

“Ties That Matter the Most”. Family Connections in Memory of the Transcarpathian Village Community

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This article explores the importance of family and personal connections through a model of informal economy present in a post-soviet, Transcarpathian (Ukrainian) village setting. I examine this informal economy through village residents' narratives of a politically turbulent past that I collected during my research. Specifically, the memory of the past they recall and share draws on their capacities to adapt to successive regimes and crises throughout the socialist and post-socialist periods. This adaptive capacity is particularly observable in how the homegrown agency of two local family networks during these periods are remembered and commemorated in the community as examples of resilience. The collective memory of these family networks transcends the non-economic, and comprises a local-historical moral anchoring of their choices and activities, one which forms a rationale that continues to act as an incentive for the villagers' ongoing engagement in a model of informal economy. Further, it remains available as a significant resource that villagers use to emphasise and explain the moral grounding of their current economic lives.

This study is based on long-term ethnographic research, and utilises predominantly anthropological theories of the study of memory, socioeconomic transformation as well as various models of informal economy. My work explores here how familial and communal narratives of the past, and physical and public commemorations, shape local perceptions of the perceived and performed (moral) value of people's economies. I suggest the reason that both family networks (and their past agency) that I focus on here are remembered so intensively is that this remembering depicts the family connections as more than an effective means to pursue economic and material advantage. Indeed, such remembrance is connected to a shared notion of socialisation that in turn informs an economic model of rural community, perceived by my respondents as traditional in this village's setting.

Key words: family, people's economy, memory, socialism, post-socialism, Transcarpathia, Ukraine

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Introduction

This anthropological study centres on a village community in Transcarpathian Ukraine that borders the Schengen area with Slovakia.¹ It focuses on how family connections have shaped local accommodations to some of the major transitions and crises that altered the course of the twentieth century. In particular, I present the power of family connections as a dominant motif in the generational memory of life under state socialism and in the early post-socialist period. By analysing various "deeper" layers of local memory, and by adding to usually vague villagers' remembrances of the conditions of everyday life during this period of history, I explain the value of the family connections. Through three generations of family recollection, I chart the moral value that these connections bear for villagers and for their model of economy and socialisation.

Remembering and commemoration take on various forms (communal, family, or personal accounts on the past; at public events and at physical sites in the village). Each form illustrates local accounts of actual instances of adaptations to past transitions and crises. Prominent in these events are accounts of the agency of the two significant local family networks who were particularly active in local politics and in the sphere of the informal economy during the socialist and post-socialist periods. In particular, the exemplary agency of both family networks highlights their adaptability to early-socialist policies of collectivisation and to the Greek Catholic Church being made illegal. Remembrances of both adaptations draws one's attention to the specific moral value of family, and connections to the family, that the community emphasises. This emphasis on the moral in memorial actions suggests that remembering such connections sustains an essential, value-based position within the remembered notions of the people's economy (called *selyans'ke zhyttya*, Ukr. for "peasants' life").² Linking value and agency, then, enables the community to explain and legitimate its long-term, ongoing reliance on an informal economy that includes widely-used acts of favouring,³ or cross-border strategies. The local memory of past adaptations, through a solidarity-based practice of favouring, bears the positive value

1 Throughout the article I anonymise names of the village, my informants, and family networks in order to protect their identities.

2 This local term was originally introduced in Butko (2023).

3 Favours are termed *posluhi* in Ukrainian.

of cooperation within and between local families. It has been deemed to be of importance to villagers who use this memory to explain their reliance on a model of economy that is rendered “authentic” or “traditional” by them in terms of their rural community. Such morally significant practices are furthermore often remembered as being facilitated by these two family networks from within the operation of state institutions, that is, using the state apparatus, instead of opposing it, an adaptation particularly powerful during the socialist years.

My theoretical approach to the study of memory in the setting of this post-socialist village is grounded in a frame of the family connections that bear crucial value in people’s economic life. Having set the scene for this framing, I lay out the methods and data I rely on here. I then focus on regional and historical contexts of macro-structural change, with particular attention to the socialist policies of collectivisation and the banning of the Greek Catholic Church. I provide a description of people’s economies extant in the researched village community and I sketch the trajectory of people’s livelihoods throughout the upheavals of the twentieth century. I then delve into an analysis of villagers’ memories of local adaptation to Soviet period policies, in which the agency of two local family networks represents a dominant element in that remembering. I move then onto two sections that depict acts of remembering that capture later examples of network agency in the next generations, roughly from the 1970s/1980s through Ukrainian independence. Finally, I focus on commemorations of these families’ agency during present-day communal events in the space of the village.

Before going further into analysis, I first wish to clarify some important terms that I rely on here, “family” and “family network”. I consider the family here to be a cluster of close relatives, who share either consanguineal or affinal relations (e.g., life partners, parents and children, siblings, first cousins, etc). Family network contrasts with family in that it also consists of rather more distant relatives (i.e., extended family) and it also includes unrelated friends. *Faita*, a more dialectical term often used in Transcarpathia, may be best used to understand “family network” here. It is a term that also includes consociates, those bound by other than affinal or blood relations. These consociates may include family friends, colleagues, or neighbours; and it is usual that in *faitas* some of them take on the highly-valued roles of best men, bridesmaids, or godparents. *Faitas* are very conscious in Transcarpathia in that relations between people associated with the same *faita* are often activated in times of the need. Thus, favours based on solidarity and moral anchoring usually follow the channels of relations within *faita*, and their realisation is often socially enforced. In general, through such favouring acts, the lasting reciprocal relations are usually sustained over time, and the benefits and recognition are channelled to people to create or maintain binding networks.

