense of warmth, a glow, impossible to achieve with a microscope. My goal here is to see the Lemkos through stained glass.

In this paper I will trace the identity formation of the Lemkos from the outside in, starting first with a brief historical introduction to the Lemkos, in both their traditional Carpathian homeland and in diaspora. I will pay careful attention to Lemkovyna as mountain borderland, and how that influenced and shaped Lemko cultural identity and any lowlanders' perceived notions of Lemko-as-hillbilly. A discussion on Lemko identity is not complete without mentioning issues of religion and language; at different times and in different places throughout history, Lemkos called themselves different things depending on what religion they practiced or what language they spoke or thought they spoke, be it Lemko, Rusyn, Ukrainian, Russian, or something else. I will touch on developments in the 1990s in Slovakia, where a literary Rusyn language was officially recognized for the first time, and explore any influence that may have on neighboring Poland, if that development had affected the treatment of Lemkos by the government, the perpetrators of the *Akcja Wisla* that removed the Lemkos from Lemkovyna. I

will finally summarize outsiders' points of view on the Lemkos by mentioning different ethnic names used for the Lemkos themselves, such as Lemko, Rusyn, Lemko Rusyn, Rusnak, Carpatho-Rusyn, Carpatho-Russian, Ukrainian, Russian, Pole, etc., and delve into the power a name can hold on self-identity.

Having explored how Lemkos are seen and defined by others, the final crux of my paper will combine all of the aforementioned elements in order to examine how Lemkos define themselves through their traditional music and song. In her essay "Continuity and Change in Eastern and Central European Traditional Music", Anna Czekanowska introduces my thoughts on this matter quite well:

Ethnicity is based on existing myths that are not always the result of historical events but are rather the result of programs imposed by dominant authorities that also refer to history... As research shows, the preservation of tradition is often influenced by myths that refer to an idealized past, especially when this past was lost involuntarily – for example, the result of enforced displacement or the imposition of new political borders. The mythologizing of the past, resulting in a cherishing of a particular traditional repertoire, can be observed among Polish communities outside Poland. . . This can also be seen among the Ukrainian, Ruthenian, and Lemke communities in Poland, which were subjected to enforced resettlement in 1946-47 (Taraskiewicz 1996). In both cases, the past – lost involuntarily and irretrievably – becomes a mythic sphere referred to and idealized, and the preservation of cultural elements with which people wish to identify becomes a primary imperative. (1996, 95)

To me, Czekanowska hearkens back to Hobsbawm with this quote- sometimes the "invented tradition" becomes the very glue which will hold a society together in spite of unspeakable odds. In this paper, then, I will examine Lemko songs which may do just that-songs which idealize the Carpathian homeland which they have lost and songs which celebrate a Lemko or Rusyn identity which they may have been raised knowing next to nothing about, but which gives them a sense of pride and fosters a sense of self once they do learn of it. Robert Carl Metil, in his musical

study of the Rusyns of Slovakia, theorizes that music there has become the vehicle through which Rusyns express their identity:

The attraction of song as a marker of Rusnak identity clearly supersedes other elements of a formerly more compelling metanarrative-based identity complex, such as their adherence to eastern-rite forms of Christianity (i.e. Greek Catholic and Orthodox), their use of Cyrillic orthography, and even their notion of homeland or their attachment to the fixity of their domiciles in and below the sprawling Carpathian Mountain region of the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland (formerly a provincial hinterland of the Austro-Hungarian empire that bordered the tsarist Russian empire (2004, 102)

Have Lemkos become their songs, as Metil proposes is the case for their Rusyn brothers in Slovakia? I'm not sure, although perhaps readers of this study can come to that conclusion if they wish. Ultimately, in this paper I hope to prove that, although they may be the marginalized residents of a mountain dyscape, Lemko music is an indicator of a strong sense of self which they have developed in spite of all that is allayed against them. I am thus reminded of the three elements that comprise Roderick Peattie's definition of a mountain:

Mountains should be impressive.
Mountains should enter into the imagination of the people who live in their shadow.
They should have individuality. (1936; quoted in Funnell and Parish 2001, 3)

Hopefully, in this short paper I can convince the reader that, like the hills and ridges of their Carpathian homeland of Lemkovyna, the Lemkos are impressive. The Lemkos, and whatever it might mean to be "Lemko," enter into the imaginations of themselves and others. Above all else, like the highlanders they are, the Lemkos are true individuals worthy of recognition and respect from others.

Who are the Lemkos?: Lemko Rusyns and their history

Lemko identity today can be professed at various levels: ethnic, sub-ethnic, and what I

shall term... sub-sub-ethnic. Whatever the level, the identity is closely tied to the group's territorial homeland in the Carpathians. (Hann 2009, 175)

Of all Rusyns, the Lemkos had the most difficult recent past, since between 1945 and 1947, almost the entire population (about 180,000) was resettled to the Soviet Ukraine or deported to the far western regions of Poland, in particular Silesia. Although about 10,000 to 15,000 managed to return from Western Poland to their Carpathian villages in the 1960s and 1970s, it was mainly among a dispersed “immigrant” population living “abroad”, (i.e., in Western Poland) that questions began to be raised in public in the 1980s about the groups’ national identity and about its lost Carpathian homeland. (Rusinko 2009, 7)

Lemko identity may come to mean little more than occasional trips to grandfather’s village, a noisy weekend at a festival, and perhaps more or less token observance of certain religious holidays within the family. This is not *nothing*, but it is quite different from what, say, belonging to the Ukrainian minority in interwar Poland meant for the members of that minority at that point in time. I am suggesting that being Lemko in today’s conditions is only a small part of a more complex set of social identities. The irony is that more people may readily acknowledge this identity now than recognized it in the past, when their Lemko-ness “objectively” permeated everything they did but was “invisible”, and they had no clearly articulated group consciousness. (Hann 2009, 184)



Map illustrating the extent of the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland, circa 1910. Traditionally, main Lemko settlement stretched along the far western spine of the Carpathians along the Polish/Slovakian borderland, from the area around the Poprad River in the west to the Oslava River in the east. <http://www.carpatho-rusyn.org/map.jpg>

Who are the Lemkos? Almost every statement about this group, including the assumption that they constitute a group at all, can be contested. However, the term is used in what is now quite a substantial body of literature to describe a population which lived in a 100 kilometer-long section of the northern side of the Carpathians between the rivers Poprad and Oslawa. From the Middle Ages this territory belonged to the Polish state. Between 1772 and 1918 it was governed from Vienna as part of the Hapsburg province of Galicia. In terms of language and religion, this population was clearly separated by a boundary that remained stable over several centuries from its neighbors to the north and west, who were mostly Roman Catholics and spoke some dialect of Polish. To the south, across the ridge of the Carpathians and to the east, the boundary was not obvious at all. These latter neighbors, like the population that concerns us here, followed the Eastern Christian tradition and spoke East Slavic dialects. (Hann 2009, 177)

In his 2008 article, “How the Rusyns Could Save Civilization”, Chris Potter wrote candidly about the Carpatho-Rusyn population of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the surrounding region. This area of western Pennsylvania was a very popular draw for immigrants from the mountainous Austrian/Hungarian borderlands (an area which I will soon define as “Lemkovyna”) at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, as many were able to find mining work. The descendants of these immigrants that Potter spoke with, while very proud of their heritage, were often found the identity that they chose for themselves caused conflict among other Eastern European immigrants, who told these mountaineers that the nation-state in which one was born, or where one’s ancestors were born, dictated nationality and thus any sense of national identity. While these Pittsburgh Rusyns could not escape this conflict issuing out of their very existence, Potter asserts that the “Rusyns lack territory, or an army to defend it. What they *do* have is culture.” He goes on to discuss Rusyn radio programs, dance and music festivals, and the work of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, an organization headquartered in nearby Munhall, Pennsylvania (2008).

The Rusyns/Lemkos *have* culture. The Rusyns have retained their culture throughout the years of conflict, forced and voluntary (e)migrations, and general isolation. To speak further of

Rusyn culture in Pittsburgh, one can go no farther than to mention Pittsburgh's favorite Rusyn son, Andy Warhol. The Warhola family, Lemko Rusyns from the Presov Region of Slovakia, near Medzilaborce, instilled in their son a deep appreciation for their Byzantine Catholic faith and the folk traditions carried with them from the old country. In Raymond Herbenick's study on the Rusyn influence in Warhol's art, the author quotes Professor Paul Robert Magocsi: "What is surprising to some people is that Warhol, a man very much part of the secular and flamboyant world of New York fashion and art, never gave up his family or religious ties." (Herbenick 1997, 8) I won't go into much detail into the artist's life here, but it is easy to note that, although Warhol was inwardly proud of his Rusyn heritage, this pride didn't always manifest itself outwardly- "despite Andy's growing recognition of his ethnic and religious roots, he never did fully feel comfortable with them." (ibid, 76) Could this be a general trait illustrating the dilemma of a stateless people? A question of "choose your own identity", if you will?

