



WELCOME WALLS  
STORIES OF MIGRATION

# SILENT MEMORIES

## TRAUMATIC LIVES

Ukrainian Migrant Refugees in Western Australia

Lesa Melnychuk



# SILENT MEMORIES

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## TRAUMATIC LIVES

This is the first work to tell the story of the Ukrainian survivors who were accepted as migrant refugees to Western Australia after World War II. The experience of these people was one of enormous struggle where only the strongest survived, to now finally share their story. By bringing their stories together for the first time we begin to understand the refugee experience of post-war migrant Ukrainians who settled in Western Australia. These are the Ukrainians who came by sea, hoping for safety and freedom.





# SILENT MEMORIES

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## TRAUMATIC LIVES

Ukrainian Migrant Refugees in Western Australia

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN  
**muSeum**



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# PREFACE

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In the words of Condoleezza Rice, if you have ‘the opportunity to explore the state of human knowledge as it stands today’ you should ‘search for the truth and ... teach and enlighten those within it.’<sup>1</sup>

I am an Australian Ukrainian, born in Perth. During my childhood, I listened to the songs, poetry, and table chit-chat of my migrant refugee parents and their friends, as they pined for the family and homeland left behind. I remember talk of the Displaced Persons camps in Europe, the journey to Australia on converted cargo ships, the migrant camps in country Western Australia, and the hard physical work it took to build our lives in a new country. What I don’t recall are any stories about starvation.

Looking back though, there were hints of it in our everyday lives. Leaving food uneaten on my plate, or worse still, throwing it away, led to uncharacteristically sharp rebukes in my home and in the homes of other Ukrainians.

As I grew up, I became aware of quiet comments, voiced only occasionally, about the complete lack of food during childhood years in Soviet Ukraine. The odd mention of childhood hunger and starvation by friends at the social gatherings that were often held at different homes. At the time, I did not understand; it seemed absurd that we should be alive and well in Western Australia if their words were to be believed. How could anyone survive such horror?

My reflexive disbelief when overhearing stories of famine and death turned to disquiet over the years. As an adult, I could not push these words from my mind as easily as I did in my childhood. With Ukraine’s independence in 1991 came a flood of information. I could no longer pretend ignorance of former lives of these Ukrainian people. My decision to base my doctoral studies on the memories and experiences of the Ukrainian migrants to Western Australia, came from a determination to finally reach some understanding of what my parents and their friends lived through.



When I began my research, I found that as a child of Ukrainian migrants, I was not alone in my ignorance of the events which befell my parents in their early years. Many survivors did not share their memories with their families, preferring to separate completely their new lives from their old, partly to protect their children from painful truths and partly to protect themselves. In Soviet Ukraine, giving voice to the truth about the famine years was punishable by imprisonment or execution, and many survivors never lost the fear that they, or any family left in Ukraine, would suffer if they spoke out.

More than 75 years later, most of those who participated in this study still felt that fear to some extent, but all faced it down to share the stories of their lives with me. These stories are not just part of a Ukrainian history, they are also part of the history of Western Australia, as these survivors spent their adult years here, determined to make their new country a true home for themselves and their families.

LESA MELNYCZUK



# INTRODUCTION

This book is a quest for understanding, an attempt to make sense of the very emotional history of the Ukrainian post-war migrants to Western Australia. It is not a history of Ukraine, it is a history of the Ukrainians who came to settle in Western Australia. They arrived in Australia by ship between 1947 and 1951, from the Displaced Persons camps of Europe, survivors of the worst of the Soviet regime's atrocities and only recently released from forced unpaid labour under the German Nazi regime.

The research this book is based on was undertaken as part of my doctoral research through the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle Western Australia. My aim was to gather oral testimonies from Ukrainian migrants in Western Australia and to record the main themes that emerged from the interviews, seeking to corroborate or otherwise inform existing published research relating to the Ukrainian famine. Although this is the first study of Ukrainian famine survivors to be completed in Western Australia, it is significant that the testimonies collected reflect the findings of similar studies carried out in Ukrainian communities elsewhere. This study adds to mounting evidence of the genocidal nature of the Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933 and the lasting effects it has had on survivors.

The youngest person in this study was six years old and the oldest was twenty-three in 1932. Thirty-five of the participants were forcibly taken from Ukraine between 1942 and 1944 under Hitler's program of importing young Ukrainians to labour unpaid in agricultural and factory work to support the Nazi war effort. All but two of the interviewees were part of the post-war refugee migration, although several lived for a time in other countries before coming to Western Australia. Some of the participants wished to remain anonymous, so pseudonyms have been used to conceal their identities.

OBLASTS/PROVINCES IN WHICH  
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MIGRANT  
INTERVIEWEES LIVED 1932–1933



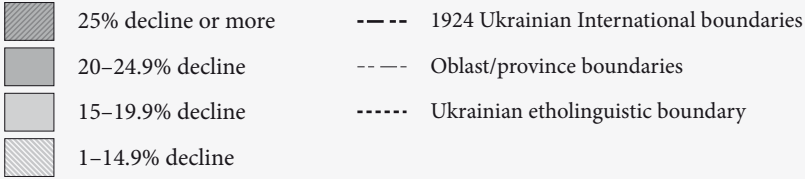
## BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEWEES BY UKRAINIAN PROVINCE 1932–1933

Current Ukrainian International boundary   
  1924 Ukrainian International boundary  
 Oblast/province boundaries   
  Provinces in which interviewee(s) lived

Cherkasy	5
Chernihiv	1
Donetsk	2
Dnipropetrovs'k	2
Ivano-Frankivsk	2
Kharkiv	9
Khmelnytskyy	2
Kirovohrad	1
Kyiv	2
Mykolayivi	2
Odessa	1
Poltava	5
Rostov*	1
Sumy	3
Volyn (now Zarudci)	1
Zhytomyr	2

\* Rostov is a province of the Russian Federation

# RATE OF UKRAINIAN POPULATION DECLINE 1932–1933



The forty-one Ukrainian migrants interviewed were elderly when this study began in 2003 and sadly, several did not live to see this book published. They shared their memories with me, finally overcoming the fears that had kept them silent for so many years. Many hoped that their own families and the wider Australian community, in learning of their experiences, would better understand what drove them to settle in this new land, so different and distant from their old homes.

Ukraine is located north of the Black Sea and is bordered by Russia, Byelorussia, Poland, and Romania. It is one of the largest countries in Europe, a land of flat plains and rolling hills. Ukraine was known throughout history as the ‘bread basket of Europe’, renowned for its black earth belt and mild continental climate, perfect for agriculture. The country was part of the old Russian Empire and after an attempt at independence following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Ukraine came under the control of Lenin’s newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>1</sup>

# REGIONAL EXTENT OF FAMINE IN THE UKRAINIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC 1932–1933



The economic strength of the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century was largely based upon agriculture. During the revolution, the peasants distributed large estates amongst themselves, leaving the Soviet Government with less control over agriculture and its main saleable commodity, grain.

Lenin's death in 1924 marked the beginning of a period of in-fighting amongst the Soviet leadership, but by 1928 Stalin had asserted control. His rise to power had particularly disastrous implications for Ukraine.

To regain control of agriculture and the wealth it created, Stalin began a program of collectivising farms across the Soviet Union, stripping ownership from the peasants and combining small allotments

into larger communal farms.

These collective farms were managed by Communist party supervisors with the previous owners working as labourers.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with continuing resistance to collectivisation and Soviet rule, Stalin maintained a brutal

control over the Ukraine. He considered its resources 'vital to the existence and further expansion of Soviet Russia.'<sup>3</sup> Terror, in the form of mass executions, deportations, and forced collectivisation, preceded the famine of 1932–1933.

Each of the interviewees spoke of 1932–1933 as years of famine and death. At this time the crops did not fail, rather the Communist activists came to the villages and confiscated the harvests, animals, and other food. The grain was left to rot in heavily guarded storehouses, while the peasants starved and died.





Millions of people died in the famine now known as Ukraine's Holodomor (death by famine).

There is much debate about the Holodomor, in particular around the causes of the famine and the number of people who died as a result. The question of whether the Holodomor constitutes an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people has become an international debate, with the governments of countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, as well as the survivors themselves, taking part. Canada has established a Day of Memory, to recognise and remember the Holodomor victims.<sup>4</sup>In November 2008, thirteen countries recognised the Holodomor in Ukraine as an act of genocide.<sup>5</sup> However, at the date of writing this book, persistent pressure from the Russian Federation and its allies has prevented the United Nations from declaring the Holodomor an act of genocide.

Part of the history of the Holodomor now rests within Western Australia. The testimonies of the Ukrainian migrants will contribute to scholarly and popular knowledge of the event, adding to the weight of evidence that may eventually lead the international community to determine, once and for all, that the Holodomor was an act of genocide.

The end of the Holodomor did not mark an end to trauma for the interviewees. Their stories cover the period of the Soviet Great Terror of 1937–1938, then Germany's invasion of Ukraine during World War II and of how they were taken from their families to unpaid labour in Germany, before finally becoming Displaced Persons (DPs) at the end of the war in 1945.

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*Left:* Stamp 504, issued 1933, depicting 'happy' Ukrainians working on the field of a collective farm at the time when millions were dying from the Stalin-created famine.

After several years in the DP camps of Europe, the Ukrainian refugees joined thousands of others who arrived in Western Australia on ships such as the *Anna Salen*, *Amarapoora*, and *Skaugum*, which set sail from various ports in Europe from 1949 onwards. With little or no money and no English, they landed in the Port of Fremantle and were quickly dispersed to rural and remote areas of Western Australia. The migrants' early years in Western Australia were dogged by hardship, uncertain working conditions, and isolation. Against these odds and despite the trauma and horror of their early lives, much was accomplished.

Many of those interviewed spoke of their deep desire to make this country their home, a safe haven for their families, far away from Communism and the atrocities of their childhood and youth. They succeeded.

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*Below: Displaced Persons Migrant transport ship Skaugum.*



## INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>Province during famine years</i>	<i>Forced labour in Germany</i>	<i>Date of Arrival in Western Australia</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Hanka	1926	Cherkassy	Yes	1949	F
Ivan	1923	Ivano-Frankivsk	Yes	1950	M
Josep	1925	Zhytomyr	Yes	1949	M
Olena	1923	Kyiv	Yes	1950	F
Evhan	1926	Kharkiv		1949	M
Theodora	1909	Dnipropetrovs'k	Yes	1950	F
Halina	1923	Cherkassy	Yes	1950	F
Orysia	1923	Sumy	Yes	1949	F
Janina	1917	Kharkiv	Yes	1949	F
Bohdan	1914	Sumy	Yes	1949	M
Julia	1925	Chernihivska		1949	F
Nina	1922	Kharkiv	Yes	1950	F
Fedor	1923	Chernihivska		1995	M
Luba	1935	Odessa		1995	F
Darka	1922	Poltava	Yes	1949	F
Tonia	1927	Rostov-on-Don	Yes	1950	F
Volodya	1918	Kharkiv	Yes	1950?	M
Stefka	1923	Donetsk	Yes	1962	F
Fania	1924	Cherkassy	Yes	1950	F

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>Province during famine years</i>	<i>Forced labour in Germany</i>	<i>Date of Arrival in Western Australia</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Lesia	1925	Kharkiv	Yes	1949	F
Marko	1917	Dnipropetrovs'k	Yes	1950	M
Larissa	1920	Ivano-Frankivsk		1989	F
Djenja	1924	Dnipropetrovs'k	Yes	1950	F
Irka	1925	Kharkiv	Yes	1950	F
Halena	1926	Cherkassy	Yes	1948?	F
Valya	1920	Poltava	Yes	1949	F
Marika	1926	Khmelnitsky	Yes	1949	F
Ella	1925	Zhytomyr		1950	F
Yurko	1910	Kyiv	Yes	1949	M
Katerina	1926	Sumy	Yes	1949	F
Danylo	1923	Poltava		1950	M
Suzanna	1924	Kirovograd	Yes	1964	F
Petro	1923	Mykolayivka	Yes	1964	M
Zoya	1924	Kharkiv	Yes	1950	F
Mykola	1921	Mykolayivka		1949	M
Yulia	1918	Kyiv	Yes	1950	F
Sofi	1923	Volyn	Yes	1950	F
Maria	1924	Poltava	Yes	1948	F
Taras	1924	Mykolayivka	Yes	1950	F
Zirka	1923	Kharkiv	Yes	1950	M
Mila	1923	Poltava	Yes	1950	F

# CHAPTER ONE

## — THE HOLODOMOR YEARS —

From 1928, when Stalin rose to power in the Soviet Union, the situation in Ukraine became increasingly dire.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union's wealth was dependent on agriculture and in Ukraine, the bread basket of Europe, this wealth was tied up in small holdings, owned by peasant farmers. The peasants not only had a measure of control over the most important source of wealth in Ukraine, they were also able to remain outside of the Communist economic system as they were largely self-sufficient.