Even though the observed family networks resemble *faitas*, they differ in two regards. First, whereas *faita* is usually not tied with one locality (e.g., village or town), and so its members are scattered around some area or region, in this article I use the

term “family network” to relate to more localised groups in the observed village. Second, family networks are not only formed of the relations or associations that are typical for *faita*, but also a broader followership is usually attached to these networks from the ranks of other friends and neighbours, who belong to the same village community. Thus, family networks are here conceived as somehow localised *faitas* with a wider followership. Even though the borders of these family networks were sometimes hardly discernible (chiefly because of some of their unrelated, and in cases very extensive, followers’ bases), during my research the village held some three or four such wide family networks. These networks, then, included the two particular ones that are in the spotlight of this study.

Memory and the moral dimension of people’s economies

For Halbwachs (1992), collective memory is generally approached as a group-specific interpretation of the past that influences the present, and which emerges from the social world. Assmann (2008) broadens Halbwachs’ perspective, distinguishing between “communicative” and “cultural memory”. The communicative, “everyday”, form thus spans some three or four generations (Assmann, 1995: 127), and is basically retained in the memories of the group’s eldest members. The latter type of memory, then, is “objectified”, “stable”, and expressed in the symbols that serve as reminders for the people, while the former “is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization” and “lives in everyday interaction and communication” (Assmann, 2008: 110–111). It is maintained “through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (Assmann, 1995: 129).

Pine (2007) localises three components of memory – social memory, personal memory, and family (kin-based) memory – in the setting of a post-socialist village community. In her perspective, a generalised social memory of the past, in the form of well-known village stories concerning the memory of “how the life was” back then (e.g., during socialism, war, etc.), “set a particular scene” for a more personal memory (Pine, 2007: 123). These two memory components then “become entangled in discourses of kinship” (Ibid.: 122). According to Pine, kinship and relations are still made “through land, through labor, and through various kinds of exchanges over place”, and, intertwined with larger/wider processes, these “continue to dominate people’s memory-accounts” (Ibid.: 108).

In line with Pine’s approach, in later passages I introduce some of these intertwined memory layers. Drawing on collective memory, I present general accounts of people adapting to the socialist regime and to changes that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I also provide a more specific localised layer of villagers’ memory to illustrate individual and family memories in which personal and family connections making up local family networks and wider community are seen

as key elements of adaptation to past transitions. I address the most visible type of memory, too, the commemoration of two local families at religious and cultural events and sites. Through such memory acts, villagers express the importance of family as a nexus of value, and so stress the key values of fairness, morality and solidarity that are observable in acts of favouring through personal or family connections.⁴

The memory of how the village adapted to a former regime, enacted and preserved in general, more personal and family accounts, and through local church-related commemorations and material objects, serves locals by explaining the value and enduring local legitimacy of their everyday economies. These are of course economies that still operate, in which they still engage and which comprise a variety of informal practices. An analysis of multi-layered memory about past community adaptations enables us to explore these people's economies as part of the bigger picture, and is particularly productive in revealing the character of the embeddedness of the economic sphere in the social fabric. In this line of thinking I benefit from the work of Chris Hann (2018). Drawing from Karl Polanyi's (1944, 1957) substantivist approach, Hann recognises both the material-institutional and the ideational embeddedness of the economy, and, following Etzioni (1988) and Weber (1978; 2009 [1915]), proposes that "[u]nderstanding the moral dimension [in terms of economy, which he also calls the *human economy*] ... involves tracking dominant values through history, ... and their concrete reconfigurations and enactment through social relations" (Hann, 2018: 251). Inspired by Etzioni, Hann "prefer[s] to recognize a *moral dimension* in the sense of a collective and systemic basis in long-term shared values", and although acknowledging Weber's methodological individualist outlook, he calls for a "recognition of resilient dominant values that facilitate societal integration" (Ibid.: 231). Following Hann's approach,⁵ I suggest the moral value of family connections, which in the long-term serve as channels for favouring within the community, is contained in remembering the exemplary agency of the two village family networks. Remembering how important these connections were during past adaptations to transitions or crises, then, highlights the moral basis of the rural sociality, locally perceived as tied to a shared notion of a more "traditional" model of people's economy.

4 For a more detail-oriented analysis of the favouring practice itself, specifically its logic, see Butko (2023).

5 Hann focuses on work as a value, but my focus is different. I only aim to apply his theoretical stance about the moral dimension of economy on people's economies I observed, specifically on the value the family connections carry in these economies.

Methods and data

Before advancing to the historical context of Transcarpathia, I want to present some of my research methods and data. The data come from long-term, on-site, ethnographic research, conducted in 2018-2019, and from my observations and online chats with informants during COVID-related and Russian aggression-related crises occurring at the outer Schengen border (between 2020, and 2022–23 respectively). The research took place among inhabitants of a particular village community who were of various ages (adults from eighteen but including respondents over one hundred years old), representing both Greek Catholic and Orthodox denominations, and who were from various socio-economic and political backgrounds. Past and present representatives of the municipality, community, faiths, and close relatives were also included. My informants were selected through recommendations from key informants with whom I stayed during research.