In "Rusnak Song, Tattoos on Concrete, the Lethal Function of Narrative, and the Metaphor of Skin for Identity in Eastern Slovakia", Robert Carl Metil mentions Andy Warhol and the idea that the artist may have been uncomfortable in his Rusyn "skin", leading him to lead one life when with his mother, and quite another at The Factory in New York City. Rusyns, according to Metil, have to wear different "skins" according to whom they are dealing with:

It is clear that any conscious individual or psyche can and naturally does manifest a variety of manifold identities or aspects of self, including social, ethnic, national, linguistic, occupational and kinship. The Rusnaks' case forefronts ethnonational and ethnolinguistic pluripotentiality and multivalency in average experience, and pluripotentiality and multivalency itself becomes a constituent of their identity in a way unlike that of neighboring and more dominant ethnic groups. (Metil 2004, 105)

So why did Rusyns develop these unparalleled skills in adaptability regarding the course of identity formation? Why was Andy Warhol, and many other Lemko Rusyns before and since, so

skilled at wearing different “skins”? What about Father Alexis Toth, the priest who followed an arduous road from Slovakia to Minnesota to the hills of Western Pennsylvania, from Greek Catholicism to Russian Orthodoxy, to minister to the Rusyns of the Pittsburgh area? Father Toth

had the credentials to be identified as a Hungarian, Slovak, Rusyn, or Russian. Toth is the Magyar word meaning “Slovak”, yet he identified with the Rusyns until he converted to Orthodoxy. From then on he generally identified himself as a Russian but never severed his Slovak connections. (Dyrud 1992, 84)

So why did Rusyns like Warhol and Toth develop similar manifold crises of identity? I believe the beginnings of an understanding of this question can be gained through a study of Lemko/Rusyn history.

Clouds flow over the mountains – silently, like geese –
Over the mountains, over the forests from Carpathian Rus’:
From Tiachevo, Uzhhorod, through Humenne, Presov,
Friendly clouds flow to us with news from our people,
Further they go to Szczawnica, over the Tatras’ peaks,
Through Szlachtowa, Biala Woda – as far as Osturnia.
-From “Lemkovyna”, a poem by Lemko “nationalist” poet Ivan Rusenko (1890 – 1960)
(found in Horbal 2009, 149)

In her work on eighteenth century Carpatho-Rusyn chant tradition, Lenora Jean Cecelia DeCarlo introduces the subjects of her study by framing the unknown, even nebulous nature of their origins:

There have been Rusyn people inhabiting the southern slopes of the Carpathian mountains since the sixth century. They probably arrived there from Galicia, Volhynia, and Podolia during the great migrations of the Slavs. They lived on small plots of land in mountain villages, and their socioeconomic status varied little from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. Their home formed a borderland during the Middle Ages between the Hungarian kingdom and Galicia, and, from the earliest times to the present, has changed hands often, various parts of it having been ruled by Moravia, Hungary, Galicia, Austria, Poland, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Russia, the Soviet Union, and

Ukraine. (1998, 9-10)

DeCarlo is understandably vague about just how the ancestors of the Rusyns ended up in the Carpathians. As the Rusyns/Lemkos are a marginal border population, it is little wonder they focused on holding on to their small farm plots, in the face of ever-changing rulers in far-off capitals telling them how to define their citizenship.

Olena Duc'-Fajfer, in her article "The Lemkos in Poland", discusses prevailing scholarship on the origin of the Lemkos, citing three main schools of thought on the subject: Polish, Ukrainian, and Lemko, which are, of course, fitting categories for discourse on any Lemko topic, as they coincide with the three categories of self-identity professed by many Lemkos today. At any rate, according to Duc'-Fajfer, Polish scholars think that the Lemkos' ancestors came from a Vlach/Romanian orientation. Ukrainians posit that the Lemkos inhabited the farthest branch of territory of Kievan Rus', and therefore are Ukrainians like themselves. Lemko scholars, however, favor the idea that their ancestors were the fierce warriors the White Croats, whom,

in the seventh century... moved to the Balkans. The remainder [were] subjugated in the tenth century by Kievan Rus'. Although the subjugated tribe took the name Rusyn (Rusnak), its traces are still visible today in the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the western Rusyns." (Duc'-Fajfer 1993, 86)

This notion of "linguistic and cultural distinctiveness" is perhaps the clearest marker in the path to discovering the historical origins of the Lemkos. Bogdan Horbal, in his extensive work *Lemko Studies: A Handbook*, devotes an entire chapter to "Mediaeval Settlement" of the Carpathians, by the ancestors of the Lemkos (whomever they might have been), and the Germans, Poles, and other groups that had settled in the area beforehand. Horbal expands on the

aforementioned predominant theories of Lemko origin but wisely does not jump to any conclusions of his own, instead offering up a survey of previous work on the topic (Horbal 2010, 332-345).

Horbal, and many other scholars, find it more fruitful to attempt to define characteristics that set the Lemkos and their homeland apart from other Rusyns and from other surrounding peoples. Horbal traces the history of Lemkovyna through the various empires that have controlled the territory, from Poland from 1345 until the 1700s, when it became part of the Austrian province of Galicia. Lemkovyna returned to Poland after World War I, and Polish territory it has remained since, divided after 1999 between the Malopolskie and Podkarpackie palatinates (Horbal 2010, 43-47). Half-Hungarian, half-Subcarpathian Rusyn scholar Alexander Bonkalo discussed Lemkos and other Rusyn highlanders (*Verkhovyntsi*) as residents of the Hungarian borderland, or *gyepuelve* (Bonkalo 1990, 7). Lemkos, according to Bonkalo, were distinguished from the other *Verkhovyntsi*, the Hutsuls and Boikos, by their use of the word “*lem*” instead of the more usual Slavic word “*lysh*”, meaning “only” in either case (ibid., 77). Using the word “*lem*” distinguished the Lemko Rusyns from the neighboring Boiko Rusyns, who did not use this word in their speech, according to Olena Duc’-Fajfer. The signifier “Lemko” did not come into use to classify these Rusyns until the early 1800s. Before World War I, Lemkos generally referred to themselves as Rusyn or Rusnak. After the war, self-orientation gradually changed to “Ukrainian” or “Ukrainian from the Lemko Region” (Duc’-Fajfer 1993, 84). The international climate post-World War II led to the growth of a Ukrainophile orientation among Lemko immigrants abroad, stemming partly from the Soviets’ dissolution of the Greek Catholic church, which many Lemko and Ukrainian immigrants saw to be a rallying point for Ukrainian nationalism (Satzewich 2002, 42) (Magocsi 1993, 55).

Between the World Wars, the Lemkos in Poland and their Rusyn brethren in Slovakia both flirted with brief attempts at short-lived Rusyn republics. Both groups also came under the influence of various nationalist organizations at various times, post-World War I onward. Such organizations in the diaspora were especially important to the formation of Lemko and Rusyn nationalistic thought. According to Professor Paul Robert Magocsi, “some critics have gone so far as to declare sarcastically that as a distinct nationality Rusyns never existed in Europe but were simply made in America.” (1993, 164) Perhaps that is true for any group of immigrants such as the Lemkos/Rusyns. While in their homeland, experiencing unrest of some kind, they dream of a new world and a better life for their children. However, once they reach this new world, they band together and fondly remember their old homes.