At this time, Ukrainians were the largest single non-Russian national group within the Soviet Union, making up two-fifths of all non-Russian citizenry, and until the 1930s, the peasantry made up the 'overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian population.' The peculiarity of the peasants as a social stratum was their ability to foster traditions, language, and faith, preserving national and ethnic characteristics, in spite of the subjugation of powerful neighbours over long periods of time.<sup>2</sup> In this manner, they resisted even the Soviet Union.

This situation deprived Stalin of control over the wealth coming from Ukraine and over the people of Ukraine, who remained stubbornly separate, maintaining their culture and beliefs and resisting the ideals of Communism. Stalin sought to bring Ukraine firmly under the command of the Soviet Union, seeking to crush the Ukrainian national identity and seize control of agriculture. The institutions and individuals that were the bulwarks of Ukrainian beliefs came under attack, as did the peasantry.

The Soviet policies of dekulakisation and collectivisation robbed the Ukrainian peasants of their land, livestock, and personal possessions. Stripped of the ability to support themselves, they were subjected to the horror of an artificial famine. The Ukrainian famine, initiated by Stalin at the beginning of April 1932, was an unprecedented period of terror and tragedy, during which millions died from starvation and related causes.

It is accepted by some and widely debated by other scholars that the famine of 1932-1933, now known as the Holodomor, was genocide. The famine was entirely man-made. It was created and enforced by Soviet policy and was a deliberate attempt to crush the resistance of the Ukrainian peasantry to Communist rule. Dekulakisation and collectivisation were not separate from the famine, they occurred concurrently and were intrinsic parts of the Soviet policy that created and sustained the famine.

The famine was not limited to Ukraine, as neighbouring Russian provinces with large populations of ethnic Ukrainians were also targeted. However the most severely affected areas were in Ukraine, where the fertility of the land had created a strong, independent peasant culture, not compatible with the Soviet Communist regime and ideals. Nina, a survivor interviewed, stated that:

*They [the Soviets] wanted Ukraine to be starved out because we had very good land, peasant land ... people started to die.<sup>3</sup>*

This chapter considers the years of the Holodomor, covering the policies of dekulakisation and collectivisation, the role of Communist activists in creating and maintaining the famine, confiscation of property and land, religious persecution, treatment of the starving, disposal of corpses, and other results of famine and the oppressive regime. Survivor testimonies are related thematically, alongside other historical material, and offer insights into the effects of Soviet policies at a grass roots level.

## THE ASSAULT ON UKRAINIAN IDENTITY

Stalin hoped that mass terror would force Ukraine into submission. Any distinctly Ukrainian cultural, religious, academic, or scientific organisations were considered to represent potential bastions of counter-revolutionary, separatist ideas and were purged.

Stalin realised that Ukrainian nationhood was, in the words of *Conquest*, 'contained in the intelligentsia who articulated it' as well as in the peasant masses who sustained it and as early as 1929, distinguished Ukrainian academics and writers were arrested and deported to penal camps, where they could face execution for spurious misdemeanors.<sup>4</sup> Nina, one of the survivors interviewed, said that the teachers and the highly educated 'were all sent to Siberia'.<sup>5</sup>

The culture and traditions of Ukraine were also maintained through the performances of Kobzars (blind bards). The bards wandered the villages, performing songs and poetry, reminding Ukrainians of their independent and heroic past. In the mid-1930s, the Kobzars were invited to the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Lirniki and Banduristy (folk singers and minstrels). They were arrested and the majority was executed. This violent act ended a long-held tradition and silenced another group that had maintained Ukrainian traditions.<sup>6</sup>

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was also a target. The church had come under attack previously, as in the early 1920s its property was seized and confiscated. By 1923, twenty-eight bishops and thousands of priests had been executed.<sup>7</sup> Under Stalin's regime, the church faced another major assault beginning in late 1929, when priests were deported to the prison camps. Their crime was having acquired income unassociated with work.<sup>8</sup> Peasants who attempted to save their churches from desecration were also arrested and deported. Many of the priests, and 'the church's faithful, died in the Solovky Islands' and other prison camps.<sup>9</sup>

The churches were stripped. Rings and vestments were stolen. Crosses and bells were removed and icons and other objects of religious worship were burned as a matter of course.<sup>10</sup> Irreplaceable cultural monuments were lost. Destruction of the churches often flowed into the cemeteries, which were desecrated. By 1934, 75 to 80 percent of Ukrainian churches had been destroyed and the traditional core of Ukrainian spiritual life had been shattered.<sup>11</sup>

One interviewee, Hanka, spoke of the churches being used as grain stores or to house cattle from the collective farms. Such practices caused considerable distress to those of faith. Hanka indicated that there were revolts over such occurrences. Her own community's church was under threat of being used as a picture theatre, which she felt was sacrilegious.<sup>12</sup>

Survivors spoke of the religious icons that had decorated their homes prior to this period. Most families hid their icons, with parents keeping the locations secret even from their children. One of the survivors, Nina, spoke of her mother bringing the icons back out after the Holodomor as she was no longer prepared to hide them or fear the Communists.<sup>13</sup>

Stefka, a survivor, returned to visit Ukraine in the 1980s. Stefka's aunt had icons on the walls of her home that had been hidden throughout the Soviet era. The village priest had, of course, perished long before, but Stefka was taken to what had been his home to see the beautiful icons, which had been hidden for safekeeping for decades. Stefka was given one of these icons to take back to Australia and it now hangs in an Orthodox church in Perth.<sup>14</sup>

Several of the survivors spoke of having crosses they were wearing confiscated. Most children became accustomed to taking their crosses off before going to school and putting them back on upon returning home, to avoid repercussions.<sup>15</sup>

Although the Soviet Constitution, Article 18, technically permitted religious worship, in reality it was suppressed.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, Merridale states that under the Communist regime, some people became more religious, performing the



## The Holodomor Years

acts of their faith in secrecy.<sup>17</sup> A similar comment was made by one of the interviewees, Irka, who said that she was more religious during the years of Communist repression than she was in the free world.<sup>18</sup>

### DEKULAKISATION

Moroz and Makohon assert that the Soviet authorities divided Ukrainians into four classes in order to create and foster disunity. The classes created were: bidniaks (poor farmers), seredniaks (farmers of average standing), kulaks (wealthier farmers who were thought to be more resistant to the Soviet regime), and pidkulaks (poor people who supported the kulaks, usually by working for them).<sup>19</sup>

Stalin believed that the New Economic Policy<sup>20</sup> should be disbanded and that it was necessary to also destroy the kulak class to achieve this. He announced this policy of 'liquidation' on 27 December 1929.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent Politburo resolution 'On Measures for the Elimination of Kulak Households in Districts of Comprehensive Collectivization' of 30 January 1930, led to the destruction of this Soviet created class.<sup>22</sup> Those targeted were in Soviet Ukraine as well as in agricultural areas of the Don, lower Volga and Kuban, where there were sizable communities of Ukrainians. Figes asserts that the removal of kulaks had everything to do with 'the removal of potential opposition to the collectivization of the village'. Kulaks were 'peasant individualists, the strongest leaders and supporters of the old rural way of life.'<sup>23</sup>

Stalin attempted to complete the task of annihilating the Ukrainian kulaks in secrecy, with a complete press blackout. Under this policy of liquidation, kulak families were subjected to exile, deprivation, forced labour or execution. Vasily Grossman, who was then a Party activist committee member, remembers this period:

*The fathers were already imprisoned, and then, at the beginning of 1930, they began to round up families too ... They would threaten people with*

*guns, as if they were under a spell, calling small children 'kulak bastards,' screaming 'Bloodsuckers!' And those 'bloodsuckers' were so terrified that they hardly had any blood of their own left in their veins. They were as white as clean paper.<sup>24</sup>*

Magocsi noted that the Bolsheviks branded the kulaks 'enemies of the people.'<sup>25</sup> Stalin declared that kulaks were 'not human beings.'<sup>26</sup> This was a view echoed by Grossman, who admitted that at the time they 'really believed the destruction of the kulaks would bring about a happy life.'<sup>27</sup> He had fallen under Stalin's spell and believed that everything evil sprang from the kulaks:

*The 'kulak' child was loathsome, the young 'kulak' girl was lower than a louse. They looked on the so-called 'kulaks' as cattle, swine, loathsome, repulsive. They had no souls; they stank; they all had venereal diseases; they were enemies of the people and exploited the labour of others.<sup>28</sup>*

Dekulakisation led to 'the killing, or deportation to the Arctic with their families, of millions of peasants, in principle the better-off, in practice the most influential and the most recalcitrant to the Party's plans.'<sup>29</sup> The authorities believed that a member of the kulak class could be identified by ownership of a property of 'twelve acres, a cow, a horse, ten sheep, a hog and about twenty chickens, on a farm which could support four people.'<sup>30</sup> Such a kulak would be required to fulfill a quota of six hundred and nineteen bushels of wheat.<sup>31</sup> In practice, this quota was difficult, if not impossible, for most families to meet.

The addendum to the Minutes of the Soviet Politburo meeting number 93, dated 6 December 1932, outlined the severe penalties imposed for not meeting the grain quota or for refusing to cooperate with the authorities. The kulaks and 'counterrevolutionary elements' were held responsible and their villages placed on the black list for so called 'disruption of the grain collection plan.' These blacklisted villages were listed in the Addendum.<sup>32</sup> The kulaks who failed to meet their quotas were arrested, their property, food, and all their livestock was confiscated, and the whole family thrown out onto the street or deported to Siberia.<sup>33</sup>

## The Holodomor Years

Stalin instigated a propaganda campaign to convince people that dekulakisation was 'an essential element in forming and developing collective farms' and that liquidating the kulaks, 'an accursed enemy of the collective farm movement', was a necessity.<sup>34</sup> He sent Party bosses Molotov, Chairman of Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Kaganovich, a member of the Soviet Politburo and the First Secretary of the Moscow region of the Ukrainian Communist Party, and NKVD Secret Police Chief Yagoda, to Ukraine to force the issue of dekulakisation. Those who resisted were herded into cattle wagons and many were later unloaded at Vologda, one of the main transit points to the Soviet prisons in Siberia.