During my time in the field, I became a participating observer and attended public events (e.g., church masses, village council meetings, village festivities, etc) and private ones (e.g., family gatherings, celebrations, or traditional seasonal events like crop harvesting or cattle slaughtering). I mapped these events by writing scratch notes on-site, later transferred into my fieldwork journal. At first, I tended to act more as an observer than active participant, however, after establishing greater trust with my informants, I was included more in events and discussions, mostly private social events. During the pandemic I was fortunate to be invited to religious events, which were occasionally held online, or to meetings of village representatives and other local networks and groups.

The format of interviews varied. As my field research also focused on livelihood patterns, partly on informal patterns, a large portion of my interview data was gathered through spontaneously- and informally-held interviews of various lengths, with notes instead of formal recordings my main means of preserving a record of these encounters. I recorded a number of these each day, amounting to several hundred informal interviews. During my fieldwork, it is important to emphasise that I did not acquire any information or personal experience connected to actual instances of illicit livelihood strategies.

Apart from informal interviews, more structured interviews were also held during my fieldwork, often in narrative form, and these were recorded either as scratch notes or on tape. These covered mostly memories of past adaptations to socialist or post-socialist politico-economic processes, of dominant village figures, and of changes in economy and livelihoods, as well as village politics. During the pandemic and subsequently the Russian aggression, I video-called and chatted with my informants, and inquired about how they were coping with the situation and about the atmosphere in their village community.

Data were analysed inductively, as I attempted to explore the most significant categories and topics: narratives present in people's memories; changing livelihood

strategies; and relations in community or in the family networks – all while trying to keep track of village politics. The interview excerpts provided below serve as illustrations of prevalent narratives about the past, important local figures, and their family networks.

Regional-historical context

This region of Transcarpathia differs from the other Ukrainian regions with regard to historical processes. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the predominantly rural population has experienced many changes of state regime, as its territory belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (until 1918), then was subsumed under the first Czechoslovak regime (until 1938), Horthy's/Hungarian fascist regime (until 1945), and then became part of Soviet Ukraine (until 1991). Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is a part of independent Ukraine.

Throughout its pre-socialist history, Transcarpathia was a region of limited economic opportunities. The policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czechoslovak state, aimed at developing this rather economically peripheral region, were generally unsuccessful. This can be said for instance of the struggle to industrialise the region, which resulted in the dependence of the greater part of the Transcarpathian population on low-productive agricultural or forest-related livelihoods until the 1930s.⁶ Migration to the Hungarian lowlands for seasonal work (mostly during the Austro-Hungarian period or later, during WWII) or to the USA and Western Europe is remembered as the way out for many people.

After the incorporation of the region into the Soviet bloc in 1945, the socialist modernisation project was met with resilience and resistance from the still mostly rural Transcarpathians. Whether this “policy package” concerned the land-collectivisation or an ideologically-driven banning of the Greek Catholic Church, various records detail the strategies whereby villagers attempted to preserve their way of life, either in the sense of a mostly peasant livelihood or with respect to their faith in Greek Catholic Church.

According to David Marples, the spatial separation of the region from the rest of Western Ukraine by the Carpathian mountains, a lack of experience with soviet rule before the end of WWII and of the impact of Ukrainian nationalist tendencies caused “a passive attitude toward Soviet rule and the relatively quick pace of collectivization” (Marples, 1992: 114–115). Even though the swift incorporation of most households into the *kolkhozes* lacked a sense of open protest, more nuanced, resilient strategies were developed by village communities to challenge the state's authority. As Jessica Allina-Pisano's (2010) analysis of the archival materials indicate, “the squandering

6 Magocsi (1978: 355), cited in Magocsi (2015: 202), notes that, in 1930, eighty-three per cent of the Carpatho-Rusyn population maintained their livelihood through agriculture or forest-related work.

of *kolkhoz* property, theft, poor accounting, and serious problems with labour discipline” (Pisano, 2010: 16) represented the common reality of the functioning of such collective farms. She further argues that problems in raising labour discipline was caused by “a population that made careful decisions about whose labor it would allow the *kolkhoz* to take” (Ibid.: 12), while (in certain Transcarpathian village) people “maintained an economy of self-sufficiency parallel to the *kolkhoz* throughout the years of Soviet rule” (Ibid.: 10). In terms of these introduced labour obligations, then, members of village communities “sought ways to conserve their most valuable labor resources for households, and they had the cooperation of key *kolkhoz* figures in doing so” (Ibid.: 11).

Along with changes in villages’ political organisation, the soviet state considered the Greek Catholic Church, which comprised 460,000 people in 1944 (according to Ofitsynskyi, 2010: 330) – making it one of the central political institutions in the region – to be undesirable from an ideological standpoint. During the first years of state socialism in Transcarpathia, some of the previously Greek Catholic clergy were pressured to renounce their faith and convert to the Russian Orthodox faith (at that time the only recognised Eastern Rite Church in the region). The regime dealt with Greek Catholic clergy and believers e.g., by means of repression, provocation and propaganda (Ofitsynskyi, 2010: 331). Greek Catholic church property in Transcarpathia is often remembered by the older generations as transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow’s Patriarchate) or used secularly (as storehouses, school facilities, etc.).