“When I received these records from you I was as overjoyed as if a family member had come to visit me from Europe. I’ve been living in America for twenty-five years, and during this time, I have not heard the beloved sounds of our Lemko songs like the ones sung on the records. I have Ukrainian records and the Ukrainian wedding but what is foreign is not as precious. I prefer to hear my own song.” (Horbal 2009a, 269)

This quote is from a 1929 Lemko newsletter, in which reader Paraska Storoshko expresses her joy at hearing the songs from her youth in the old country. She has Stephen Shkimba (1885-1966) to thank- in 1926 he put together the first Lemko record, leading to a three year contract with Okeh Records, a label famous at the time for “race” records and what came to be known as “hillbilly” records- a seemingly perfect fit for the music of our Carpathian hillbillies! At the time records were labeled Lemko-Russian or Lemko-Ukrainian, depending on the orientation of the group that produced the record (ibid., 264-268). Storoshko was certainly not alone in her feelings of pride in her Lemko records. To Horbal,

folk music is not only an important part of the Lemko cultural tradition; it is also instrumental in creating and preserving a collective cultural identity. Music plays a large role in religious as well as secular holidays, and wherever Lemkos reside bands and

choirs proliferate... In the 1920s, Lemko immigrant circles engaged in various cultural activities, including the recording of Lemko music. (Horbal 2009a, 264)

I will look more closely at Lemko folk music later in this paper. This Rusyn love of singing, which was a part of their daily lives, according to Bonkalo (1990, 115), traveled well from the old world to the new, and thus added to the continuity of their group identity. Victor Satzewich finds close parallels with the Ukrainian diaspora community:

Women's organizations, youth organizations, choirs, orchestras, bands, dance ensembles and heritage schools for children were also an important part of the process by which the Ruthenian identity in America was transformed into a Ukrainian and American identity. (Satzewich 2002, 43)

Satzewich's work on the Ukrainian diaspora also demonstrates the various "waves" of immigrants travelling to the new world in different time periods. Lemko immigration also follows these "waves", especially since the lines between Ukrainian/Rusyn/Ruthenian/Russian identities were blurred as the boundaries of nations and empires changed over the years. The "first wave" of immigrants, mainly labor migrants, traveled to the US and Canada roughly from 1880-1914. The "second wave", labor migrants mixed with a few political refugees after World War I, lasted from approximately 1920-1930. The "third wave" of immigration, perhaps the most influential on diasporic identity formation, was made up of political refugees who made their way to North America between the years 1940-1954. Finally, the "fourth wave" of immigration began in the 1980s, as the Iron Curtain fell, and continues today. The fourth wave immigrants travel mainly for labor purposes (Satzewich 2002, 23).

During and immediately following World War II, the Lemko and Ukrainian populations of the Carpathians faced trial after trial. Many initially welcomed the German occupation of their homeland, as an alternative to the hated Soviet presence to the east. However, many of

these Slavs of various nationalities were conscripted to Germany as slave labor for munitions factories and other industrial sites. There they were known as *Ostarbeiters* (east workers) (Satzewich 2002, 91-93). The transition from Nazi work camps to Allied-controlled Displaced Persons camps found many former *Ostarbeiters* stuck with few appealing options. For many, especially those that were Lemkos, a return to their village would be impossible as their homes were destroyed and their families displaced. Those originally from Soviet Ukraine often faced deportation to Siberia. Many Lemkos, in turn, were sent to Soviet Ukraine, where they soon became “Ukrainians”, even to this day – Konstantin Dikan, a member of Ukraine’s Committee for Nationalities and Religions, assures all who will hear that all Rusyns are Ukrainians, and that Rusyn is a dead language (Russia Today film, 2009).

A lucky few Lemkos would find the opportunity to emigrate to the United States or Canada, where Lemkos and Ukrainians alike would often band together in support of a Ukrainian self-identity, which they had learned in the DP camps (ibid., 98), leading to the “formation of, and participation in organizations [which] were the means by which ethnic identity and ethnic group boundaries were developed and sustained in the North American diaspora after World War II.” (ibid., 108) American Ukrainian-oriented organizations such as the Yara Arts Society, Shevchenko Scientific Society, and the Ukrainian Institute of America (ibid., 130) came into prominence after the war, as did Lemko-based organizations such as the Lemko Association (*Stovaryshynia Lemkiv*) and the Union of Lemkos (*Ob’iednannia Lemkiv*) (Mihalsky 2009, 74). Many “third wave” Lemko immigrants to the United States and Canada, fleeing the nebulous uncertainty of German displaced persons camps or the precarious anxiety of existence in Communist Poland, came to identify more closely as Ukrainian, as many often settled in areas with established Ukrainian populations with recognized social networks such as

churches, schools, and fraternal organizations. What choice did they have? Perhaps identifying with the brave but downtrodden Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic appealed to the Lemkos who emigrated in the 1950s, especially considering the anti-Communist atmosphere in the United States at that time.

I shall turn back now to those Lemkos that remained in Poland. The Polish government, after the war, held an extremely negative opinion of all those they considered Ukrainian, due in part to both ancient animosities and suspicion of ongoing cooperation between Ukrainians and the UPA or Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrain'ska Povstan'ska Armiya*). The reorganizing of the region's borders didn't help either, according to Jan Steszewski: "The shift of [Poland]'s borders after World War II brought about an unprecedented scale of migration of expelled and displaced Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, and later the Lemko ethnic group." (204, 69) He also asserts that "being a minority is not a permanent position" (*ibid.*, 68) if the borders change. I'll add that being a minority can also change according to the official position of the government in charge.

So why then do the Poles find the Lemkos so backward, if not threatening? Ancient Polish animosity toward Ukrainians is not new and stems from the origins of Polish nationalism. It seems the borders in this part of the world are ever fluid – the Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was founded in 1795, which afforded the Poles a claim to a huge swath of land, including much of present day Ukraine, which "bas[ed] Polish nationalism on par excellence Polish ethnicity with its claims to all the territory of the former Commonwealth [and] disregarded the needs and political ambitions of the non-Polish speaking populaces." (Kamusella 2007, 138) Poles saw themselves as caretakers of this territory that must

be polonized. Shifting borders continued into the 20th century and into the 1930s, when the Polish government slowly began to sanction the polonization of minorities (ibid., 140).

In 1947 the Polish government undertook the so-called “Vistula Operation” (*Akcja Wisla*) which sought to replace the Ukrainian and Lemko populations of far eastern and southeastern Poland, especially those lands formerly part of the U.S.S.R., in favor of reclamation by ethnically Polish settlers. Those displaced were to be sent to the former German territories of Silesia and Pomerania, which were in turn “cleansed” of their German populations (Mihalsky 2009, 61). According to Maximilian Masley, the Polish government sought to curry favor among its citizens by removing any traces of perceived Ukrainian threat. Therefore, Ukrainian and Lemko minorities were to be essentially polonized. The crux of the *Akcja Wisla* took place from April through June 1947, during which the populations of entire villages were systematically rounded up for “deportation”, often given only a few hours to gather as many possessions as they could carry on the boxcars that would take them to their new “homes” in Silesia and Pomerania. Masley also points out the unfortunate irony that most trains of Ukrainian and Lemko deportees passed through the Jaworzno concentration camp, which had previously been used by the Nazis, for the forced labor of Polish Jews and other political prisoners and prisoners-of-war (Masley 2008).

There was no letter, no family matter
And by the castes we don't divide
It's just father told me tonight authorities
Preparing ethno-cleansing ride

Hey hey hey, na na na na
Preparing ethno-cleansing ride
Hey hey hey, na na na na
Preparing ethno-cleansing ride

Two helicopters with machine guns
Over the slums proudly will glide
So when the universes collide
Son, don't get caught on the wrong side!

Hey hey hey, na na na na....

(From "When Universes Collide", Gogol Bordello. Written by Oliver Charles, Thomas Gobena, Eugene Hutz, Oren Kaplan, Yuri Lemeshev, Sergey Ryabtsev, and Pedro Erazo Segovia. From the *Trans-Continental Hustle* CD. 2010)

Even after deportation and the ensuing struggle to adapt to alien territories and climates, the Lemkos faced lingering feelings of distrust and animosity from their Polish neighbors, which were apparently sanctioned by the Communist government. In 1958, Aleksander Slaw, a top party official, stated that "obviously every citizen of Poland belonging to a national minority has the right to declare his national preference, but must choose only from those identities recognized as 'nationalities'. Here we have to point out that there is no Lemko nationality." (Slaw 1958, quoted in Horbal 2009b, 152) For stateless minorities living within the confines of established nations, this is nothing new.

What is "home"? Where is "home"? Is "home" a place in the heart or a place on a map? If you ask these questions of a Lemko, you might get more than you bargained for – perhaps a tearful recounting of a tragic family history; perhaps an indignant dissertation on the innocence of the small, peaceful Lemko population, punctuated with a wave of the hand, a shake of the head, and a steely gaze. (Mihalsky 2009, 61)

It is little wonder that the Lemkos have experienced such crises of identity in the intervening years. Even in Poland today, they are faced with the challenge of "Polish nationalists . . . [who] see the rise of the Lemkos as a method of limiting the demographic size of the Ukrainian minority in Poland." (Kamusella 2007, 156) Is it now better to be Lemko than Ukrainian? The

Polish government essentially feigns wanting Lemko culture to be celebrated. I'll now look closer at some specific issues which have influenced the development of Lemko self-identity.



Lemko farm in reclaimed Prussian territory in the north of Poland, circa 1960. Life for the Lemkos appears to have been a mixture of a new location with a continuation of the old ways. Photo from the family collection of this author.

Help for the Lemkos cometh from the Carpathian hills? Mountains as identity signifiers

Lewis: These mountains. The whole thing's different. I mean the whole way of life and the terms you take it on.

Ed: What should I know about that?

Lewis: The trouble is, that you not only don't know anything about it, you don't want to know anything about it.

Ed: Why should I?