Reid states that many who survived the train journey subsequently died near Vologda station. Those who were still on their feet were marched to their final destination or simply abandoned in the wilderness, where they were expected to build their own camp.<sup>35</sup> The freezing conditions took their toll and many died from the cold and the privation. Others faced execution. Margolis records that Kaganovich set a quota of 10,000 executions a week and that eighty percent of Ukrainian intellectuals met their deaths as a result.<sup>36</sup>

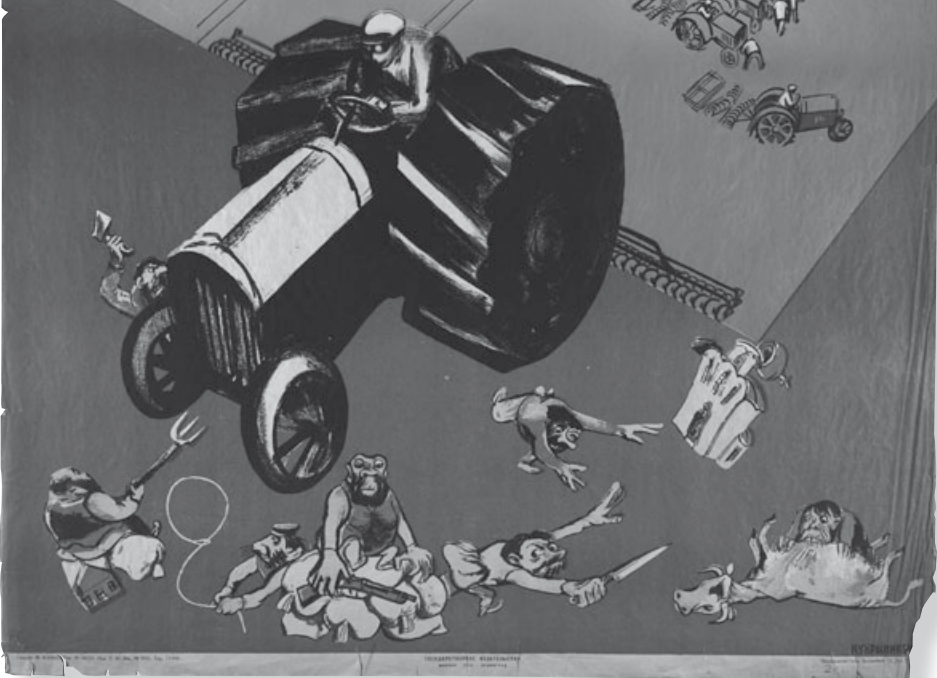
Peasants of every economic situation were caught up in the dekulakisation process.<sup>37</sup> Figes states that in some villages, people actually selected kulaks from their own number or drew lots. Isolated farmers, widows, and the elderly were singled out to satisfy the demands of the activists who visited the villages in search of kulaks.<sup>38</sup> Children were left abandoned when their parents were arrested, shot, or deported. Kulaks who were not executed or deported, were denied education and employment and lived in constant fear of arrest as traitors to the fatherland.

Grossman describes a typical scene of kulaks being evicted from their homes. He relates how the Ukrainians were driven out on foot in winter, trying to carry whatever they could on their backs, with the mud so deep it was pulling their boots off. The kulaks kept looking back at their homes where the stoves

# УНИЧОЖИМ КУЛАКА КАК КЛАСС

В РАЙОНАХ СПЛОШНОЙ  
КОЛЛЕКТИВИЗАЦИИ КОНФИ-  
СОВАННОЕ ИМУЩЕСТВО  
КУЛАЦКИХ ХОЗЯЙСТВ, ЗА  
ИСКЛЮЧЕНИЕМ ТОЙ ЧАСТИ,  
КОТОРАЯ ИДЕТ В ПОГАШЕНИЕ  
ПРИЧИТАЮЩИХСЯ С КУЛА-  
КОВ ОБЯЗАТЕЛЬСТВ (ДОЛГОВ)  
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫМ И КО-  
ОПЕРАТИВНЫМ ОРГАНАМ,  
ДОЛЖНО ПЕРЕДАВАТЬСЯ  
В НЕДЕЛИМЫЕ ФОНДЫ КОЛ-  
ХОЗОВ В КАЧЕСТВЕ ВЗНОСА  
БЕДНЯКОВ И БАТРАНОВ,  
ВСТУПАЮЩИХ В КОЛХОЗ.

(ИЗ ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ЦК и  
СМ ЦСР)



Above: Soviet propaganda campaign poster. 'Let us destroy the Kulaks as a class', 1930. (Soviet Poster Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.)

## The Holodomor Years

were still burning and smoke was coming out of the chimneys, their dinners still on the table. The women were sobbing and too terrified to scream for fear of even worse repercussions.<sup>39</sup> People faced brutal evictions without warning. The lines of the dispossessed stretched in all directions from all the villages.<sup>40</sup>

A survivor now living in Chicago, Anna Pylypiuk, was celebrating her eighth birthday when the black raven, the name given to the vehicle used to remove prisoners, arrived one dark autumn night in 1929 and took her father away. She remembers crying so much that the 'lips of her family members became dry and their bodies froze.'<sup>41</sup>

Several of the Western Australian survivors shared their memories of the arrival of the Soviet authorities to their homes or villages. Mykola said:

*And sometime after ten they came, a whole group of them. Immediately they bound my father. This is how they tied his hands, [physically demonstrated], and sat him down, and told us to get dressed ... It was freezing outside, and snowing. 'Get dressed and march out from the house.' I was never to return. And whoever opened the door to people like us, the same will happen to that person. And what happened? We got dressed and left absolutely everything as it was. My sister wasn't able to walk from birth. Mother carried her on her shoulders, and took grandmother, pulling her to the neighbour's house. They were relatives of grandmother. Mother knocked on the door. They didn't open up, they weren't letting anyone in. She said, 'they're not letting anyone in.'*

*And so I stood in the street, in the freezing temperatures, I had dressed warmly, and waited for mother in the freezing weather. What were we going to do now? The snow — it was so bright like — like in the daytime in the snow. There were no roads anywhere, everything was closed, here and there might be a trace of a road. Road or no road, you knew more or less where to go, and mother said to go to father's sister's place, twelve kilometers away.<sup>42</sup>*

Another survivor, Bohdan, spoke of how his family was dekulakised and their household was ‘crushed’. He was sent to Siberia in 1928 and recalled his mother carrying his six-year-old sister in her arms throughout the long trek. He remembered eating horses’ hooves in Siberia.<sup>43</sup>

Bohdan’s father died in 1932, after three years in Siberia. After his father’s death, Bohdan escaped Siberia with his mother and sister. They took thirty-four months to get back to their home, traveling mostly on foot and sometimes stowing away on trains. They lived in fear for their lives.<sup>44</sup>

Bohdan and what was left of his family arrived back to discover the ravages of the famine. His mother was not accepted when they returned because they had been dekulakised. They were sent five regions away from their own village and kept there for a week, until it had been confirmed that Bohdan’s father was not with them and had died. The family was finally left alone and not sent back to Siberia. However, their house had become part of a collective farm and had been turned into a granary. Bohdan had to work on the collective farm in order to survive.<sup>45</sup>

Volodya tells of his family being classified as kulaks because his father was a skilled boot maker in the winter, worked in the fields during summer, and also owned cows and horses. Volodya’s father had feared that the house would be burned down by the Communists as that was one way in which they asserted their power over the dissenting kulaks. The family somehow managed to escape being deported but faced the loss of their farm once collectivisation began.<sup>46</sup>

Near the sea of Azov, where the railway ended, Stefka lived with her family near a river and the Kossa Hill. She stated that during 1929 or 1930, the authorities began transporting kulaks from many different regions to the top of the hill, where they lived in barracks.<sup>47</sup> The kulaks began digging into the hill ‘like mosquitoes’, as she put it. They were digging the foundations of factories. Two or three iron and steel factories were built on the hillside by the hard labour of dekulakised Ukrainians, whose families knew nothing of where they were.<sup>48</sup> Stefka returned to Ukraine years after the famine and saw these factories still functioning.

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Lesia remembered her father wanting to leave their village before dekulakisation began, but her mother refused and they remained. The family was labeled kulaks. Lesia's father was conscripted into the army and her mother took them to their paternal grandparents' home, near the Kirovgrad Oblast. Lesia's mother struggled to feed her own children, but she also feared for the brother she had left behind. He had been dekulakised, stripped of all his possessions, his wife had died, and he had eight children to care for. They lived in a cow shed and slept on straw. Lesia's mother had left them foraging in the frozen earth, hoping to uncover food that might have been secretly hidden by other people.<sup>49</sup>

Djenia gave a succinct account of the kind of treatment meted out to Ukrainian families:

*We had a big house, but everything was taken away from us. Everything, including the garden. We had a two-hectare garden with cherries. It was such a garden! My mother said they had better not take away everything, just leave the house and the garden, but they deprived us of everything. Some Communists made it their home, and we couldn't go back there. Once we went there with friends and were almost arrested by militia. We couldn't pick cherries in our own garden ...*

*In those times one couldn't emigrate anywhere, because the Soviets caught such people and exiled them in Siberia. Whoever was caught was exiled. People went through that very hard. A friend's parents had neither horses nor cows, nothing, and the father was thrown out of the house ...*

*The Russians did such harm to us. Robbed us, took away our horses, the cow, which I liked very much. I tell you, it was such a tragedy, God forbid this happening to any nation, our nation suffered the most ...*

*They dispossessed us, but didn't send us away to another administrative oblast or region where there were mines [as happened to*

*others, although the mines were feared]. Who could work and was young still had some life, and those who were old had to die. In the villages people suffered a lot ...<sup>50</sup>*

Larissa was dekulakised with her family. They were sent to Siberia for about two and a half years. Her family and others were then collected by the army and taken to a place known then as 'Persia', where they lived in tents. The husband of this migrant had been taken into the army together with her brother.<sup>51</sup>

Irka remembers that the dekulakisation process began in her region from about 1932 when she was six years old. Her father came from a family of six sons and all of them were dekulakised. Some ran away and she called them 'the lucky ones'. Others were sent to Siberia. Irka's father ran away but her mother had five children and were thrown out of their home. The home was destroyed and Irka's family went to live with her grandmother. There was no further mention of her father, they assumed he had perished.<sup>52</sup> Not knowing the fate of a family member, whether they lived or how they died, is a common legacy of the Communist era.