Agnieszka Halemba (2015: 159–160) mentions two common adaptive strategies in the sphere of Greek Catholic faith preservation, in which people engaged after the Church became outlawed. One of these strategies was to celebrate Greek Catholic rites within the framework of the Orthodox Church, while another method was to participate in underground church activities. In her book, Halemba (2015) also mentions that the religious life transformed in Transcarpathia in a way that it became *domesticated*.⁷ Official policy towards the Greek Catholic Church basically transformed the everyday practice of the religion and made it more reliant on the lay population to coordinate and organise services.

In Brashovo, the memory of this adaptation to both soviet policies is tied specifically to the agency of particular family networks. The Holubko and Brisudskyy⁸ families, who we will return to later in greater detail, were often afforded nicknames such as “*the great families*”, “*two most important families*”, or “*the role models*” by my informants during interviews. Thus, even though I was not able to fully imagine

7 This term was originally introduced by Tamara Dragadze (1993).

8 For a more detailed analysis of agency of this particular family network since socialism see Butko (2023), where I discuss it in terms of an anthropology of state, political-economic anthropology, and an anthropology of borders, and where particularly the logic of the prevalent local economy is unfolded. In this study, however, I offer a different reading of empirical material, collected in Brashovo, as I analyse this and one other networks’ local agencies mainly in terms of memory studies and literature covering the socio-cultural parameters of people’s economies in post-socialism.

the scope and composition of the local power relations after some months of my fieldwork in Brashovo, these nicknames were a good lead for me as I came to appreciate the mosaic of relations and to understand the importance of these families in leading adaptations to past changes.

Local context: livelihoods and people's economies

Brashovo is an ethnically homogenous village, located near the northern side of the Ukrainian-Slovak Schengen border. In pre-socialist times, its inhabitants depended on small-scale agriculture, occasionally on lumber-related work, where people practiced only the Greek Catholic faith. When state socialism was introduced in Transcarpathia in 1945, these livelihood patterns shifted. Many inhabitants of Brashovo started working in the growing industrial sector in regional, or district, centres, while a smaller portion was employed in the newly-established local cooperative.

In spite of this shift of livelihood, the “rural nature” of life in the village persisted, according to the memory of villagers, in what they nostalgically remember as *selyans’ke zhyttya* (Ukr. for *peasants’ life*). As I previously showed in Butko (2023), this notion of life under socialism was tied not only to the practices of socialisation, perceived as “traditionally rural” (i.e., related to agriculture or an agrarian lifestyle), but also to an informal system of favour and assistance exchange. Frequent informal benefiting of the family networks from the state resources, achieved through these exchanges, have left its mark on the daily operation of key village institutions (village council, cooperative, etc) and of people’s workplaces.

Similarly, as Juraj Podoba (1996) shows in his study of the Slovak countryside, which was modernised in the same period as the Transcarpathian countryside, the pre-modern social structures survived under socialism, even despite the characteristically fast pace of modernisation. The use of social capital within the new structural settings of socialist village was typical, and represented a common way of benefiting from the new material and economic opportunities for networks. This model of the people’s economy, in Juraj Buzalka’s (2018) terminology *post-peasant*, is an object of nostalgic remembering of the “good old times” of socialism, when matters were often informally arranged in the interstices of the political structures and so the (family) connections and values played important role for people.

As shown in Butko (2023), after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, border communities remember navigating the politico-economic crisis – its attendant hyperinflation, non-functioning state administration and services sectors, and high unemployment – by maintaining their informal economy and thereby remaining dependent on family and neighbourly ties. Brashovans added new cross-border livelihoods to partial agricultural subsistence, namely, reciprocal exchanges of materials, goods and services within the community. Alongside the work available,

people availed of migration to neighbouring countries, petty commodity trade, and the operation of small stores, while smuggling⁹ became another viable option for improving people's material conditions. The smuggling option in particular became a common livelihood strategy, for which Brashovans are still well-known in the area.

As explored in my previous study of Brashovo, today, people live from the combination of paid work in nearby cities, work migration, and the informal economy. The latter sphere comprises the mixture of so-called *favouring* within and between the family networks and through informal cross-border strategies. The reciprocal acts typical for the village community are easily recognisable (familial or neighbourly help-outs in garden plots, lending machinery and resources, or providing expert services, so-called *dopomohi*, in Ukrainian). There are also the favours perceived as more essential for people's livelihoods though. As I previously demonstrated (Butko, 2023), it is for example the provision of income opportunities within and between the family networks that has economic consequences for the wider village community, but that also connects to the morally-based, unwritten rules of socialisation within and between the family networks. Thus, upholding the unwritten rules of favouring reflects on village community values, i.e., solidarity, trust and a sense of belonging. In Brashovo, the enduring practice of favouring from within the local state institutions (and Schengen border administrative structures) through personal and family connections over several generations has been intrinsic to the local agency of two particular family networks that have gained the status of community patrons.

I present here elements of memory connected to these people's economies and families. I trace how the prominence and value of the family connections in people's narratives about their economies stems from the specific historical experience of the community with socialist and post-socialist transitions. I particularly analyse the memory of the community that connects to the agency of these networks (one of which still held a position of power during my research in 2018–2019) in terms of these transitional "macro-changes". I argue that remembering their agency in this changing environment over the twentieth century, agency characterised by adaptation to soviet policy, makes up an essential part of the local memory. Villagers use memory narratives and commemoration practices to validate the key role the family connections hold in their model of the everyday economy, which they consider traditional. This memory practice also legitimises, explains and maintains their engagement in it.