Lewis: Because, for the Lord's sake, there may be something important in the hills. More important than what we've got in town, anyway. (Dickey 1972, 19)

The new president of the [Galician-Russian Benevolent Society (*Galitsko-russkoe Blagotvoritel'noe Obshchestvo*)], A.S. Budilovich, gave a more factually oriented speech. He said that history did not record a time when the *Chervonaia Rus'* (Rus' in Galicia) were not culturally and ethnically in the Russian family. For 2,000 years the Carpathians have been the "holy mountains" of the Russian family. These *Chervonaia Rus'* have resisted every effort of their enemies (Tartars, Magyars, Poles, Germans, and Jews) to destroy their faith (Orthodox), but in recent centuries their religious and literary ties with Russia have been strengthened. (Dyrud 1992, 50)

I recall the film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* when I read this quote from Keith Dyrud, in which the author recounts a speech by the leader of a Russian-oriented organization in which he refers to Carpatho-Rusyns as "*Chervonaia Rus'*" and the Carpathian Mountains as an idealized Russian province. *Chervona Ruta*, or "red" rue, is associated with the festival of (*Ivan Kupalo* (Ukrainian) or *Sobitka* (Lemko), an ancient pagan Slavic fertility festival celebrated in midsummer, which was Christianized into the festival of St. John the Baptist (Mushynka). According to legend, "the mythical 'flower of fire' is said to bloom only then, and anyone brave enough can venture into the forest to search for it." The one that did would find luck in love and life (Gilchrist 2009, 155). How easy to picture Ivan, Marichka, and the other Hutsul villagers of the film taking part in such an idealized, even quaint ritual! Or, perhaps, how easy for Russians to picture them doing so!

Chervona Ruta as symbol of the "innocence" of the Carpathians continues to this day. Chernivtsi, Ukraine, in the southwestern Ukrainian region of Bukovina, near the Carpathian foothills, was the site of the *Chervona Ruta* music festival in 1989. The independent nation of Ukraine was a growing dream two short years away when, according to Catherine Wanner, the

“soccer stadium became the central town square as the “imagined community” of Ukrainians, at least for one night, was reified and celebrated in music and dance.” (1996, 140) It becomes easy to see that music can produce intense and visceral reactions in terms of nationalism and nationalist feeling at large-scale events such as this (ibid., 148).

If a flower from the Carpathians can provoke such strong sentiment for the entire nation of Ukraine, how does the natural environment of the mountains affect the residents of the mountains such as the Lemkos? In a collection of essays on the Appalachians, Allen Batteau cites an older (1956) work on mountain environments by Perry Miller, in which that author claims that nature is an “act of national self-definition.” (Batteau 1984, 96) This idyllic sense of mountain dwellers being closer to nature is a common thread in academic work on mountains. Don Funnell and Romola Parish discuss mountain environments and how they affect the groups that live in these areas, deciding that mountaineers hold their peaks in high regard due to a traditional sense of respect (2001, 114). Mountain cultures, often minority cultures by virtue of their isolated, even “hostile” location within larger nation-states, become known as bastions of traditional values and practices, and even stubborn personalities among their people (Brush 1984, 160). This marginality allows mountain groups to “remain distinct from other groups.” (Funnell and Parish 2001, 222) Later in their work, Funnell and Parish list reasons for this cultural distinctiveness to be preserved:

Mountains have long had sacred status to local cultures, high aesthetic value for visitors, and a growing recreational role.

[Mountains have] a highly diverse culture, traditional knowledge and livelihoods, language, arts, and religious beliefs are increasingly recognized as resources in their own right.

Mountains often form borderlands, marking boundaries or buffer zones between nations, and are also areas of conflict, tribal strongholds with a strong identity associated with access to land. (Funnell and Parish 2001, 309)

It is when this strong mountain identity is perceived as a threat to lowlanders that mountain cultures are persecuted and punished for merely existing as they have for generations. In

Anthony Harkins' work on the image of the "hillbilly" in Appalachian culture, he notes that

Beginning in the 1880s and accelerating rapidly in the 1890s... a strikingly different conception of the region developed – a notion that the people of the Southern Appalachian mountains (and eventually of the Southern mountains more generally) were not just out of step with but actually were a threat to civilization. (Harkins 2004, 34)

This, of course, sounds eerily like the Polish government's endorsement of the *Akcja Wisla* program to forcibly remove the Lemkos from the Carpathians. Similarly, for Funnell and Parish, they state that lowland governments believe that

From a socio-economic viewpoint, mountain areas are often marginal, posing accessibility problems, and have often been considered culturally 'backward'. Until relatively recently, many lowlanders held mountains in awe tinged with fear of the unknown. In all historical periods, they have been regions in which outcast groups have nurtured resistance to centralized state power. (Funnell and Parish 2001, 6)

In his foreword to the 1997 edition of James Watt Raine's seminal work on Appalachian mountaineers, *The Land of Saddle Bags: A Study of the Mountain People of Appalachia*, Dwight Billings discusses some of the prevailing scholarship on the mountain cultures of the southern United States. Among these ideas is Rodger Cunningham's equating of the notion of "Appalachianism" with Edward Said's famous theory of "Orientalism": both involve

a discourse of power, a way of seeing and talking about things which is conditioned by domination and which tends to perpetuate itself and to perpetuate that domination. [This discourse] is a way of organizing perceptions into a closed self-referential system which takes on a life of its own, shaping assumptions and perceptions even among those who are unaware of any motivation to oppress. (Billings 1997, xvii)

Orientalism, Appalachianism, Carpathianism, if you will... what effect do these isms have on mountain scholarship? Returning to Billings's essay, he discusses Richard Brodhead's further

ideas on this notion of “Appalachianism” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century

American writing, and what it might mean for scholars:

regionalist studies of the Appalachian hillbilly, the backwoods Hoosier, the New England rustic, the Creole, and the Southern Black served to acknowledge the increasing cultural and ethnic pluralism of fin de siècle America by bringing readers “within hearing distance of ‘the stranger within the land.’” (Billings 1997, xx)

In other words, does Billings believe Brodhead is making excuses for academia? By studying native Others, is that safer than studying the Others of a more exotic locale? Anthony Harkins might agree- to him, mountain people are traditionally portrayed as a white Other, a “construction both within and beyond the confines of American ‘whiteness.’” (2004, 4) Of course, the differences between the idealized hillbilly and the realities of mountain life are often immense. The films I discussed earlier are good examples of this. In Patricia Beaver’s “Appalachian Cultural Adaptations: An Overview”, she cites previous scholarship along these lines, concluding that any “backward” Other status placed upon mountaineers by outsiders, is, in fact, not their fault (1984, 91).

The Lemkos internalize the low Carpathian ridges and valleys of Lemkovyna as part of their self-identity, just as residents of the Appalachians do. In fact, the topography of the two regions is remarkably similar. The Northern Carpathian region encompassing Lemkovyna consists of three smaller ranges, from west to east: the Sadecki Beskid, the Low Beskid, and the most rugged Bieszczady peaks in the east (Horbal 2010, 61-62). No matter where Lemkos ended up, from Nazi labor camps to northern or western Poland after the *Akcja Wisla*, or even to North America, dreams of their mountain home followed them. In spite of the remoteness of their territory, Lemkos traversed the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathians with ease, and felt a sense of kinship with their Lemko/Rusyn brethren in what is now present-day Slovakia.

Many Lemko farmers traveled once a year to the Women's Fair in Krasny Brod to arrange marriages and even find brides: "If you want a husband, here I am, come to the priest" might have been a common utterance at the fairs, according to Alexander Bonkalo (1990, 83).



Detail of eastern Lemkovyna where the low Beskid range meets the Bieszczady, near the towns of Rzepedz and Komancza. The tributaries of the river Oslawa flow northward from the northern slopes of the mountains and eventually reach the river Vistula (Wisla). As the Beskid changes to the Bieszczady, Lemko settlements were fewer and farther between. Here we also approach the traditionally nebulous border between Lemko and Boiko territory.