Halena's matter of fact words nonetheless reveal glimpses of how difficult life was for her as a young child during the time of dekulakisation:

*They turned us out of our house, and mother went to stay with my father's sister. I went to school, so I wasn't yet driven away. I stayed at my aunt's and at my grandfather's. I finished school, seven forms, in our village. Mother had to work, so she worked on a collective farm for six months, and then the head of the collective sent her to work at a cooperative. Mother worked in a shop, not a private shop, like here. So she worked there, and then the war began. She died right before the war. She didn't know good times. People ask me why I never went back to visit, but I didn't and don't want to go home. My husband went, but he is from Volyn, and they didn't starve there. He maybe heard about the starvation, I don't know. That's how it was.<sup>53</sup>*



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After Stalin's death in 1953, Josep's grandfather was pardoned and sent home from Siberia. He was told that he need not have been deported. He was not part of any dissident group. He lost twenty years to forced labour in Siberia. His family believed they had lost him forever. His wife had migrated to Western Australia and his son had grown up without a father. He returned to his old village and died there. Josep's understanding was that his grandfather had been given no compensation, no medical assistance, and no pension. Josep's grandfather was a poor, broken man who lost everything because he was falsely labeled an 'enemy of the people'.<sup>54</sup>

Katerina was still fearful and found it very difficult to speak about this time in her childhood. She remembered fully the events of the night the militia came to take away her father. The children were terrified and clutched at their mother's skirt, crying with fright. Unspeakable things happened. The next day, her mother was ridiculed by the village council when she attempted to pay the tax they had levied on the family. Katerina noted how difficult such memories were for children who did not understand what was happening.<sup>55</sup> Others remembered similar stories of property being confiscated and people disappearing.<sup>56</sup>

Survivors spoke of people losing all rights during dekulakisation. Zoya stated that people were deprived of the right to vote at village councils.<sup>57</sup> Communist activists or the militia were permitted to come a second time to confiscate goods and arrest people in case they had missed something or someone the first time. The first official round began in 1929 and the second round occurred in 1930.<sup>58</sup> Some people were subjected to further visits at arbitrary intervals.

Zoya often reflected on what a nightmarish time it was. Ukrainian villages were traditionally known for their whitewashed houses, neat and tidy gardens, good roads, animals and strong community. She spoke of how abominable it was, what the Communists had done to her village. After the banishment of her family and the imprisonment of her father, a notice had been put on the door of their house stating that the family was 'under political observation and political

persecution/enemies of the system'. Upon her return many years later, she found a very unkempt village with potholes in the road and houses gone. None of the people she had known were still living in what was left of her village.<sup>59</sup>

During 1933, Mykola's family lived on the street. They rescued a chicken that had been maimed by a horse stepping on its leg. The hen lived with them for some years, laying precious eggs that sustained them until it was stolen in 1935 by an old lady who slaughtered it.<sup>60</sup>

Theodora's story provided one of the most comprehensive overviews of dekulakisation, dispossession, and exile to Siberia. In her community, people were driven to the village council where some said that they should be taken to Siberia so that 'mosquitoes would eat out their eyes', a reference to the mosquitoes which plagued Siberia. The deportees were taken to a station and unloaded for a day into a church. They then had to stand upright in a train for an entire day in a place called Vologda before being transported in an enclosed train with forty people squeezed into the carriage.<sup>61</sup>

Theodora's husband, father and son were brought to the station at Murene to which she had already been transported. Her husband did not recognise her, his mother, or his sisters. Theodora had been taken by force, her husband and son thirty kilometers from her at the time. 'Don't cry,' said her husband, 'it will be even better for us that I didn't recognise that it was you.'<sup>62</sup>

They were led into a huge hall with people just standing there. They were put to one side, and they did not know why. A militiaman took them into another room where the NKVD was waiting. In that room stood a table, covered with red, at which the NKVD officials sat and asked them what they knew.

Her father had told Theodora not to disclose anything about the family. They had land holdings in different regions and her father-in-law had also bought a great deal of land. She only knew how much forest they had bought: one hundred 'dessiatin' (a measure of land), a lake with fish, and a mill, and that they had built three houses. The latter was their 'khuty' (farm). She went on to describe the history of how the family had come to own the land and what had

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happened to it since the years of the revolution. There had been murders by the Bolsheviks, people exiled and much destruction since then.

Theodora was interrogated by the NKVD, the secret police, as to why her husband, father, and son had been imprisoned. During this time, the three men had been forced out into the Siberian forest with nothing to eat. Others had also been arrested and imprisoned but some had been moved on to the 'concentration camp' [her term] at Arkhangelsk in Russia.

Much transpired in between these developments. Theodora's will to survive helped her escape, and she began to make her way back towards Ukraine with other people, including some of her own family. Along with her husband's sister and her aunt, who had an eighteen month old baby named Vera tied to her bosom or back, she ran through the forest for ten days. Sympathetic Russians devised a route to take them to a village where they stayed for three days to gather their strength and rest.

Theodora's story was at times confronting and her recall of the names of places and her descriptions of events along the way, together with her understanding of the history of the period, confirmed the truth of her journey. She was eventually captured and again interrogated by the NKVD who said that she would be put on trial. They asked her why she was running back. She replied that it was where she had come from and that there was no-one for her anywhere else. Her husband was in jail and her son and father lost to her, and also because there was nothing to eat where she had been.

The officer said to her, 'We'll send you where you were,' and she cried. Then he said, 'We'll send you where there's work and where there will be food.' Theodora told him nothing more. He asked her about a particular town. She knew where it was and she had relatives there. And at once she became scared and thought that he would 'tear her into pieces'. The officer said that he was from Ukraine and then asked her where she would like to go. She said, 'To Ukraine'. He told her that she could not go there and said that she would be sent to another place, but he did not say where.

Theodora said that she was taken by the Murmansk railroad. Food was brought to her by the military, and she slept a lot because she was very weak. She saw that she was going to the Appatyt station, because there was nowhere further to go. The Lapps, who kept reindeer, had been moved somewhere to the mountains where they built a town and erected a big factory. There were engineers at this place, one from America and another from Germany. Theodora's husband had sent word that she should 'get to Ukraine', but all the time she lived there she could not run away on her own. The railway was laid through the camp, by those who were in the concentration camps. The prisoners were brought there and had built a road twenty kilometers away from the Appatyt station. They had also built a big town and a lake. Theodora could not remember the name of that city or town. She could not remember whether it was Kandalash or Minorsk.

Theodora eventually escaped by truck. Another woman risked her own life to help her, by covering her and sitting on top of her. Theodora found her way to Moscow and was taken in by a poor Russian family who treated her very well. She eventually caught a train to Jalovaisk in the Donbas region. Her own father was already working in the Jalovaisk government collective farm. She arrived at the time when they had to live in dormitories. 'Oh God, how poor we were', she said. A brother arrived from Makijivka where he worked at the blast furnaces. He took Theodora back to Makijivka where she worked until transported as forced labour to Germany in 1943.<sup>63</sup>

Another Ukrainian migrant, Orysia, spoke of being dispossessed and separated from her family as a young child. The rest of her childhood was spent being led from house to house, hoping that someone would take her in:

*They took everyone. They took father ... They did not want to take little children. They took my mother. She tried hard to get away from them but couldn't do anything. I saw her screaming. I understood absolutely nothing about this — where am I and why am I? When they were taking*

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*me around to the different houses they said that I was a wealthy kurkul's [kulak's] daughter, a capitalist's child. No-one took me. You know it was like a kitten, they take it, feed it and it sits in a corner.*<sup>64</sup>

Janina also remembered dekulakisation during 1933. Her father was to have been transported to Siberia but the family was saved by the local officials, when they were reminded that it was this family that had fed the whole village. The villagers had worked for Janina's family on their fifty to sixty hectares of land and they reminded the officials that the wife had always given them what they had earned and then some more food to take home. She would ask how many children they had, and would give them butter, and cheese, and other things. Consequently the family was not deported to Siberia; instead they stayed in Ukraine and starved like everyone else.<sup>65</sup>

Poltava was a region hard hit during the period of dekulakisation. 'People were dispossessed by the Communists for being rich' stated Valya. She said people were sent to Siberia to work and spoke of the conditions of life for inmates of the camps there. It is likely that Valya had a family member who was transported, as she spoke with such understanding of accommodation, work, and illness within the camps. She mentioned the suffering from tuberculosis and rheumatism, and of how people perished in the severe conditions.<sup>66</sup>

A survivor, Ella, spoke of those labeled as kulaks and transported to Siberia, saying 'they suffered greatly.'<sup>67</sup> In discussing the elimination of kulaks, Stalin is on record as saying on 27 December 1929, 'When the head is off one does not mourn for the hair.'<sup>68</sup>

The Ukrainian migrants had strong memories of how the Soviet regime treated kulaks, whether it was their own family affected or a friend or neighbour. The fear that their turn might come if they were not Party members would have been tangible, even though Party membership was a privilege not available to all.

## COLLECTIVISATION

Valentino argues that Stalin saw the long term survival of the Soviet regime as dependent on reaching an immediate solution to the collection of grain through collectivisation.<sup>69</sup> Most Soviet Ukrainians opposed this policy and it was during the move to collectivisation that the majority of deaths occurred. According to Leszek Kolakowski, the commencement of collectivisation saw the Soviet government carry out ‘probably the most massive warlike operation ever conducted by a state against its own citizens.’<sup>70</sup> Stalin, Valentino states, decided that any program for overcoming the resistance of the peasants would have to be quick and involve considerable coercion.<sup>71</sup>

The first Soviet Five Year Plan was launched in 1928 and as part of this plan Stalin announced the policy of collectivisation of agriculture the following year.<sup>72</sup> Collectivisation meant ‘the effective abolition of private property in land, and the concentration of the remaining peasants in collective farms under Party control.’<sup>73</sup> Stalin believed that collectivisation would enable industrialisation, which would result in rapid militarisation and secure the Soviet state. The collective farms were a means of taking back land that had been given to the peasants by the Bolsheviks during the 1917 Revolution. Stalin was taking control away from the peasant farmers, who had until this point been able live outside the economic system set up by the Soviet government.

These newly created collective farms were large state-owned estates. When peasants joined the farms they surrendered their own land, implements, and animals. Their hours of work were not defined, their wages were not fixed, and the distribution of the food remaining after state quotas were met was based on the number of days they worked.<sup>74</sup>

Ukrainian writer and witness Pigido-Pravoberezhny states that workers on the collective farms might receive a small monetary payment post-harvest,

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*Right:* Collective Farm, Ukraine. (Morgan E. Williams Collection.)



after the various state payments were made. At the time, the average pay for Soviet citizens and officials was approximately 300 to 350 rubles per month. In contrast, collective farm workers might be paid between 20 and 80 kopecks for a day's work, with 100 kopecks equaling a ruble. Pigido-Pravoberezhny calculates that the state made from 2,900 to 10,000 percent gross profit from these workers.<sup>75</sup>

Pigido-Pravoberezhny notes that payments to collective farm workers did not include anything for the small children or elderly parents who were part of the traditional family group, and who could not work; although one survivor, Evhan, spoke of even pre-school aged children being made to work on the collective farms at times.<sup>76</sup>

Pigido-Pravoberezhny states that most items were prohibitively expensive for collective farm workers. A pair of boots, the main footwear of the peasants, cost 300 to 700 rubles and sugar was three and a half rubles per kilogram.<sup>77</sup> It is no surprise that essential commodities quickly became unaffordable for most families.<sup>78</sup> Even staples, such as bread, were out of reach for most workers. Bread cost three rubles a kilogram and this could equal four days' work on the collective farm. Workers might also receive some grain and straw after threshing was complete, but they received no luxuries, as defined by the state, with all dairy, poultry, oil, flax, and honey, for example, handed over to the government.