⁹ As significant price difference in popular commodities (tobacco products, spirits, fuels, etc) between Ukraine and Slovakia existed, the cross-border practices were essential for border people's livelihoods.

Appropriation of the cooperative

Collectivisation fundamentally transformed the social and political organisation of the countryside. Even now, its impact on the villagers' way of life is perceived rather negatively. Removal of arable lands from the ownership of peasant families in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and their incorporation into state-run collective farms, was at first met with openly negative reactions. As Rimma, an eighty-three-year-old retired cooperative worker and widow remembers it, however, the will to openly protest waned as soon as people realised that the consequences of such actions would be severe (arrests, imprisonment or deportation). "Another way round" needed to be found, and here the remembered local contribution of one of "*the original leaders of the community*", Mykola Brisudskyy Sr., becomes important.

After the collectivisation, the life was not that bad. But in the 1950s it was about the lands, our lands, that belonged to our farmsteads, and that were stolen from us. ... At first, when the Soviets confiscated the lands, people, ... my parents, did not like it, obviously. Some 'hotheads' wanted to protest in here, against the Soviets, and the same in other villages. But some people got arrested, some disappeared, and ... I guess people got scared. ... My parents told me that people realised they needed to use their brains in preserving of their lands, of their way of life. But they needed to be shown the way. ... For that, there was Uncle Mykola, his family. He stepped in, led people by example, provided for them. ... Sometimes not everything he did was okay, I mean legally, but it was about our lifestyle so people were not questioning it, ... and admired him and his family.

Thus, soon after establishing of the collective farm in Brashovo in the early years of state-socialism, Rimma remembers that people recognised a leader. Mykola, familiarly remembered as "Uncle Mykola", who would be over one hundred years old today, was the local persona shaping the early course of events concerning the establishment of *kolhosp*.¹⁰ According to villagers' memories, it was also he who was responsible for "the invention" of the non-conflicting attitude towards the imposed cooperative.

In other words, Mykola Brisudskyy is remembered as possibly the first villager who decided not to publicly clash with the new institutional establishments during the 1940s and 1950s, but rather to react in a more cryptic manner. In the heated times of land removals from peasant families (which were locally seen as unlawful and immoral), Mykola Sr. is remembered (as are some of his close relatives at times) for

¹⁰ This is the Ukrainian term for the collective farm, synonymous with *kolkhoz*. *Kolkhozes* were one of the main institutions under the state control that structured the political and economic life in the soviet countryside. They emerged during collectivisation through the merging of lands previously belonging to peasant families.

calming the villagers down, and for being their spokesman in the matter of their problematic labour engagement with the cooperative. Elderly Brashovans' memories of Mykola Brisudskyy comprise stories about his heroic ability to advise others about everyday tactics to preserve practical power over their collectivised property, about navigating their workplace duties, or facilitating his relatives' and friends' informal access to the cooperative's resources.

Mykola Sr. represented leadership in the village setting during early socialism, someone who was willing to relate to the institutional changes in an original way, and whose legacy stems from the way he locally facilitated the subversion of the soviet state. Put simply, he is remembered for his wily embeddedness in the formal framework of the cooperative (e.g., he served as its early manager of production, and was a member of the local branch of the Communist Party) "for the sake of appearances" (as the locals emphasise), through which he provided materially both for his family and for others' families too. From his formal position, then, Mykola provided for his family network and followers from among his neighbours by facilitating occasional theft and the misuse of farm machinery. He is also remembered as the leader who approved of, if not facilitated, his peers' frequent bypassing of labour obligations in the cooperative. However, according to the villagers, the contribution of Mykola Sr. to the community is not represented merely by his facilitation of favours, but, as we see below through the words of my elderly informant Milan, a former cooperative worker, by also preserving communally-recognised values, via the exchange of favours.

He was a fantastic leader, charismatic, calm ... he always correctly evaluated the trade-offs between the eventual costs of some "not too clean" deeds and their benefits. ... He was always the first person to stress the importance of the family, of all these ties that matter the most when some "situation" comes up, a crisis, or like that. ... He excelled in that, he lived it, and his family was the proof of that. ... They are still remembered. Not because they did many things for the village, that is obvious, but ... because they showed the others that the family and togetherness are always a priority over the gain, ... or even over the state.

Memories of the early functioning of the cooperative also fit into the narrative by which people stressed the need to preserve the rather traditional social organisation of the village – one based on strong informal ties and the values of cooperating families – particularly in light of the regime's new establishments in the village. This case of Brisudskyy family's agency, then, corresponds to Nicolette Makovicky's (2018) ethnographic observations of the people's economies and livelihoods among Polish *Górale* (connected to the cultural trope of *kombinowanie*). Makovicky shows that these Highlanders' informal (cunning and subversive) strategies, associated with *kombinowanie*, are often accompanied by anti-establishment and insubordinate attitude towards the state power. Similarly, in this respect the narrative of Mykola Sr.'s

preservation of *the peasants' life* through hidden tactics and utilising personal connections also reflects what people have perceived as the right way to cope with life under a regime that had profoundly changed the politico-economic organisation of the village. Even more so, it is suggestive of what, in their view, had facilitated the preservation of their lifestyle and livelihoods, both valued as elements of a traditional mores. Moreover, utilising Hann's (2018) reading of the moral dimension of economic life, recollections of Brisudskyy's agency attest to the institutional embeddedness of collectives in a new political-economic environment. They also hint, though, at the importance of private and family connections, which were – and still are – considered more than mere instrumentalities within people's notions of what has been constitutively traditional, namely the operative model of socialisation and economisation, but which also act as holding treasured moral values in them.