Image from the SKPB Lublin website. <http://www.skpb.lublin.pl> Specifically <http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcTkdBsZJ3KcfHw76DgFScWSKrnJOc7wHOV3hmuICquB2xxU2jRThA&t=1>

Oy Odsi Hora/ Oh from here to the mountain

1.
Oy odsi hora, ol odsi druha,
/ mezhi tymi horon'kami
yasna ya zorya. /

2.
Ya sobi hadav, zeh zorya zoysla,
/ a to moya dyeevchinon'ka,
po vodoo peesla. /

3.
A ya za neyoo, yak za zoreyoo,
/ beelim beelim konichen'kom,
po nad vodoyoo. /

4.
Deevchino moya, napeey mee konya?
/ Ne napoyoo bo sya boyoo,
bo shchem ne tvoya. /

5.
Yak boodoo tvoya, napoyoo ti dva,
/ z stoodenen'koy kernichenki,
z novoho vedra. /

6.
A kon' vodoo pyeh, kopitami byeh,
/ vteekuy, vteekuy dyeevchinon'ko,
bo tya zabeeyeh. /

7.
Ked' mya zabiye, ta sya neh boyoo,
/ a ya svomoo milen'komoo,
konya napoyoo. /

1.
Oh from here to the mountain,
Oh from here to another,
between the mountains
the morning star is bright.

2.
I guess I see the morning star,
but there was the girl,
going to get water.

3.
I follow her like the morning star,
me with my white horse,
go along the stream.

4.
My dear girl, won't you give my
horse some water?
I cannot because I'm afraid,
I'm not yet yours.

5.
When I am yours, I'll water two,
from a cool stream,
with a new bucket.

6.
The horse drinks the water,
he strikes his hoof,
step away darling,
you could be killed.

7.
Even if he kills me, I'm not afraid,
and since you are my darling,
I will water the horse.

Finding love in the hills of Lemkovyna or in the words of the traditional song *Oy Odsi Hora*? Featured on the Kruzok recording - "ZASPEEVAYMEH" - "LETS SING", copyright Jerry Jumba, 1993.

<http://www.lemko.org/lih/music/kruzhoks.html#OY%20ODSI%20HORA>

Mountain land becomes borderland: Lemkos at the crossroads

As I mentioned earlier, mountain areas often become borderlands by nature of the remoteness of their territory. Lemkovyna as borderland was problematic in the formation of Lemko identity, due to its location at the crossroads of several empires, Austrian, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, German, etc., which lead to various groups of outsiders at various times imposing upon the residents whichever identity they saw fit. For the Lemkos themselves, they “have traditionally described themselves as Rus’ people/*rusky liude* or simply as Rusyns or Rusnaks. Under the influence of their own national and religious movements and those of their neighbors, the Lemkos have at various points in their history considered themselves or been considered by others to be Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, or Carpatho-Rusyn.” (Horbal 2010, 2-3)

The shifting borders of Eastern Europe in general have held much interest for historians and ethnographers. Kate Brown (2005), Adrian Ivakhiv (2006), and Anna Reid (2000) focused particularly on Ukraine and its changing western borders most particularly. To bring Poland and Lemkovyna into the mix, Anna Czekanowska has decided that the Polish/Ukrainian/Belarusian/Lithuanian border area

seems to be proper for studies on identity. This is not only due to a variety of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups living in this territory, nor to the isolation of this area located far from the basic cultural centres (Rome, Constantinople, Cracow, Kiev/Moscow). This border area is also interesting because of its complex social structure, which is evidently a consequence of the historically changeable subordination of culture to different policies of various governors in particular periods. (Czekanowska 2004, 21)

Slightly to the north, parallels can be drawn between Czekanowska’s ideas and with Arleta Nawrocka-Wysocka’s notions of the Polish province of Mazury as a borderland, mainly between Polish and German identities of within this former Prussian territory:

Mazury is today seen by the social sciences as a typical borderland. In sociology it is an area where different cultural influences cross. This happens under conditions of superiority or equality, but without destroying connections of national background..... Cultural identity (the sense of one's own ethnic, language and cultural individuality) and awareness are being formed at the crossing of different historical and national processes. Historical changes in inter-ethnic relationships between neighboring groups play an important part, too." (Nawrocka-Wysocka 2004, 247)

Above all, the point I take from both of these perspectives is this: the land itself never changes, only the borders do. I imagine this is why this area of the world is such a fascinating object of study for myself and for other scholars as well. The Lemko Rusyns, traditional residents of Carpathian Rus', seemingly keep their mountain dyscape with them no matter where they end up. Returning to Czekanowska,

Cultural identity moves frontiers and overcomes long distances. And it is music which unifies people best. People from this border area love to sing together, mostly in their beloved multipart way, which integrates the group. They also like to sing lyrical songs and ballads in praise of Nature, dealing with the nostalgia of seasonal moods and the mystical power of Nature. (Czekanowska 2004, 27)

These ties to the "mystical power of Nature" are little better expressed than in "Na Lemkovyni" ("In the Lemko Region") the poem by Ivan Rusenko, which has been adopted as the Lemko "national" anthem:

In the Lemko region, in the old country
Fir trees rustle-
A victorious song they sing
From Uzhhorod to Szczawnica:
Because in the Carpathians, today
A nation is resurrected! (quoted in Horbal 2009b, 148)

Христос воскрес! (Christ is Risen!): Religion as element of Lemko identity



Easter basket filled with traditional items waiting to be blessed outside of Sts Peter and Paul Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Auburn, NY, circa 1985. Lemko identity often became irrevocably tied to their house of worship, leading them to identify as Ukrainian or Byzantine (Catholic) or Russian (Orthodox) depending on the time and place, either at home in Lemkovyna or in the diaspora. Photo from the family collection of this author.

Immediately after the service, people return home to break the long fast with an Easter breakfast of consecrated or blessed food. The menu consists of boiled eggs, a variety of hot and cold meats, roast suckling pig, cheese, salads, horseradish and beet relish, and delectable Easter breads and pastries. The meal begins with an Easter grace, followed by a ceremonious serving of the blessed egg, which the elder head of the family divides into portions, one for each person, again with the greeting of Easter. This ritual symbolizes family unity and expresses hope for a happy and prosperous year until next Easter. (Shiplack 2001, 24)

The “border nature” of the Rusyns’ culture is most noticeable in their church. Their church has become the symbol of their existence. (Dyrud1992, 13)

Today’s fourth and fifth generations of former immigrants consider themselves to be Americans or Canadians of Carpatho-Rusyn origin and, as a rule, barely know their former native “Rusyn” language. They are united by either the Greek Catholic or the Orthodox “Rusyn” faiths, by their common descent, and by their desire to know at least something about the old country. (Mysanyc 1993, 49)

Rather than secularizing his religion or abandoning his identity, Andy [Warhol] leaves it all over the surfaces of his art work, invites art lovers to examine those surfaces to know his life and his work, and challenges them to decipher the roots of his very ethnic and very religious art work. Rather than dismiss the folk art of common everyday objects and the religious art of uncommon folks, he sanctifies both. (Herbenick 1997, 101)

In Byzantine and Slavonic religious art, the artist is meant to be anonymous- merely the medium through which God paints the picture or tirelessly reproduces the icons (Herbenick 1997, 65). Andy Warhol, the New York artist, at first glance, appears to be a figure completely antithetical to the usual stoic Lemko Rusyn persona. Dig deeper, however, into his diaries, and a different opinion may be formed. According to Raymond Herbenick, the diaries

indicate[d] that Andy persevered in his peasant-like religious faith and practices. This in turn propelled him to consider anew his ethnic roots by way of continuing family ties, an interest in ethnic identities, the need to be noticed, documentation of his being noticed, and the use of proverbs as cultural markers. (Herbenick 1997, 70)

After all, couldn't the repeated images of the tomato soup cans and of Marilyn Monroe, be viewed as examples of the iconography of a postmodern, post-religious generation? It remains hard to construe Warhol's exact intended meaning of his works, but one can be sure that the time spent making *pysanky* (Easter eggs) in his family's basement while growing up in Pittsburgh certainly influenced the artist throughout his life.

Religion was and is so important to Lemkos that it, in some instances, became an identity and not just a marker of identity. Depending on the time and place, in their homeland and in the diaspora, when asked for their ethnicity, a Lemko may answer "Byzantine Catholic" or Slavonic. These, of course, are religious terms which are mostly meaningless in quantification of an ethnic identity (Magocsi 1993a, 171), but as we have already seen, God and the land are the two things that the Lemkos hold most dear. Even when their land is taken from them or they are forced to leave, their faith becomes a rallying point around which to hold on to their Lemko identity.

Christianity was believed to have been brought to the Slavs in the ninth century by Saints Cyril and Methodius (Horbal 2010, 238). The new religion consequently "influenced the social life and institutions of the Eastern Slavs, their cultural and literary traditions and the formation

and development of their languages” (DeCarlo 1998, 11) such as Church Slavonic. In many instances, Christian practices were melded together with existing folk rites tied to worshipping Nature and the “ancestors”. On occasion, according to Petr Bogatyrev, folk rites continue uninhibited:

Often the Christian rite and the folk rite, far from being in conflict, reinforce one another. Thus, the Christian rites performed during a feast give it more solemnity and thereby confer greater authority on the folk rites performed at the same time. One can find an even more intimate merging: folk rites having nothing in common with Christianity are sometimes taken for Christian rites. (Bogatyrev 1998, 32)

It is not my intention to go into great detail on Lemko religious celebrations here, but it is easy to see how a twelve course meal on Christmas Eve could come to represent both the twelve apostles of Christ and the twelve months of the lunar year (Tracz 2005) or how the ancient pagan patterns carefully etched onto *pysanky* at Eastertide could be brought to the nearest church to be blessed by the priest without a second thought (Wolynetz et al. 2005).