For children, the inability of their families to provide them with basic necessities meant that in addition to being starved they were often prevented from attending school. School was usually some distance away and lacking shoes in the winter cold and snow, it was impossible for the children to attend. One survivor, Halina, spoke of her parents going without some items of clothing so she could attend school; in her words: 'I finished school, literally, in my father's boots and my mother's coat.'<sup>79</sup>

Another interviewee, Marko, lamented the way people were treated on the collective farms:

*Oh-oh-oh. It's such a tragedy, so hard to speak about. To imagine people,*



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*hard-working people, grain-growers, who grew wheat, [being deprived of grain] and it was sold abroad. At our station there was 'Sovpoltorg' [Soviet-Polish Trade]. They bought chickens which were processed and the chicken meat sent abroad, with nothing left for us. They gave us nothing. We couldn't buy meat, they didn't sell it.<sup>80</sup>*

Hanka also spoke of the conditions her family faced on the collective farm:

*The Communists just wanted us to give them everything. They took away everything from the people and made the collective farms. They called them collective farms. My dad worked on a collective farm. He was very poorly, swollen, because there wasn't anything to eat.<sup>81</sup>*

In describing the start of collectivisation, interviewees recalled family property, including the precious family cow, being taken from their homes and given to the collective farms.<sup>82</sup> Many spoke of the bitterness and anger with which the collective farms were viewed and the punitive measures enforced against any who resisted.<sup>83</sup> Zirka stated her belief that collective farms were set up to destroy the Ukrainian people.<sup>84</sup>

Some survivors spoke of resisting relinquishing family owned land to the collective farms. When faced with giving up their farm, Toni's father told the authorities, 'You come and get it yourself if you want it'. By this stage, he had already hidden his precious horses to prevent the Communists from seizing them. After this altercation, he brought the horses out of hiding, attached them to a cart, and the family left.<sup>85</sup>

Volodya's family had been labeled kulaks but had managed to escape being deported. When collectivisation began, they lost their farm. Volodya was thirteen at the time and still needed to go to school. He described how people preferred to go thirty kilometers away to work in factories in the cities, rather than work on the collective farms. The collective farms were an abomination to these hard-working peasants who simply wanted independence and land that they could call their own.<sup>86</sup> Volodya himself made the choice to traverse great distances to work in a factory in a nearby city.<sup>87</sup>

Marika's mother worked on a collective farm but her father refused to do so, instead finding employment with a doctor and essentially living at the premises. He was fortunate not to be transported to a penal colony, as Conquest states that resistance to collectivisation incurred severe punishment, including deportation to distant Arctic labour camps. One such camp, in Kolyma, was known as the coldest place on earth. Prisoners there bitterly joked that there 'were 12 months of winter and all the rest was summer.'<sup>88</sup> While Marika's father escaped this fate, the family was nonetheless punished. All of their land was confiscated and they were left with only the house. They were told that if they did not join the collective farm they had 'no right to venture out and urinate outside' because it was no longer their land.<sup>89</sup>

Ownership of land was extremely important to the Ukrainian psyche and parts of the family farms were traditionally given to young Ukrainian couples when they married. Josep spoke of the mental and emotional distress people experienced when forced to relinquish their land and join the collective farms:

*When I think about it, I just think about the scary, inhuman, and devilish regime, the Soviet system. Stalin and his henchmen wanted to set up a new order — to send everyone to the collective farms. Saying that the collective farms would evenly distribute wealth and not have wealthy people as in non-Communist countries, where everyone can become wealthy.*

*They did it so that people from ten to one hundred were on the land. He wanted to turn them upside down to the other side so that they worked and lived like peasants. At the collective farms they had to give up their homes and so on but that will never work. To suddenly disrupt people. You can't. People didn't want it. Some didn't want the collective farms ... Everyone wanted privacy and freedom.<sup>90</sup>*

Djenja's family property was taken over by a collective farm. Her parents had owned beautiful white horses, which were confiscated along with the land, and these horses were whipped and ridden to death by people who did not

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understand animal husbandry. If her father had protested 'they would have beaten him or killed him' so he said nothing, but Djenia spoke of her anguish at the mistreatment.<sup>91</sup>

Ukrainian survivors considered the collective farms as futile and mismanaged developments. Many were left disillusioned, confused, and angry by the move to collectivisation. Some spoke of parents losing their sense of self-worth and pride in their work. Marko's father felt this way when he was sent away from his family to graze cattle and cows from the collective farm on the nearby steppes.<sup>92</sup> This was work usually done by boys or unskilled adults, but for those with a skill or profession of some kind, like Marko's father, it was demeaning work.

Grabowicz describes some of the psychological consequences and impacts of collectivisation. She asserts that 'de-emphasizing the individual and shifting all importance to the collective was the first stage to personality restructuring' and that collectivisation created 'a generation that was emotionally paralysed and paranoid'.<sup>93</sup>

As Ukrainians were so reluctant to join the collective farms a more concerted effort was made to take over the villages and collectivise the farms during 1930. Communist activists were sent to manage the collective farms and control the requisitioning of seed. They were assisted by members of the Komsomol, the Communist youth organisation. Activists were told that the 'authorities needed an injection of Bolshevik iron ... [they were to] beat down the kulak agent whenever he raises his head ... and act like Bolsheviks worthy of Comrade Stalin'.<sup>94</sup>

## THE ONSET OF FAMINE

The famine of 1932-1933 'was not a natural phenomenon but a politically engineered cataclysm', according to Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan.<sup>95</sup> The opposition to compulsory collectivisation saw the introduction of cruel measures designed to bring the Ukrainian people to their knees. In July 1932,

the Third All-Ukrainian Party held a conference, with Molotov and Kaganovich in attendance. The purpose was to discuss the reasons why Ukrainian peasants were resisting joining the collective farms. Stalin viewed their opposition as a major crisis, as Ukraine was a highly valued source of produce and war materials for the entire Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup>

The outcome of this conference was a plan from Moscow that destroyed the Ukrainians' hopes of retaining individual ownership of land. The plan, in effect, was to remove all food reserves from Ukrainian peasants so they would be forced to join the collective farms in order to survive. Hamalian calls the resultant famine one of the worst in human history and notes that while its causes are complex and clouded, collectivisation is the most important cause as 'it involves conscious decisions and hence motive and intent'.<sup>97</sup>

Davies, Wheatcroft, and Ellman agree that Stalin was less concerned with the lives of the peasantry than with industrialisation. 'Divide all those hospitalized into sick and improving, and considerably increase the good of the latter so that they can be released as quickly as possible'.<sup>98</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft also assert that Stalin believed 'the famine was the peasants' own fault'<sup>99</sup>, supporting Ellman, who notes the belief at the time that those who were starving were idlers and therefore, in Stalin's eyes, deserved to die. This seemed to be a typical reaction to the famine by Stalin's regime.<sup>100</sup> In his speech of 11 January 1933, Stalin said that the kulaks had not yet been beaten by the executions and deportations and the 'class struggle' had not been completed. Although by then two and a half million peasants had been caught up in the repression, Stalin stated that more punitive measures would be necessary.<sup>101</sup>

The result, according to Conquest, was that Stalin 'regarded the weapon of famine as acceptable, and used it against the kulak-nationalist enemy'.<sup>102</sup> He maintains that Stalin and the regime would have known that the policies of 1932 would result in famine and that they did nothing to prevent the starvation which eventuated or to alleviate its effects.

Conquest sums up as follows:

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1. The cause of the famine was the setting of highly excessive grain requisition targets by Stalin and his associates;

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  2. Ukrainian Party leaders made it clear at the start to Stalin and his associates that these targets were highly excessive;

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  3. The targets were nevertheless enforced until starvation began;

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  4. Ukrainian leaders pointed this out to Stalin and his associates and the truth was also made known to him and them by others; and

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  5. The requisitions nevertheless continued.<sup>103</sup>

Hamalian agrees and argues that Stalin's interest was not in feeding the starving. If it had been, food exports would have ceased, foreign aid would have been accepted, and food would have been imported. None of these actions were permitted at the time.

The famine began in April 1932, after the harvest, when as much grain as possible was taken by the state and secured in warehouses. The famine was not the result of a natural disaster or a poor harvest, it was caused by excessive state requisitioning of grain and other foodstuffs. One survivor, Luba, recalled that there was a 'really good harvest' and believed that the Soviet authorities simply wanted to 'get rid of all Ukrainians'.<sup>104</sup>

The grain allowances provided by the state or obtained from collective farms simply did not meet the needs of the people and although they rationed carefully what supplies they could get, starvation began with the onset of severe requisitioning.<sup>105</sup> April, May, and June 1932 were the worst months and people were forced to resort to eating green vegetation which led to an epidemic of dysentery. Little care was given to livestock during the blight and many animals died as starving people neglected them or slaughtered them for food. There is evidence that by March 1933, an estimated 76.2 percent of horses had died in one year.<sup>106</sup>

As all personally owned foodstuffs had been confiscated, many peasants

stole food from the collective farms. The government responded by passing a decree stating that all collective farm property was owned by the state, and as such anyone who stole from the farms was declared an enemy of the people. Theft was punished by confiscation of all family property and, in some cases, the additional imposition of a sentence of no less than ten years in a penal camp.<sup>107</sup> Stalin was prompted to write in a letter in August of 1932 that ‘we may lose Ukraine’ as a result of the tough measures and maximum quotas he imposed as punishment for peasant resistance.<sup>108</sup>

The Western Australian migrant refugees’ memories of the Holodomor are of mass death, loss of family, trauma, bitterness, grief, and human resilience. Although eastern Ukraine experienced the worst of the famine, neighbouring Russian provinces with large populations of Ukrainians, such as Volgograd’s Don region, Rostov and the Kuban region which is now part of Krasnodar, were targeted as well.<sup>109</sup> In south east Ukraine and eastward to the Volga, there were large pockets of Ukrainians and, subsequently, acute famine. Two-thirds of these provinces were said to be ethnically Ukrainian. Gregorovich notes, as does Conquest, that just over the north-eastern border in Russia, food was plentiful.<sup>110</sup> Kononenko in Makohon writes:

*No, the famine was not a reaction against those who attempted to undermine Moscow’s aims — it was the aim.*<sup>111</sup>

Interviewee, Djenia, seven years old at the time of the famine, voiced the sentiment of all the survivors of the Holodomor when recalling her childhood: ‘What I remember is that I wanted to eat. That is all.’<sup>112</sup>

Werth uncovered evidence that Stalin imposed measures that were in effect ‘a death sentence’ for Ukrainian peasants.<sup>113</sup> He notes that the already critical famine situation was made worse by cutting off these peasants from the rest of the Soviet Union. Travel between rural and urban areas, and from Ukraine into neighbouring Russia or Belarus, was prohibited. These restrictions and border closures were not lifted until the end of 1934, when the famine was over.

Stalin issued a directive on 22 January 1933 for troops to be stationed on

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the Russia-Ukraine border as well as the Belarus-Ukraine border, preventing people from leaving or entering Soviet Ukraine. The border controls also closed off the northern Caucasus and the Kuban regions where two-thirds of the population were ethnically Ukrainian.