However, collective, familial and also personal memories of another pillar of people's notion of the authentic *peasants' life*, that of faith, also comprise accounts that stress the importance of adaptation through the subversion of official rules. In next part I discuss the agency of the second significant local family network, through which such adaptation was achieved.

When the church was in people's hands

The reaction of the community towards the outlawing of the Greek Catholic Church in the early soviet period is well remembered among the “Eastern Rite” believers. Soon after the church was targeted by the soviet regime, the Greek Catholic church building in Brashovo was converted into an Orthodox church. The other church was transformed into a storage place for state institutions, and a new priest replaced the former one, who had not converted to the Orthodoxy. Brashovans mostly refused to convert and Greek Catholic church-related sacramental activities (e.g., Sunday masses, confessions, funerals, marriages and christenings) were performed underground, often by the members of clergy who refused to convert under the new soviet law, and who often worked secular jobs.

Even though many families participated in the activities of the underground Church in the soviet period, only a few facilitated the practical organisation of services (e.g., by providing material resources or space for them, or by assisting the priests during services). Yurii and Olena Holubko are recognised sacristans for the underground Church in Brashovo who are remembered for their active role in its operation. Although they were never persecuted, and continued to support the church until their deaths in the 1970s, they are remembered for being willing to “*risk their necks*” to preserve the faith. Whether it was the offering of their home for Sunday (or “high-day”) services, or organising the confessions, their contribution has not been forgotten, as Artem recalls below:

I was a teenager, or like that, back then, when they were doing that [i.e., Holubkos organising the secret church meetings]. I was the ministrant often, for some time the only one. My mom was Aunt Olena's cousin, there was no way around, I basically had to do it, but when I grew up, I understood the value of faith, and why it is important to preserve it. ... So, yes, Aunt and Uncle [Olena and Yurii] gathered the people in their home regularly, first it was just their close family attending, but then also we [more distant relatives] took part. ... And after some time, it was many other Brashovans gathering at Holubkos' place; friends, neighbours, whole families. ... And when more and more people went for the public service instead, I mean to the Orthodox church, they [Holubko couple] never stopped. ... For that we still remember them. ... They were courageous in preserving our traditions.

It is clear from the memory of my septuagenarian informant, Artem, a retired factory worker and devout Greek Catholic, that after the Greek Catholic Church was banned, the underground religious services were served primarily in the Holubkos' home. Although at first services brought only the Holubkos' close relatives together, later the base of the secret Church also included more distant relatives, and, later still, friends and neighbours. Despite the fact that the number of believers attending legal Orthodox church services increased in the 1960s and 1970s, at the expense of the secret Church, the Holubko family had actually not stopped facilitating their activities. This perseverance of the Holubkos, currently emphasised in memory accounts about the earlier socialist era, was, then, seen as key to the practical preservation of the faith and an important sphere of life in the village setting. The narrative about the Holubko family in early socialism, which emphasises the importance of informal ties between lay family networks for the survival of the underground Church, attests to the so-called *domestication of religion* (Dragadze, 1993); thus also to what Halemba (2015) uncovered in the Transcarpathian region in the context of the soviet repression of religion.

Proliferation of the informal sphere of economy in late socialism

In addition to preserving the two elements of the peoples' lifestyle in the changing environment of the socialist village, the agency of the Holubko family and the Brisudskyys in the early-to-mid socialist period also affected local politics. In the words of Volodymyr, of a former clerical worker in his seventies, both Mykola Brisudsky Jr. (currently in his eighties), son of Mykola Sr., and the twin sons of Olena and Yurii Holubko, Taras and Bohdan (in their seventies now) – the next generation of these two families – have “*confirmed the high value of their family names*”. The communal memory of the later socialist period, then, is comprised of stories about new village leaders holding the key village positions.

Under the leadership of the village head, Mykola Brisudsky Jr., with the village council where some of his relatives were seated, the village flourished. Along with the

building of the new elementary school and public library building, road communications and power connections were reconstructed throughout the village. Similar progress was present in the cooperative, peaking under the guidance of the Holubko brothers. Starting as workers there in their youth, they later represented the cooperative as chairman and vice-chairman.

Thus, there have been many visible outcomes of the effective operation of the village institutions. However, villagers' memories of the later socialist period consist mainly of personal and family accounts of how the informal economy was facilitated by the next generation of both families via accessing and redistributing state resources. Both family networks proved their value to the community, whether by facilitating the pilfering or squandering of cooperative resources, or by the prohibited use of state-owned machinery in the home gardens of locals.¹¹ Organising communal brigades and redistributing state-owned resources and services from the office of village's head through informal channels was also typical. An important element in local memory is that of the socialisation of these men and their relatives regarding events perceived as traditionally rural. Villagers' recollections about material benefits from state institutions – facilitated by the two families – were often presented in conjunction with almost romantic depictions of the atmosphere during intimate, rural events (i.e., slaughterings, harvests, other seasonal village festivities).