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a great deal of religious turmoil throughout Europe. The Carpathians were not excluded. Rulers of Slavic lands in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth feared the spread of Roman Catholicism on one hand, and disturbing loyalty to Orthodoxy on the other. Between the Union of Brest in 1595 and the Union of Uzhhorod in 1646, a Byzantine Greek Catholic church was created and solidified, combining Orthodox ritual with loyalty to the Pope of Rome:

The union of Uzhhorod marked the beginning of a long process of liturgical inculturation, in which Byzantine-rite Rusyns both struggled against and embraced traditions from Roman Catholicism that were introduced into their liturgical practice (DeCarlo 1998, 24).

How did the Lemkos react to the conflict within their churches? Lenora Jean Cecelia DeCarlo ponders this question in her work on Carpatho-Rusyn chant traditions:

The religious struggle between Orthodoxy and Catholicism had more to do with the powers involved than with any specific religious questions. Carpatho-Rusyn parishioners were relatively indifferent until Roman-rite influences began encroaching on their church calendar and liturgy. The chant itself resisted change probably because it was so ingrained in the culture. (DeCarlo 1998, 36-37)

Congregational chant singing became ingrained in the minds of Rusyn children from an early age because church cantors were often the only teacher available for the village youth (ibid., 38).

Chant would follow Rusyns/Lemkos to the diaspora, no matter the denominational name on the outside of their church building (ibid., 80).

Religious conflict in the nineteenth and twentieth century diaspora movement of Lemkos was often tied in to the availability of priests and the size of potential congregations. It often took years to build a large enough population of immigrants to warrant a priest being sent from the old country. During that time, Lemkos would be forced to attend Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches- whatever would be available to them. In consequence, self-identity markers often changed from Lemko or Ukrainian to Polish or Russian, whatever the case may have been. Lemkos in the United States often found themselves growing weary of all the political maneuvering- many Lemko Rusyns lived in close proximity to their Subcarpathian Rusyn kindred, which was their first exposure to any idea of “Ukraine” or Ukrainian nationalism (Dyrud 1992, 58).

All these new cultural forces had a confusing effect on the Rusyn immigrants who would have been bewildered and lost in the new country even if they knew who they were. As millions of immigrants before them, the Rusyns wished to recreate something familiar that would remind them of the comforting security of the “old country”. The Church – their church – was the institution that could provide a social, cultural, and spiritual center for their lives much as it had in Europe. It was because those peasant immigrants wished to reconstruct their heritage that they got caught up in the arguments over cultural identity that were being disputed among the intellectuals in their homelands. (Dyrud 1992, 58)

The development of competing fraternal organizations sponsored by different denominations didn't help the average Lemko's identity confusion. For those Lemkos who found themselves in the Orthodox fold and under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Mutual Aid Society, they had the president of the society from 1907-1910, Benedict Turkevich, to thank for this dictum:

“Members of the Society must be completely Orthodox brothers without other nationality (*bez' drugikh narodnostci*).” (Dyrud 1992, 75) While it was likely that many Lemkos, never having had a state of their own nor understanding terms like “Ukraine”, “Poland”, or “Slovakia” that were as yet distant dreams of the future, found it comfortable and comforting to self-identify solely with a religion – God and the mountains were their constants, after all – there surely must have been confusion when asked for their ethnicity by outsiders. Conflict around the formation of a settled Greek Catholic Church in the new world continued

after 1907, when the Greek rite was established and the Pope had appointed a Galician bishop, most of the conversions to Orthodoxy came from the Subcarpathian Rusyns. The appointment of a Galician bishop was not reassuring to the Subcarpathians, but the accompanying decrees, which the bishop was to enforce, threatened the familiar details of their tradition – details that the Orthodox Church left intact. (Dyrud 1992, 106)

It is little wonder then, that among the Lemkos in the United States, many of those who attended a Ukrainian Greek Catholic church, eventually came to identify as Ukrainians. Lemkos who converted to Russian Orthodoxy often called themselves Russians. Identities of those who attended mixed Byzantine Catholic Churches could range from Lemko to Rusyn to Carpatho-Rusyn to Slavic to Byzantine, with many variants in between.

The “old country” was not without its share of religious conflict in the tumultuous twentieth century. A Rusyn movement gained prominence in Poland in the 1930s, which had among its goals

to encourage the further development of Lemko-Rusyn ethnic identity on one hand, and to eliminate Ukrainian influences in the region on the other. These goals were to be achieved through: (1) the introduction of Lemko vernacular in schools and publications; (2) the immediate establishment of a Lemko Greek Catholic eparchy, separate from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Eparchy of Przemyśl; and (3) the removal from the region of priests and teachers who advocated a Ukrainian position. (Horbal 2009b, 147-148)

While the 1930s may have been the nascent beginnings of the Polish Rusyn movement, a Lemko eparchy was not to materialize. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic church in all its variants was effectively liquidated after World War II and the Lemko population was removed from the Carpathians, as I discussed earlier. The quest for a unified “Polish” identity certainly went hand-in-hand with a quest for unity of religion among Polish citizens. Lemkos in the reclaimed Prussian territories were often forced to become Roman Catholics, while those who were deported to the U.S.S.R. had Orthodoxy forced upon them. Meanwhile, many former *Ostarbeiters* and displaced persons who immigrated to the United States after the war began to identify closely as Ukrainian, in sympathy with the lost Byzantine/Greek church in their homeland. Ukraine as a cause began to be very attractive to the Lemkos in the United States, during the anti-Communist fervor of the 1950s.

Does the language make the nation(al group)? Lemkos and the quest for a vernacular

The quest for a standardized, literary language is closely tied to the quest for a Lemko identity. Much has been written on this similar quest among the Rusyns of Slovakia:

The right to use a given vernacular as the literary language of a nationality arises from more than merely linguistic evidence. Not even the best linguistic evidence could convince the Rusyns, or any other people, that they are or that they are not the nationality they think or feel themselves to be. Rusyns could hardly be convinced that they are

Ukrainians simply because the etymological *o* and *e* in Proto-Slavic closed syllables changed into *i* as had happened in Ukrainian.... As the Polish historian Andrzej Zieba has said, the decisive factor in the existence of an ethnic group is its consciousness, a sense of internal unity, solidarity in its relationships to the other groups, the existence of its own traditions, and its own interpretation of its historical language, that is, all factors which are usually described as being subjective in nature. (Vanko 2000, 12-13)

Upon the final legislative codification of a literary Rusyn language in Slovakia on January 27, 1995 (Magocsi 1996, 70), the question raised is this: if a cultural or national group doesn't have a written language, can the argument for its unique identity be presented to others? That, of course, is ultimately a fundamental Rusyn/Lemko problem, and a problem relative to any nationalist movement, as "questions of nationality and language are closely connected and constitute a relationship which is explicitly manifested in the revival process. A national awakening or revival cannot develop fully without the resolution of the concomitant language problem." (Plishkova 2009, 3) How can this "language problem" be resolved? Perhaps the answer lies in religious education.

The use of the written Rusyn language in any official written milieu was first developed for religious purposes, especially in the Greek Catholic seminary at Uzhhorod in the late eighteenth century. Bishop Andrij Bacynskyj was a huge proponent of Rusyn in religious education, benefiting mainly from the rule of the Austrian empress at the time, Maria Theresa, who worked to control the degree of power held over the Galician population by the Polish landlords. Consequently, "schools were allowed to teach students in the local language." (DeCarlo 1998, 34) In Slovakia, Ioann Kutka's 1797 *Bukvar' (Primer)*, was the first book for schoolchildren which was printed entirely in Rusyn (Plishkova 2009, 18).

By the mid-1800s, with religious instruction and education of the young at least partly in the Rusyn vernacular, the way was paved for the flowering of the Rusyn literary national

awakening, led by priest-poet Aleksander Dukhnovych (ibid., 20). Rusyn intelligentsia of the time vacillated between Russian, Ukrainian, and Rusyn orientations (ibid., 46) - much like the immigrants in the new world which I discussed earlier, one's identity often depended on which fraternal organization one belonged to. One of the most important not just in Slovakia but throughout the reach of the Carpatho-Rusyn world was the Society of St. Basil the Great, a religious order founded in Uzhhorod in 1866 and dedicated to promoting the written Rusyn language, culminating in the *Svit (The Light)* and *Novyi Svit (The New Light)* newspapers (ibid., 28-29).