A circular was sent on the same day to station special patrols to stop what Stalin referred to as 'runaways,' peasants attempting to flee their villages. Peasants were no longer able to buy train tickets as they were forbidden travel certificates, which were usually issued by rural Soviets and collective farm directors.<sup>114</sup> Food was available in Russia but even if people succeeded in evading border controls and entering Russia, contraband food was confiscated upon their return to Ukraine.<sup>115</sup>

A system of internal passports for all Soviet citizens over sixteen years of age was implemented. This was intended to ensure that starving peasants did not leave their villages to look for work and food in the cities. It also trapped any escapees from the Gulags and any kulaks who had evaded the authorities by leaving their villages. It had the additional effect of inducing terror in the wandering peasants who had previously avoided persecution by keeping on the move.<sup>116</sup>

Despite these restrictions, the hungry left their homes and provinces to search for food or for work which would enable them to earn some money for bread. Kuromiya states that those with some sort of tie with Russia were able to go there in search of a better situation. He speaks of hungry people from collective farms gathering along the railway tracks, hoping that people traveling on the trains might throw them some bread. Keis, a witness quoted by Kuromiya, spoke of the corpses that littered the sides of the railway lines; people died while begging there.<sup>117</sup>

In remembering the time after the border closures, an interviewee, Ivan, stated that no-one was permitted to leave his village. 'It was so strict, that even dogs were not allowed to move.'<sup>118</sup> Josep also spoke of the restrictions and wondered 'where would they go anyway?' The village where his brother lived,

approximately 12 kilometers from Josep's village, was also full of hungry people. 'We could not go anywhere or escape. The Soviet Union closed the borders.'<sup>119</sup>

Mykola also spoke of border closures and people forbidden to leave the country. He said that some did leave Soviet Ukraine, although he wasn't sure where they went because he believed there was nowhere to go.<sup>120</sup> Zirka spoke of people attempting to leave and being returned to the village by police.<sup>121</sup>

One interviewee, Evhan, spoke of being in a displaced persons' camp after World War II and hearing a story from a person who crossed the border into Russia during the Holodomor in an attempt to find food for his family. This person was able to obtain some food in Russia, but had it confiscated as soon as he travelled back into Ukraine. It was from this person that Evhan learned there was no famine in Russia. This was a shock, as he had believed until then that everyone had suffered the same fate across the entire Soviet Union.<sup>122</sup>

## LIFE DURING THE HOLODOMOR

### *Starvation*

Starvation causes the body to wither, the skin takes on a dust-grey tinge and folds into many creases. The eyes become large, bulging, and immobile. It is common for the skin tissue, especially of the hands and feet, to swell and for eruptions and festering sores to develop. Blisters and boils appear all over the body, people suffer from urinary incontinence, and scurvy is common. Lethargy, fatigue, and general weakness occur and starvation diarrhea begins. Any exertion can induce heart failure. Eventually, a starving person will lapse into a semi-conscious state of sleep that might last a week, until their heart finally stops beating and they die.<sup>123</sup>

The Ukrainians faced a slow, painful death and witnessed loved ones undergoing the same agonising deterioration. Survivors spoke of watching loved ones die and knowing they faced the same fate. It was a terrifying,



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horrifying experience. Grossman, quoted by Conquest and Davies, describes the appearance of starving children:

*Heads like heavy balls on thin little necks, like storks ... And the children's faces were aged, tormented, just as if they were seventy years old ...*<sup>124</sup>

The survivors interviewed spoke of death by starvation in the third person; they spoke of the people, or some people, or of unnamed villages. It seemed too difficult to speak of the many deaths by starvation in more personal terms. Taras related how 'people' would go to the cemetery so they could die there and be buried more easily by others, but it was apparent that the people he spoke of in such a sorrowful way were related to him.<sup>125</sup>

Many famine survivors described the swelling of arms or legs that accompanies starvation; some witnessed people in this swollen state and others spoke of their own limbs swelling.<sup>126</sup> From these swollen limbs, a transparent liquid oozed, accompanied by a dreadful smell. Bohdan recalled a young girl in a pitiable state:

*She stood near the porch, that girl. She was eight or ten years old. Her legs were swollen like bottles, big glass bottles. They were leaking. Like broken glass, water was dripping from those legs. Do you understand?*<sup>127</sup>

This description was echoed by another survivor, Luba, who spoke of many people having legs swollen like buckets and also having swelling under their eyelids. She said that it was as if someone had poured water inside them. Luba recalled that it was difficult for people to walk in this state of swollen starvation and so they would crouch and rest in a gutter, eventually dying there.<sup>128</sup> Darka's mother died in this way.<sup>129</sup>

Some survivors described the swollen people as looking almost transparent.

According to Fania, in the beginning, both children and adults would stand around and stare at the people whose limbs had swelled from starvation, but in the end everyone became so accustomed to seeing swollen people that it was



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no longer as frightening as when it first began to occur.<sup>130</sup>

Several of the survivors had first-hand experience of swollen limbs and there was an awareness among them that, if no additional food could be found, this swelling meant death was imminent. When Petro's father's legs swelled, he said to his family:

*If we don't find anything to eat we will all die of hunger, because my legs are already swollen.*<sup>131</sup>

The family managed to obtain some barley and cooked soup and porridge and this sustained them. A child at the time, Petro had no idea where this food came from.

Marika spoke of her legs swelling to be 'as fat as barrels'. When this happened, her married sister arrived and took her to live with her family. Unfortunately there was little to eat there as well and in the end, her father somehow provided more food for Marika to eat and the swelling in her legs subsided.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Danylo related how as soon as he became swollen, his food intake was somehow increased by his family. He managed to survive, but in both his case and Marika's, someone in the family would have had to get by with less to eat.<sup>133</sup>

When children became swollen often their stomachs also became distended. Mila faced this swelling of her body as well as her legs. She survived by eating grass, although this 'food' did not reduce the swelling.<sup>134</sup> Orysia developed swollen legs and arms but the rest of her remained skinny. She spoke of a friend who had a very swollen body. This child had just eaten some sort of hot meal and was standing like a weak sack, before collapsing. The children knew the signs of imminent death, but were powerless to help each other in such

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*Left from top: Life Has become Better, Life Has Become Funnier* by Nestor Kyzenko, late 1990s. (Morgan E. Williams Collection.)

Starvation. (Morgan E. Williams Collection.)





*Mother of the year '33*, by Nina Marchenko, 1998–2000. (Courtesy Morgan E. Williams Collection.)





*The Road of Sorrow* by Nina Marchenko, 1998–2000. (Courtesy Morgan E. Williams Collection.)

extreme circumstances.

The Ukrainian migrants dotted their stories with comments such as ‘people died in the streets and at home, because they had nothing to eat’.<sup>135</sup> Stefka spoke of asking her father how the people lying or sitting in the street and begging at the local market survived. She did not remember her father’s reply, but went on to speak of people just lying down and dying in the street.<sup>136</sup> Marko recounted how ‘the bags of bones’, as he referred to them, sometimes reached the train station to beg, before dying.<sup>137</sup> Djenia spoke of people dying on the roadside in her village.<sup>138</sup>

Whole families perished. Halena spoke of a family friend who buried her entire family, but because she had work, albeit unloading trains, she had survived. Halena remembered the woman’s grief and distress, her constant tears.<sup>139</sup> Tonia felt extremely fortunate that six out of the thirteen children in her family on her mother’s side, survived. Her father’s parents had fifteen children and she was not sure if any of them survived the famine.<sup>140</sup>

Josep spoke of his friend Hrytch, whose mother had picked a particular weed and made soup for her family with it. The friend died four days later, but Josep believed that it was simply starvation and not the soup that was responsible.<sup>141</sup>

Not one person interviewed had a single friend surviving from their childhood.

There are a few translated interviews available from an unpublished Australian study by Elizabeth Waters and in one of these, the interviewee, Basil, spoke of his mother starving to death. Although he and his siblings found food, in the form of grass and weeds, their mother was too weak to eat.<sup>142</sup> It is possible that the mother simply left her children to eat what there

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*Right: Millions of Ukrainian Peasants, our Grandfathers and Great-Grandfathers Perished from the Holodomor organised by Communist Regime, Oleksandre Nikolayets, 1988.*  
(Morgan E. Williams Collection.)



**УКРАЇНА**  
**1932**  
**1933**



was in the hope that they would survive. Another survivor interviewed for the same study, Claudia, told of a mother having only a bowl of snow to give her starving children. Claudia lived in Kharkiv, where she said there was nothing to eat from 1932 onwards.<sup>143</sup>

The effects of starvation were not only physical; constant hunger caused people to react in inhibited and strange ways. Marika, whose parents appeared to abandon their children to fend for themselves, was offered varenyky (a Ukrainian dish comprising little dumplings filled with potato) when visiting the home of her aunt. For some reason, this aunt always seemed to have a little food. Marika refused the food, saying that she was not hungry, and no amount of pressing by her aunt could persuade her to eat. Marika went home and cried so much she could not breathe. She then avoided going to her aunt's house for a long time. In recounting the incident, she spoke of feeling too embarrassed to eat the varenyky and how, looking back, it was a stupid thing to do when she was so hungry.<sup>144</sup>

Petro says he felt as if the whole thing was a dream. He couldn't understand why people not guilty of anything should die of hunger.<sup>145</sup>

### *Disease*

With so many people in a weakened state, disease spread quickly. Additionally, the total lack of protein-based food, needed to aid recovery, meant that people swiftly succumbed to illness.<sup>146</sup> Dysentery and typhus, associated with famine, often took the lives of the starving before hunger did.

People were also exposed to illness through their diet. Starvation led people to eat cats, birds, dogs, and even livestock that had died from disease. Survivors interviewed for this study spoke of people eating diseased livestock. Although the risks were known, hunger drove people to consume the tainted meat.<sup>147</sup> On one occasion, spoiled fish washed up on the beach in Mariupol, on the Azov Sea, were eaten by starved and weakened people, many of whom died as a result.<sup>148</sup>

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A survivor, Djenia, gave an account of an outbreak of malaria and typhus in her village. She spoke of being encouraged to drink a bitter medicine made from wormwood. Clean drinking water was also scarce and when Djenia arrived home from school, thirsty, she would drink the brackish water which was all that was available. Soon after drinking, she would develop a fever and shake all over. According to her, this happened every day. She would come home thirsty, drink some water, and start shaking. She would then lie down and get under a blanket until the fever passed and she stopped shaking.<sup>149</sup>

Djenia was the only member of her family who did not contract typhus. She lost her mother to typhus and believes it was a miracle she herself did not also succumb, attributing this to the fact that at the time she enjoyed bathing and being clean. Speaking of the Holodomor years, Djenia stated that first came starvation, then malaria, and then typhus. People were already weak from hunger and often fell prey to these diseases.<sup>150</sup>

Other interviewees also spoke of dysentery and malaria and some noted that tuberculosis was rampant among those exiled to Siberia. Many perished from these diseases.<sup>151</sup>

### *Trudoden payments*

A trudoden payment was a payment in kind, for a day's work. It was generally made with food or grain. The Soviet system attempted to make many payments by trudoden. One survivor, Yurko, was a postman and when his monetary wage was changed to a trudoden payment, he left for Kyiv and found work at the railway station.<sup>152</sup>

On the collective farms, the daily trudoden payment was given on the proviso that if a person worked and there was yield, they ate.<sup>153</sup> Workers were supplied with amounts of bread or grain that could not sustain a single person, let alone meet the requirements of a whole family. For young children, the elderly, and others in the household who were unable to work, there was nothing.<sup>154</sup>

Those who joined the collective farms were forced to work, even in a hunger weakened state. If workers did not complete their assigned tasks, they were not given anything to eat.<sup>155</sup> It was extremely difficult for women who had recently given birth or who were caring for young children. In defiance of the severe penalties he faced for disobeying a directive, Larissa's husband stood up to the authorities and firmly told them that his wife could not work as she needed to look after their child. He worked and received only a tiny piece of bread for his hard effort. Larissa, their child, and an elderly parent who lived with the family, received nothing. Larissa's husband would give this piece of bread to his young son, who he felt needed it more than him.<sup>156</sup>

Payment for work on the collective farms was calculated by a simple approach to labour in a communal economy. A person who drove a tractor would earn two labour days, or trudoden, for one day worked. An unskilled worker had to work for two days to earn one trudoden. No work meant no pay.<sup>157</sup>