Making a comparison between this later and the earlier transitional socialist period, the generational difference in the memory of two families' agency is clear. Whereas the memory of the families' agency in the early soviet period is dominated by a confrontational, anti-establishment narrative, stressing the role of family in a previously "untasted" politico-economic environment, the memory of the latter period is remembered rather nostalgically. This latter recollection is of a time when community prospered, notably thanks to the proliferation of the informal sphere of favouring and a broad utilisation of connections within the village institutions.

Other parallels can be drawn with what Buzalka (2018) has characterised as a nostalgia for a *post-peasant* model of economy. From the analysis of material here, too, the latter period of state socialism is recognisable as that which Ivo Možný (1991) described as "the colonization" of the state. Here, people accommodated themselves to the regime through the extensive use of social capital, which bestowed family collectives with standing and material benefits.

11 For a more detailed account on this kind of Brisudskyy family agency from the later socialist and early post-socialist era, see Butko (2023).

Families after the post-socialist transition

Unlike this positively-attributed accommodation with the regime in later state socialism, the villagers perceive the early post-socialist period more as a time of deep economic crisis in which the family connections were used for the effective adaptation to changes in the politico-economic environment. So, because the new administrative and market frameworks were not operating effectively, people remember utilising the existing informal channels even more intensively.

Partial home-based subsistence and the reciprocal exchange of favours in family and neighbour circles is often remembered as a way to endure, if not prosper. However, before drawing benefits from the work on the land, previously collectivised by the socialist state, Brashovans first needed to familiarise themselves with the restitution policy so they could actually claim these lands. Because the villagers remember being quite lost in the restitution process, the Holubko brothers again proved their importance to people as “the brains” in the fields of agriculture and law. Their popularity among villagers increased after helping their own relatives and fellow villagers, as they processed the documentation needed for making claims over the lands. These claims often had to be delivered to *raion* or *oblast* authorities, institutions often fortuitously operated by acquaintances of the Holubkos from the socialist period. Alongside these favours, the brothers acted as mediators in land disputes between villagers, disputes remembered as being “*always solved to everyone’s liking*”, according to the septuagenarian Matvii, a former cooperative worker. The popularity of the Holubko family resulted in their members taking on the political mandates after the elections in the early post-socialist period. Taras became village head, and Bohdan, along with both of the brothers’ wives and their two cousins, formed a strong family faction in the early post-socialist village council.

The second family network also remained prominent and held positions of power in local politics. The new leader, Vasil, son of Mykola Jr. and grandson of Mykola Sr., rose in importance in the community, on the basis of capitalising on family connections in the state border’s administration. As I explored his story with particular ethnographic detail (in Butko, 2023), at first, in the early-to-mid 1990s, he provided transports through the border to his relatives and peers who were migrating (mostly to Czechia) for work regularly. Later, he built up the informal smuggling group, and in addition to the original member base, his relatives, other village peers, whom he provided with income opportunities, were included. Favours performed through his informal businesses helped his peers to make peace with the crisis economically. They also allowed him to gain wider political support in the community, and were the reason why, in the later 1990s, he was elected village head, with his close relatives holding more than half the seats in the village council, and why he was still in this position when I was researching there (2018–19).

It doesn’t matter what you do, but for whom you do it. ... You can call it smuggling, bribing, or stealing. ... But as you do it with a good reason... I mean, for the family,

for its good ... just like it was done in the past by our dads, grand-dads, you are good, it is understandable, people accept it. ... You need to honour your family, not to be selfish, and everything is okay. ... Family means a lot, it means how you treat the people, what you do for them in bad times. ... We know its value, we remember it from our greats, we have learnt it from the past and that is how we live.

As can be inferred from this account from a former member from Vasil Brisudskyy's informal business network, sixty-three-year-old Symon, present-day Brashovans associate their engagement in the informal economy with a narrative about the past and its key local figures, in which family and personal connections represent not only the usual means-to-an-end. In narratives about the past, family connections also maintain a morally-inflected value, which is especially true with regards to informal illicit strategies. Enshrining past experiences of transitions and crises in the form of a personal, family or collective memory narrative – in which the informal, subversive agency of past “local heroes” figure as dominant motifs and family connections become authentic, traditional means of adaptation – then forms a kind of local and historical mechanism of legitimisation for people's economies. More broadly, these narrative tactics also pave the way for people to relate to each other and the state in the present, particularly in terms of some shared notion of a morally-based economy glossed as the *peasants' life*.

However, it is also possible to explore even more publicly evident forms of remembering and commemorating this narrative of the value of family and its connections, one that stems from past adaptations and agency of key village personae. I observed this type of memory in the space of the village and at public events.

Public commemorations and remembrances

In terms of physical commemorations, there are basically two memorial sites commemorating the members of both families, and both are in spaces considered typical for their past agency. One smaller sign, bearing, among others, the names of the father-son duo Mykola Sr. and Mykola Jr. Brisudskyy, was formally put into the building of village administration, after it was publicly handed over to then eighty-year-old Mykola Jr. during an annual village festival. Physically more visible is the monument which was installed near the current Greek Catholic church building, and which bears the names of those who preserved the Greek Catholic faith during the socialist era, including those of Olena and Yurii Holubko. Additionally, the local historical consciousness is – as is typical in other Transcarpathian villages – expressed at the cemetery as well. The arrangement of the Holubko family tombstone is probably the most imposing of all tombstones there, and flower arrangements on the family grave are replenished throughout the year, but are most visible around the time of Olena's and Yurii's birthdays, and on religious high-days.