The Rusyn/Ukrainian/Russian orientation war in Slovakia continued into the twentieth century, when the Rusyn question was effectively closed under Communism and a program of forced Ukrainianization. According to the government, Rusyns didn't exist, because they were not an officially recognized national minority (ibid., 73). Rusyn language proponents went underground, slowly emerging after 1989 and the fall of communism. The Aleksander Dukhnovych Theater (formerly the Ukrainian National Theater) began performing plays and musical concerts in Rusyn in the early 1990s. According to Anna Plishkova, "people who love Rusyn folksongs often learn the language thanks to direct linguistic contact with the music and lyrics." (ibid., 89) Although the Rusyn language was officially recognized by the government in 1995 and Rusyn arts and literature have blossomed since that time, Plishkova believes that

there is little doubt that contemporary Rusyn literature in Slovakia would be able to boast a much higher artistic level if it were not for the conflicting linguistic orientations resulting from political influences of neighboring countries. (Plishkova 2009, 117)

We have returned to the same problem- Rusyns/Lemkos do not have their own nation, therefore they aren't a "real" ethnicity with a "real" language and a "real" body of literature.

Back in Poland with the Lemkos, we still find similar issues. Although literary Lemko, the scholarship of which is centered at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, is slightly different than the literary Rusyn as codified in Slovakia in 1995, Polish Lemkos are faced with similar problems. There have been inroads into the teaching of Lemko in public schools, but to this day there are still more Ukrainian-language classes than Lemko-language classes. Thus, there is still a higher percentage of Lemkos who identify as Ukrainian in Poland than there are of Lemkos who identify as Lemko. To Christopher Hann, this can be solved by an outside, unbiased organization like UNESCO or the European Union stepping in to declare that the Lemkos have a stand-alone ethnic identity (Hann 2009, 182). Then, the Lemkos would truly *become* Lemkos, from culture to language to a “Lemko” box to check on the census form.

Would a Lemko by any other name still be a Rusyn?

Identification as Lemko, or as Lemko-Ukrainian, or Lemko-Rusyn, or Lemko-Rusyn-Ukrainian expresses a form of cultural identity, but it is not necessarily of much social significance. It opens up positive ties of sentiment to a picturesque territory and to other people who share one’s origins there, without thereby becoming a major form of social identity. (Hann 2009, 186)

I have now examined Lemko history and many of the key elements which play a role in the formation of Lemko identity: mountains, borderland, religion, and language. Before I examine a few traditional songs that express some of these elements, I shall look briefly at the terms which Lemkos have used to identify themselves over the years. To Christopher Hann, there are three main types and a few minor types of identity signifiers among Lemkos:

There are those who say that they are Ukrainians; there are those who say that they are Lemkos; and there are those who say that they are both Lemkos and Ukrainians. To

these may be added several additional options, thanks to the promotion of Rusyn, or Carpatho-Rusyn, as an intermediate level of identity by new group[s] of intellectuals, both inside and outside the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland... It is probably the case that, within each one of [these groups], more adherents live outside the homeland than have returned to it. It may also be the case that the number of descendants of the original population who have entirely lost their East Slav identification is larger than all of these groups combined. (Hann 2009, 178)

“Descendants of the original population... entirely lost their East Slav identification.” Hann raises an interesting point, especially pertinent to the Lemko population in the United States and Canada. It is very possible, in fact, that some of these people have no idea that they are Lemkos, because their parents had no idea that *they* were Lemkos, and so on and so forth. Hann cites 1930s ethnographer Roman Reinfuss’s study on Lemko identity (or lack thereof). Even as late as the 1930s, Lemko villagers often professed “highly local identities” rather than grandiose national or ethnic ones (ibid., 179). After all, we have seen that it was perhaps easier for Lemkos to identify as Byzantine or Greek Catholic than Lemko or Rusyn. Why wouldn’t it be easier still to identify solely as a Greek Catholic resident of Javirnyk or Komancza? After all, many Lemkos simply wanted to be left alone on their hillsides with their little plots of land.

“Today I am like that lost sheep. I have nothing. I had one God, and they took him from me; I had my nationality, and they took it from me, too; I had my little piece of land, and they took this from me. Everything that I once had – everything – they have taken from me.” - an anonymous Slovak Rusyn villager lamenting forced Ukrainianization in 1968 (quoted in Plishkova 2009, 70-71)

Lemko identity idealized through song

In “The Problem of Cultural Borders in the History of Ethnic Groups: The Yugoslav Rusyns”, Ljubomir Medjesi makes an excellent argument for the power of culture to dictate

ethnic and national identity, as I hope I will have done by the end of this paper. I'm reminded of Hobsbawm's "invented traditions" when I ponder this quote by Medjesi:

what categorizes or differentiates one ethnic group from another? What determines the degree of a group's ethnic identity? Identification with a common territory, language, culture, origin, history, and political beliefs have been seen as characteristic of ethnic groups. The sense of separate identity both reinforces and determines the degree of retention of ethnicity among individuals and groups. The experience of group members in interpersonal and societal relationships constitutes a history of the group. Continuity of a culture and aspirations for its development grow out of the ongoing interactions of individual and group actions, in particular with regard to their use of the same language and residence in a given territory, as well as their efforts for survival and progress. Customs are created in which there is a strict adherence to norms developed and accepted by the given society. (Medjesi 1993, 139-141)

While the Lemkos' political situation has been precarious at many times throughout their history, it has been their culture that has remained strong. Returning to Anthony Harkins's work on the "hillbilly" as Appalachian cultural figure, he likens the hillbilly as a means for Americans to "use popular culture to define personal and national identity and to help come to terms with the ambiguities in their own lives in a rapidly evolving society." (2004, 221) Professional practitioners of culture, such as musicians, have always been especially sensitive regarding the hillbilly label: "while recognizing the term's derisive connotations, they also warily adopted the label as a marker of personal and cultural pride that reflected their sense of divided identity between a rural past and the industrial present." (ibid., 72) I imagine that Lemko musicians must feel exactly the same way.

Old man: Lonnie don't know nothing but banjo-pickin'. He ain't never been to school. When he was little he used to sit out in the yard and beat on a lard-can with a stick. (Dickey 1972, 28)

“Traditional music was a glue that bound people to each other and deepened their attachment for a given place on earth.” (Dahlig 2004, 80) How can we unpack this statement regarding the Lemkos? They are certainly the victims of an identity war. In spite of all the conflict going on around them through the years, among outside forces trying to dictate their identity and among their own intelligentsia trying to settle on an identity, music has been a constant throughout. For example, *koljadky* (winter carols) have been sung since pagan times, but since the dawn of Christianity have taken on a Christian orientation and “a principle motif [of] the expression of wishes for the prosperity of all the members of the family, which aligns these songs with the magical actions intended to bring about the well-being of the master of the house.” (Bogatyrev 1998, 45) *Koljadky* are meant to bring blessings on the house during a time of celebration. No identity conflict in sight.

Timothy Cooley (1999 and 2005) and Piotr Dahlig (2004) explored this idea regarding the Tatra Mountain region of Spisz along the Poland/Slovakia border, to the immediate west of Lemkovyna. Dahlig brings up a musical metaphor – “polyphony” – when describing the musical and cultural life of Spisz:

The social, ethnic, and religious conglomerate precluded the development of a collective identity. Some historians, describing the past ethnic structure of Spisz, introduce a musical metaphor – “polyphony”. The term polyphony can be applied to minority-majority relations, although “polyphony” could mean also “compartmentalization” of ethnic, or, especially, social groups. (Dahlig 2004, 76-77)

What about the Lemkos? Do they look to eschew national or group identity labels through song?

Robert Carl Metil might agree:

While most Rusnaks are skeptical though tolerant of their activist intelligentsia on a personal level, they are decidedly uncomfortable with and eschew nationalist characterizations of their Rusnak identity, which is instead conceived within the domain of “narrative knowledge” (Lyotard 1984) and transmitted through narrations such as song

performances. (Metil 2004, 100)

Perhaps now I can reach an answer to the Lemkos' fundamental identity problem. Lemkovyna as happy Carpathian dyscape supersedes all identity crises. Let them sing about their idealized mountain borderland home instead, whether or not they currently reside there.