Survivors Hanka and Darka spoke of the trudoden payments and both stated that no money was received for work on the collective farms, with payment in grain only occurring at harvest times, when there was grain available.<sup>158</sup> For one hundred days of work a person would receive twenty kilograms of grain, which, as Josep said, 'did not stretch for a family.'<sup>159</sup> From this meager trudoden, workers were forced to pay in kind to grind their grain or use any other collective farm equipment, their own having been confiscated.<sup>160</sup>

Collective farm workers laboured hard in the fields and might have been given a little over 3.2 ounces (approximately 90 grams) of bread and a cup of sorrel soup. Hanka recalled a lady at the collective farm asking for food before beginning work, as she was so weak from hunger:

*People go and work but they want to eat first — give her food! No there isn't anything. She went, the woman, and said 'give me at least a little bit of soup that you have.' The manager, as we called him, on the collective farm, came and asked her 'have you already done your work?' 'I can't, I*

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*have done a little, but I can't.' 'Go home,' he said ... So she went, and just at that moment, she fell down and died.*<sup>161</sup>

### *Torgsin stores*

'Torgsin' is a contraction of 'Torgovlia Inostrantsami' or 'trade with foreigners shop', but it was starving peasants, not foreigners, who were the customers<sup>162</sup>. The Torgsin stores were created by the resolution 'On creating the all-Ukrainian Torgsin office', passed on 29 June 1932. They were state-run enterprises where foreign currency, especially American dollars, or valuable items such as gold, silver, and jewelry, could be exchanged for food and other necessities priced at inflated rates. The stores became an important economic tool to finance Stalin's industrialisation, as well as a valuable source of food for desperate people who had something of worth to exchange during the Holodomor.<sup>163</sup> Money could be transferred between private individuals through the Torgsin stores, but anyone receiving money in this way faced arrest for being in contact with an enemy of the state.

The Ukrainian scholars, Oleh Nadosha and Volodymyr Honsky discuss the notion that 'the 1932–1933 Holodomor was not only the largest genocide recorded in history but also the most large-scale and effective pillage of people'. They called it 'a gold rush ... Communist style'.<sup>164</sup>

In August 1932, a decree was passed to protect what was seen as government property by introducing severe punishments for theft of collective farm property. This decree also introduced an added measure which prevented peasants in the villages from making purchases from the Torgsin stores until they had met a specific quota of surrendered crops and produce. If peasants were unable to meet their stated quotas, they were prevented from purchasing basic items such as kerosene, salt, and sugar from the stores. If their work on the collective farms fell behind they received no trudoden. If they stole from the collective farms in order to trade with the Torgsin store, they were branded as speculators, with a sentence of five to ten years confinement in a Soviet prison camp.<sup>165</sup>

Through the Torgsin stores the wealth of Ukraine was stripped, as Ukrainians exchanged every last item of value they possessed for food. This appears to have been a deliberate strategy of the Soviet regime.<sup>166</sup> The Communist Party's revenue from transacting with Ukrainians during this time was massive. It is estimated that six million karbovanets (hard currency) of the total annual revenue came from Torgsin stores in 1931. By 1932, the estimated annual revenue had risen to fifty million and it reached 107 million in 1933.<sup>167</sup>

### *Communist activists, requisitioning and mass terror*

To ensure that the August 1932 decree was upheld, Stalin's government enlisted the help of special brigades of Communist Party activists who became known as the 'twenty-five thousanders'. The November 1929 meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party had created this brigade of 25,000 industrial workers, half of them under thirty years of age, for the purpose of recruiting people to the Communist Party and convincing people to join the collective farms. Seventy percent of the twenty-five thousanders were members of the Communist Party.<sup>168</sup> Members of the Young Communist League, Komsomols, also carried out searches for hidden foodstuffs and intimidated the villagers. Although the Komsomol was an organisation of children and teenagers, its members were feared.

Until the activists were brought in and serious requisitioning began, collective farm workers had each been permitted to maintain a small farmhouse plot for personal use and to keep a cow. Subsequently, this was forbidden and any produce grown on the small plot was requisitioned.<sup>169</sup> Amis states that people who were still outside the collective farms faced their own specific quotas of grain and produce which were imposed by the authorities.<sup>170</sup> Nina, a survivor, spoke of people, or families, who lived on communal land but were not part of the collective farm, still being required to provide a 'donation' to the state.<sup>171</sup> From this time of strict requisitioning and starvation, Darka recalled hearing talk of wheat being dumped in the sea rather than being distributed to the people.<sup>172</sup>

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In addition to meeting their quotas, all peasants were required to make 'voluntary' contributions, from any income they might receive, to various funds such as street building funds, the Five Year Plan loan fund, the Aviation Society, the Motor Highway Society, and the Society for Atheists.<sup>173</sup>

The activists used brutal methods to ensure their own promised salaries were secure and an atmosphere of terror and suspicion grew in Ukraine. Activists went from village to village, searching for hidden reserves of food and 'persuading' people to join the Communist Party. They were usually armed with long steel probes with very sharp tips and small sacks attached to the end, called 'stabbets'. The activists poked their stabbets into floors, cellars, barns, and areas around houses, searching for buried caches.<sup>174</sup> Any grain or food reserves discovered were confiscated and people held responsible could face death for withholding food.<sup>175</sup>

Survivors spoke of people who did not appear to be starving being under suspicion from both their neighbours and the activists. Pidhainy relates bizarre cases where activists actually examined faecal matter to ensure that peasants were not secretly hiding and eating grain or other foodstuffs.<sup>176</sup>

Sixteen of those interviewed spoke of Communist activists visiting their homes with stabbets to search for foodstuffs.<sup>177</sup> The brigades made searches every couple of weeks.<sup>178</sup> Mila spoke of these activists as the 'Red Broom'.<sup>179</sup> For the survivors, many of whom were young children at the time, these visits were a terrifying ordeal. It was perhaps even worse for their parents, who must have attempted to protect their families as best they could.

Hanka spoke of how the Communist activists took not only food but her family's clothing and bath. Family members began to cry and said 'what are we going to cover ourselves with? We don't even have anything with which to get dressed.' People had taken to hiding food by burying it in holes and Hanka described the activists repeatedly thrusting their steel probes into the dirt or clay floor of the house and the area surrounding it and then doing the same in the pigsty, searching for caches of buried food. They tried to bribe Hanka with



*Where did you hide the grain?*, Mikhailo Ivanchenko.

(Morgan E. Williams Collection.)





sweets and chocolates to tell them where her father had hidden food. When bribery failed she was threatened: ‘Show me where your father hid it all, or we will take you in a minute.’<sup>180</sup>

Luba recounted a memory of activists arriving in a four-wheeled wagon, drawn by two horses. Caught by surprise, her family had no time to hide anything and lost all their food, including the chaff. She spoke of the confiscation of the chaff in disbelief, as it could barely be considered a food and would usually only be fed to the pigs.<sup>181</sup>

Janina told of her family’s distress after activists had been to their home:

*We’re grieving, crying, father is sitting swollen [from hunger], with mother. The neighbours say nothing, and when they [the activists] left, they [the parents] embraced us and said, ‘Children, don’t cry, we’ll survive somehow.’ And I’ll never forget how I said, ‘Father, how will we live if they’ve taken everything away from us?’ ‘God’s spirit will help us, don’t cry, children.’<sup>182</sup>*

Josep spoke of the requisitioning and said, ‘God forgive anyone who retained bread.’ He spoke of people hiding grain if they could and trying to sow it in the spring and of hiding the grain mill so it would not be confiscated. It shocked him that they were required to give up the mill stones as well as any bread to the government, even though people were dying from hunger. Of the searches, Josep said:

*The first shock was when a group of Komsomols would comb the grounds with steel prods in case people had buried potatoes, wheat, grain or things like that. I asked my mother ‘What are they doing?’ Mother replied that, ‘In case we have hidden things from the government.’ That was the first memory that I have. The second memory was when they were also going from house to house looking for zhorna. ‘Do you know what zhorna is? It is two stones that they use to grind the wheat ...’<sup>183</sup>*

Despite their youth, the Komsomols were feared. Petro spoke of the

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Komsomols and related how, after they visited his home when his parents were not present, his father immediately packed up the family and moved with them to another village, out of fear for their safety.<sup>184</sup>

Mistrust and suspicion were rampant. People feared they would be informed on, particularly by those who had joined the Communist Party, even if they were relatives. One of the survivors interviewed, Volodya, spoke of a cousin who was a member of the Communist Party and of how they feared him because of his Party connections.<sup>185</sup> A well-known case of informing within families is that of Pavlik Morozov, a fourteen year old boy and a member of the Pioneers, a Communist youth group, who informed on his father for sheltering kulaks. After his father was tried and sentenced, the boy was killed by a mob of which his own uncle was a member. Pavlik Morozov was later hailed as a Soviet martyr, with a museum and statue erected in his honour.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, adults took care not to discuss events in front of children for fear that they might misrepresent the conversations and report on them to others.<sup>187</sup>

Children at the time, some of the survivors interviewed spoke of being aware of needing to be cautious. Zirka spoke of children being particularly vulnerable, as they might speak without understanding and say something that could be construed as being against communism, thereby placing their family in danger.<sup>188</sup> Valya said:

*[As a child] I understood that it was necessary to be cautious. It was necessary to know who, what and why. Why someone came looking for something ... Because I'll tell you, that someone could earn his living and preserve himself [from starvation] ... Other people didn't have the means and died. Hunger was a nasty thing.<sup>189</sup>*

Starvation brought out the worst in some people, with neighbours reporting on each other to the activists. Katerina told of how a cache of food was confiscated from her family:

*It was awful, it's hard to express ... We were kids. We remember how*

*we were walking around Mother and holding her skirt and crying. And Mother said, 'Everything has been taken away.'*

Father had heard what was going on, and he buried sacks of wheat and sacks of flour. He dug out a pit and buried the sacks there. And people came, those who knew, they were our people, with such long iron bars, dug them out and took everything away.<sup>190</sup>

Valya was helping her mother pound corn for cereal when the neighbours, hearing the sound of pounding, called the activists in. They searched the house, but Valya actually sat on the pounded corn to hide it. Had the activists realised she was concealing the corn in this manner, there could have been dire repercussions for the whole family and especially for Valya.

The Soviet system pitted Ukrainians against Ukrainians in a time of extreme suffering. Polodskij and Coleman's research outlining memories of those living in the former Soviet Union at the time quotes a statement from an elected head of a collective farm who said:

*It was an awful time for me ... I had almost gone mad. Everybody came to me and cried. Children were dying for there was nothing to feed them with and their fathers had perished. What could I do? There was no firewood or bread, all the houses needed repair. There were no men to do this.*<sup>191</sup>

The atmosphere of violence and oppression was related through stories about informants, unexplained disappearances, arrests, and violence. People knew not to speak openly about hunger or starvation, because it might result in arrest and a prison sentence. Arrests could happen quite suddenly, as one survivor, Ella, related. She gave an account of how, as a child, she came home one day to find that both of her parents were missing. They had been arrested.<sup>192</sup>

Conquest states that starvation produced psychological dysfunction and could result in people denouncing one another for hoarding. Civil society broke down. Families could be murdered for what little food they had.<sup>193</sup> A survivor,

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Fania, made similar comments, stating that the Communists ruined an orderly and law abiding community. She spoke of the brutality of the Holodomor and the Communist reign causing people to become mistrustful and lose faith in others. Fania believed this atmosphere of suspicion and fear ruined Ukrainians and affected the country for generations.