Although not as visible, the Brisudskyys' tombstone is also a place of intensive decorative commemoration of its members – mostly of Mykola Sr.

Moreover, much is also said about both family networks, and about their members in the earlier soviet period. Publicly, at events regularly attended by villagers, their exploits and contributions are recalled. Memorial masses are served in the village's current Greek Catholic church for the deceased of both families, usually more than once in a year, which, from what I understand, is not usual practice. In addition, emotional remembrances of these two families are also palpable on regular Sunday masses.

I attended many Greek Catholic church services and was regularly surprised by the intensity of the memory for both families there. The Holubko name was heard probably more often during the services, and on those occasions Olena and Yurii were called "*the bravest supporters of the Church in the time of the unfree soviet regime*", or "*villagers whose bravery and selflessness should be celebrated and followed by every Brashovan*" by the priest. The priest's most frequent sermon topics included "*the unity in family and between the families*" and "*the importance of the family in uneasy times*" where the members of Brisudskyy family were mentioned, with particular note made of Mykola Sr. and Jr. Both families' deceased ancestors from the earlier soviet period were not only mentioned briefly, but were often put into an improvised parable e.g., about the oppression of the community or its faith by the soviet regime, or the importance of family in everyday dealings. Thus, the priest used them as heroic examples, or defenders of moral values during hardship. In my few chats with the young priest, who is not a native of Brashovo, I inquired about his preparation of the sermons, and I learnt that even he consciously understands the need to reproduce the past through stories about significant Brashovans, to whom present-day villagers can still relate, and from whom "*they can learn about the authentic, believable, value of the family, ... the one that belongs to their own past*" as the priest told me.

Even though I have not been able to return to Brashovo in person since late 2019, I was fortunate enough to talk to my informants online about how they coped with the COVID-related crisis during its course. I was able to explore the obvious, negatively-perceived effect of the pandemic on the hardening of the nearby border regime and on people's cross-border livelihoods. I was also able to attend the church meetings, streamed online, which were still a space of commemoration for the Holubko and Brisudskyy families. Even during more current crises, these significant personae and their agency were publicly remembered as heroic examples of past struggles, which are locally understood as periods when the family and its connections– ascribed with values of morality, solidarity, belonging – emerged as significant elements of inventive resilience against adversity. Thus, the family and its network still bear not only pragmatic significance locally, but in local memory these ties uphold the moral value of a remembered, rather traditional sociality, to which locals connect their informal (and often illicit) strategies and livelihoods today.

Results and conclusions

In this article I outlined the importance of family connections, and particularly its high value for people and their economies. I showed how this value is reflected in a public way of remembering adaptations to past transitions and crises by the village community. I analysed memory as a way of organising my findings and focused on its various types: on cultural (public or institutionalised) and communicative (narrative) memory (Assmann, 1995, 2008), and on the social (generalised), personal and family (kin-based) memory of the village community (Pine, 2007). Through the generational remembering of agency of two significant local family networks and their leaders in the first decades of soviet period in Transcarpathia, I accounted for the key role that family connections hold in villagers' notion of the *peasants' life* (i.e., rural model of economy and socialisation) today. The *domestication of religion* (see Halemba, 2015; Dragadze, 1993) and the subversion of the early cooperative's operation (see Allina-Pisano, 2010), both undertaken by the family networks' leaders at that time, are at present perceived as acts of preserving rather traditional, rural values and sociality, which are contained in family relations, and which were deployed against newly-imposed socialist institutions and policies in the earlier socialist times (roughly from 1940s to 1960s). These strategies, or rather the active remembering of them, hold their potency for villagers today who continue to need creative responses and moral anchors to activate them. I suggested that early adaptive strategies to socialist realities, especially the subversion of the cooperative as remembered by villagers, came to resemble the so-called *kombinowanie* of Górale people (Makovicky, 2018) in that such cunning acts were accompanied by a strong anti-establishment narrative. In terms of the two families' agency in later socialism, I explored less confrontative and more nostalgic, even romantic, memory narratives about the proliferation of informal relations within state structures and rural socialisation, which I made sense of through Možný (1991) and Buzalka (2018). I further argued that remembering important village figures and the role of family connections as value-carriers in people's notion of the *peasants' life* is used to explain and legitimate people's engagement in the informal economy more recently. Lastly, my observations of commemorations, village sites and online events reveal the intensive and emotional character of remembering of key local figures, through which the central value of family and networks are emphasised in people's economic behaviour.

Inspired by Chris Hann's (2018) approach towards "the moral dimension" of economic life, I suggest that the heroic role of two specific family networks and their resilient agency – included in people's recounting of the past – still act as dominant, local, historical motifs by which villagers connect their present informal economies with the notion of traditional life in a rural setting, and by which they also express, even stress, the moral underpinnings of these economies. Remembering past local adaptations, then, includes the remembering of family connections not only as a pragmatic local economic context (i.e., in facilitating favour exchanges), but also

as the meaningful relations carrying the important values (solidarity, morality, belonging) which are locally perceived as essential elements of people's ideas about traditional life in a village community. In other words, I suggest the interpretation of past transitions and crises through the memory narratives of the family and their networks, then, enables Brashovans to create and recreate, whether by maintaining or updating, the framework of morally-based, unwritten rules of their social-economic interactions and practices, practices they perceive as meaningful, and also as somehow authentic and traditional for the rural setting they inhabit.

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