Day zhe Bozhe Dobriy chas/ Dear God grant good times

<p>1. Dear God grant good times, as we are your people, make it so for us. In a happy hour we will make the family happy.</p> <p>(Refrain) Oy nu nu, oy nu nu. We will make the family happy.</p> <p>2. You girls with the boys, stand in a row near us. In a happy hour, we will make the family happy.</p> <p>(Refrain)</p> <p>3. Let the rich worry where they will put their money. Although I am not rich, I will not perish. I'll make the family happy.</p> <p>(Refrain)</p> <p>4. So let us all stand in a circle and sing happily, and a happy hour,</p>	<p>1. Day zhe Bozhe dobriy chas, Yak u lyudey, tak i v nas. Ee v shchaslivu hodinu, Rozveselim rodinu!</p> <p>(Pripeev) / Oy noo noo, Oy noo noo, Rozveselim rodinoo! /</p> <p>2. Vi deevchata z khloptsyami, Postavayte v ryad z nami, Ee v shchaslivu hodinu, Rozveselim rodinu.</p> <p>(Speevayte Pripeev)</p> <p>3. Nay zhurit'sya bohatiy, De podeeye dookati. Ya khoch beedniy ne z'hinu, Rozveselyu rodinoo!</p> <p>(Speevayte Preepeev)</p> <p>4. / Ee tak vstan'me vsee v kolo, Zaspeevayme veselo, Ee v shchaslivu hodinu, Rozveselim rodinu!</p>
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will make the family happy.

(Refrain)

(Speevayte Pripeev)

“Dear God grant good times” of simplicity with my family and friends, in my simple mountain home. Featured on the Kruzok recording - "ZASPEEVAYMEH" - "LETS SING", copyright Jerry Jumba, 1993.
<<http://www.lemko.org/lih/music/kruzok.html#DEAR%20GOD%20GRANT%20GOOD%20TIMES>>

“Dear God grant good times” is a prototypical Lemko song celebrating the values of hard work and family values. If Lemkos are as musical in their daily lives as Alexander Bonkalo would have one believe (Bonkalo 1990, 83 and 115), this song would be a good example.

Mam Ya Zhenoo V Yevropye / I have a wife in Europe

1.
Mam ya zhenoo Yevropeh, Yevropeh,
nich neh robit lem bandurki kopleh
/ Kopleh, kopleh, ta ee visipuyeh,
a od muzha novinoo neh chuyeh. *I*

2.
A yak ona novinoo uchula,
vshitko sobee do poryadkoo dala.
/ Sama seela na vranoho konya,
eedoo k tobey moozhoo na kray morya.

1.
I have a wife in Europe,
She knows no work, except to dig out potatoes.
She digs them out and digs them out,
and also delivers,
and of her husband she hears no news.

2. As soon as she heard news,
she put everything in order.
She mounted a (adj.) horse,
I'm coming to you my husband on the land near the sea.

“I have a wife in Europe”... the Lemko immigrant’s lament? Featured on the Kruzok recording -
"ZASPEEVAYMEH" - "LETS SING", copyright Jerry Jumba, 1993.
<http://www.lemko.org/lih/music/kruzok.html#MAM%20YA%20ZHENOO>

“I have a wife in Europe” recalls the loneliness every labor migrant feels in the new world, while his family remains in the old country. Perhaps the husband knows that life in Lemkovyna is hard, and he eagerly awaits the company of his wife so that they might create a new life together. Or, perhaps he views this particular faraway wife as a tie to the old country which he does not want!

Podkarpatskiyee Rusini/ Subcarpathian Rusins Awake From Your Sleep

Text by Reverend Alexander Duchnovich

Podkarpatskiyee Rusiny,
ostavteh hloobokiy sone,
narodniy holos zovet vas.
Ne zabood'teh o svoyeem.
Nash narod, nash narod lyoobimiy,
da budet, da budet svobodniy.

Ot nehoda otdalitsya,
ne priyateley burya.
Da positit spravedlivost',
Uzh ee Rus'koye plemya.

/ Zhelyaneeyeh Rooskikh vozhd,
Rooskikh da zhivet narod.
Mi prosim vse vyzhnyaho,
da poderzhit Ruskaho,
ee dast veeka, dast veeka loochshoho,
dast vika, i dast veeka loochshoho. /

(text by Rev. Alexander Dukhnovich)

Subcarpathian Rusins,
wake up from your sleep.

The voice of the people calls you.
Do not forget your own.
Let our loving people live in freedom.
Let the storm of the enemy distance
itself from our nation.
Let the truth finally prevail
in the Rusin family.
The Rusin leaders wish that the
Rusin people will live.
We all implore God high above
to support the Rusins,
and give them a better century.

“Subcarpathian Rusins Awake From Your Sleep” – stop dreaming of nationhood and endeavor to make it a reality, says nationalist poet Aleksander Dukhnovich. Featured on the Kruzok recording - "ZASPEEVAYMEH" - "LET'S SING", copyright Jerry Jumba, 1993.

<http://www.lemko.org/lih/music/kruzok.html#PODKARPADSKIYEE%20RUSINI>

“Subcarpathian Rusins Awake From Your Sleep” is the eloquent call to nationhood by Aleksander Dukhnovich, the father of Rusyn nationalism in Slovakia. This song/poem is of course still relevant to Polish Lemko Rusyns. Dukhnovich implores all Carpatho-Rusyns to canvas the support of “God high above” in their worthy quest for nationhood. Perhaps he has in mind a God residing high above the Carpathian hillsides, or perhaps I read too much into a gently poetic phrase. No matter. The power of the song’s words is easily felt.

Conclusions/Personal Reflections

In Cathy Black's 2008 article on Jerzy Starzynski and his dance company *Kyczera*, and the work he has done to foster a sense of pride among Polish Lemkos in their heritage, she recounts one incredibly moving performance in which *Kyczera* staged a performance of a traditional Lemko wedding:

In this version, rather than having the wedding party exit the home of the bride to make its way to the church, Starzynski had each of his dancers transform in slow motion into a tableau to signify that something ominous was about to occur... and [then] there began to appear on a screen behind the dancers a series of visual images of traditional Lemko homes, wooden churches, and everyday life from bygone days in the Carpathian Mountains. Then came the Vistula Operation images, masses of people trekking to the transport trains that would take them from their beloved mountains to distant unknown lands, followed by the images of Lemko individuals – real people whose lives would be and were changed forever. Accompanying the visual images was an extremely moving narration chronicling the many examples of genocide, not only in Poland but throughout the world during the entire twentieth century, beseeching that the twenty-first century become one of healing, acceptance, and love. (Black 2008, 6)

For me, as a Lemko scholar and a scholar who is a Lemko, it is heartening to know that artists like Starzynski are out there fighting for their beliefs and for the acknowledgement of their people as a viable and vibrant group with beautiful traditions, worthy of existence.

Within the confines of the scope of this paper, I realize I have barely scratched the surface of Lemko cultural identity as expressed through music and song. I hope to have, at least, introduced the reader to a group of people I feel passionate about and to open the door for further study by myself and other. For, yes, I am a Lemko. I had never heard the term until I was an undergraduate researching the folk song tradition of Ukraine, what I assumed to be my heritage, because that's what I had been told since I was old enough to understand what heritage meant.

During my research, I came across a small book of “Lemko” folk songs in the library, paged through it, and thought little about it after that.

Throughout my graduate studies, as my passion for the ethnomusicological study of the music of this corner of the world grew, so did I begin to suspect this supposed Ukrainian identity of mine. My grandparents, both *Ostarbeiters*, met and married in a displaced persons camp in Munich, Germany. Through a lucky loophole a few years later, they were able to emigrate to the United States, their two young children in tow. However, they did this at the price of never returning to their Polish homeland – Polish! – and never seeing many family members again, aside from a few here and there who could visit briefly. Two of his brothers were able to follow my grandfather over within the next twenty years - two brothers who remembered being forced to leave their village of Javirnyk in the middle of the night, to board a train north to the unknown.

“We’re Ukrainian! Not Polish! After all, the borders have changed so many times throughout the years....”

That is true. The borders have changed. But the land did not. The Lemkos were removed from their homeland by the Nazis. What nationality did their German papers tell them they were? Ukrainian. What established house of worship awaited them in the small upstate New York city in which they would find themselves starting a new life? A Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

The Lemkos were also removed from their homeland by the Polish government. Why? Because they were Lemkos. What were they not? Polish. What could they now choose not to be? Lemkos. So much violence, so much suffering to inflict on others simply because they were born something different than you, they check a different identity box than you do. Ukraine, that

land of melancholy poets and expansive steppes seemed a better choice of national allegiance. Never mind that that land is not your own. It is little wonder that I became Ukrainian by virtue of events that happened and choices that were made before I was born.

It is so easy for scholars to remain ensconced in the ivory tower of academia, at a safe distance from their subjects, calmly making sanitized arguments about the validity of their theories du jour. Am I doing my family a disservice by safely offering up theories of my own, without ever having seen Lemkovyna for myself? Perhaps. However, it is my hope that I have opened a call for activism for the Lemko cause, for myself and others. I have long been a lover of the calm a mountain vista brings to my soul, without ever really knowing why. Perhaps somewhere, at the depths of my being, I understand Rusenko's poem - "because in the Carpathians, today a nation is resurrected."

Ja Rusyn byl, jesm' i budu.

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