Mykola and his family suffered dire consequences when he wrote a letter to a cousin that contained something the local Communists did not like. Mykola's cousin lost his job and was sent to a prison where he was 'given hell'. Mykola was evicted from his home and spoke curtly of scavenging through the house afterwards and finding that nothing was left, everything had been taken from them.<sup>194</sup>

Katerina spoke of a being haunted by a memory of two young neighbours, aged 18 and 20 years old, and of how one night:

*Those boys were taken away, but where to, what and how, nobody knew. Something unspeakable was going on.*<sup>195</sup>

Luba recalled activists visiting families who were not members of the Communist Party. She told of the night activists came to her home when her parents had been called away and of how her father came to join the Party:

*Mother told me to look after the children and not to open the door if someone knocked or something. 'Don't open the door.' They [the parents] went. Mother told me not to open the door.*

*Bang! And a window was broken. 'Open up' They spoke in Russian: 'Open the door'.*

*We were afraid. The children ran up behind the oven [to the ledge where they often slept]. The activists had thrown in some sweets, biscuits. I actually understood at that time. I opened the door. Three men with guns came in.*

*All the best things, documents, were in the locked chest. They tore off*

*the lock and took everything.*

*I told my father [when they returned]. He guessed by the opened door. And he knew, 'What bastards, they sent me to go somewhere else but came here themselves.'*

*Mother started to cry. Father punched the door with his fist and said, 'Be quiet, stop, we are going to Siberia. Let them take it and let them live with the consequences.' Mother stopped crying.*

*They [the activists] were going from house to house.*

*They came back to my father. He asked, 'Why have you broken the window? Could you not wait for me? You could have come here and just spoken to me. So, you came when my wife and I were out.'*

*We hid up on the chimney that night, when they came back. I was older and heard what they were talking about. Father did not swear, but he said, 'I joined you, thinking to sign [papers to join the Communist Party] everything as you wanted. I will not eat the earth. I have six children.'*

*Everything was taken: horses, cattle, everything was taken from people. They left us a cow and a pig, she didn't have piglets. A horse was taken away. Everything for an economy was taken away and father signed. What could he do?*

*If he hadn't signed like our neighbour ... [she shook her head at this point].<sup>196</sup>*

When their families faced such threatening behaviour, many people signed whatever documents were necessary. As Irka said, 'It was easier to be Communist.'<sup>197</sup> Zirka also stated that 'there were Communists who lived well' throughout the Holodomor.

Olena spoke of people who refused to join the Communist Party being transported to Siberia, where they were left in the forests. A family friend was sent to Siberia, he escaped and walked back, returning home in 1940. He had bound his feet with rags but this did not protect him from the cold and he

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developed frostbite on the long walk. His legs were amputated when he returned home and he died soon after. Speaking of the punishments and starvation faced by those who refused to join the Communist Party, Olena said:

*What could we do? ... Once you signed up everything was given back to you, chickens, geese, everything. Those who would not sign were transported out and everything was taken.<sup>198</sup>*

Despite this, not everyone joined the Communist Party. Even though many young boys quickly signed up to join the Komsomols, Josep would not. He questioned what sort of regime the Soviet Union was when everyone was required to give up their possessions to fill government quotas and people were shot or sent to Siberia for dissident behavior like wearing traditional 'wealthy, embroidered shirts' or 'playing the bandura' (a Ukrainian musical instrument).<sup>199</sup>

Similarly, Stefka was at pains to say that her parents were not Communists, but for her family the consequences of this resistance were severe. Her worst memory was of the night her parents were arrested for keeping religious icons. Stefka believed the Communists arrested her father because he was educated, which was considered a threat to the Soviet regime as intellectualism was linked to the growth of Ukrainian nationalism. She spoke of people like her father being sentenced to five or ten years in Siberia and of how, with the subsequent death of her mother, Stefka herself was left an orphan. Stefka said 'Tut Boh ta I voroh' [God is here and also the enemy] of Ukraine during the Holodomor.<sup>200</sup>

Stalin's government decrees continued the requisitioning of food until March 1933.<sup>201</sup>

### *The Soviet penal system*

The mass terror of this period is illustrated by figures which indicate that from 1930–1933, two million kulaks were exiled to Gulags in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and other remote regions. Many of those imprisoned were sentenced for minor crimes, such as the theft of small quantities of wheat or bread.<sup>202</sup> In 1930,

179,000 Ukrainians were in prison camps; in 1932, 212,000 were deported to prison camps.<sup>203</sup> Steven and Agnes Vardy state that the Gulags were set up to not just to weed out the ‘enemies of the state’ but to use the unpaid prison labour for the ‘rapid industrialization and modernization of the Soviet state.’<sup>204</sup> This assertion is supported by the existence of the White Sea Canal prison camp, set up by Stalin in 1932–1933 for the purpose of constructing a canal to connect inland waterways with the White Sea.<sup>205</sup>

Conditions in the prison camps were horrific. Khlevnyuk describes the exiled kulaks who had been jailed by the state as ‘hungry, emaciated, and completely pauperized ... [they] suffered the most during the terrible famine that peaked in the winter and spring of 1932–1933.’<sup>206</sup>

The Gulags were especially dangerous for women. Sentenced to the prison camps for crimes related to starvation during the Holodomor, they faced rape and abuse from guards, camp employees and even male prisoners. Many horror stories arise from the Gulags during this period.<sup>207</sup> No respite was afforded in the event of childbirth. Some children were taken away from their mothers at birth.<sup>208</sup> Others remained in the camp until they were two years old, when they were transferred to orphanages. These children were often never reunited with their parents.<sup>209</sup>

Sometimes entire families would be sent to the prison camps and the children lived in special barracks there. If children were not sent to the Gulag with their parents, they faced being ostracised in their home villages. People feared that kindness to such children would see them labeled as sympathisers of an enemy of the state. The children became displaced; they were sent to orphanages or sometimes raised by family members in other towns or cities.

One survivor interviewed was deported as a child. Bohdan’s father was exiled to Siberia, from where he never returned. Bohdan’s mother was also exiled to Siberia and he and his six year old sister went with her. The mother gathered food from the rubbish and cooked it for her family. They also ate horses’ hooves that were cooked day and night to make jellied meat.<sup>210</sup>



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Other survivors spoke of relatives being sent to Siberia.<sup>211</sup> Some, such as Stefka's father, managed to smuggle out letters. He wrote in pencil on a piece of a cement bag, asking Stefka's grandmother to send salt. Stefka's grandmother sent a parcel with salt and some salted fish, but they had so little themselves that there was nothing else they could spare. Stefka learned later that because of the lack of salt, the prisoners became ill and their teeth fell out.<sup>212</sup>

The prison camps were the last stop for many dekulakised Ukrainians. They suffered the hardships along with the illnesses that came from living in such conditions and sadly perished in the camps.<sup>213</sup> Evhan was one of the few survivors interviewed who was dekulakised to Siberia and actually survived.<sup>214</sup>

Having relatives deported, imprisoned, and declared enemies of the state jeopardised the survival of the remaining family members note Danylo and Zoya.<sup>215</sup> Another Western Australian Ukrainian interviewed for this study, Theodora, recalled the night her mother was 'beaten with rods ... by the Bolsheviks.' The children were rescued from this situation by their grandfather, who loaded them and the family possessions onto a cart and took them away. Within a week the Communists had located them at their new home, where they killed Theodora's grandmother in front of the children. Such was the retribution for having an enemy of the state in the family and attempting to escape.<sup>216</sup>

Some who were exiled or imprisoned survived and found their way back to their families at the end of their sentences. Stefka had been left without either parent and with no knowledge of their whereabouts, but two years and eight months after having been arrested, her mother returned. Although she tried to protect her child from the reality of her life in the prison camp, Stefka eventually learned the true cause of her mother's injuries. In tears, Stefka said:

*My mother was a solid lady with curly hair, but when she came home she was skin and bone with no teeth. All I knew was that she had to have an operation as she had a prolapsed womb. She told us that she had been working — you know those iron foundries and the slag heaps? She was*

*working at the top of the slag heap and she fell down.*

*Afterwards I found out that they were beating people up as they were considered to be spies. A spy! A women with three kids? She was no good for anybody.<sup>217</sup>*

Stefka's father also attempted to return from Siberia, but like many others he never made it back. While he survived his term in the prison camp and set out for home, he 'disappeared' somewhere along the way and Stefka's family presumed he had been taken by wolves.<sup>218</sup>

In the late 1980s, during the period of glasnost, many former guards wrote to ex-prisoners of the Soviet prison camps, asking to be portrayed as kind and decent, should the ex-prisoners ever be questioned about their treatment. One, Mikhail Iusipenko, a former Deputy Commandant in a camp near Akmolinsk, allegedly raped a large number of female inmates. He wrote to several hundred former prisoners, together with the children of those who had died, in an attempt to perpetuate this myth of fair and humane treatment. He died without ever being tried for his crimes.<sup>219</sup>

### *Resistance*

In his discussion of the campaign against kulaks, Figes notes that when kulaks suddenly disappeared from the village, peasants reacted with passive resignation born of fear.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, despite the severe grain quotas, harassment and mistreatment by activists and the authorities, restrictions, and starvation imposed upon the peasants during the Holodomor years, there was little overt resistance. Those who did resist were easily overpowered and imprisoned, sent to Gulags in Siberia or severely punished in other ways.<sup>221</sup> During dekulakisation and the Holodomor, many men were imprisoned, exiled, or executed and as such, many mothers were left, often homeless with small children, to face the terror of the local militia alone.<sup>222</sup>

There are, however, stories of heroism. Pidhainy outlines the case of the church bells in the village of Syniushyn Brod. The bells were taken down

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and earmarked for smelting, but on the day they were to be removed, several hundred women arrived to surround the church and protest.<sup>223</sup> Boris, a survivor interviewed for this study, related an incident that occurred in his village in 1932, where women marched onto a collective farm and took back the livestock and farm implements, dragging it all back to the village. This ‘rebellion’ as he called it, lasted a week until it was ‘liquidated’.<sup>224</sup>

Another survivor, Irka, said that while people did not want to join the collective farm, they did join, because those who refused were denied food rations.<sup>225</sup> Taras spoke of his father, who said that he would not fight the Communists because if he did they would take everything away.<sup>226</sup> However, according to another survivor, Djenia, many refused to give up their land even when they were dying from starvation.<sup>227</sup>

### *Cannibalism*

The extreme widespread starvation led to outbreaks of cannibalism, the ultimate human taboo. Dolot, a survivor himself, recounts how some people reacted to starvation by going mad or losing all compassion, honour, and morality.<sup>228</sup> Conquest records a case of a boy being told by his younger brother that ‘Mother says we should eat her if she dies.’<sup>229</sup> It seems, however, that cannibalism was not limited to consuming the corpses of already dead family members. There are stories of children and strangers being trapped, ambushed, or lured into homes to be killed and eaten. The Soviet authorities were aware, at the time, of the occurrences of cannibalism resulting from the famine. A communication sent by Rozanov, then head of the Kyiv GPU, to Balitski, a senior official within the GPU, reads:

*Every passing day strengthens people’s belief that it is acceptable to eat human flesh. This idea is particularly widespread among the starving and children.*<sup>230</sup>

There was sufficient concern by the Soviet United State Political Administration that cannibalism was becoming increasingly widespread and

acceptable, that suspected cannibals were transported to the security police, who detained some and deported others to a life in the White Sea Canal Gulag. Allegedly, some of these prisoners were still imprisoned in the late 1980s.<sup>231</sup>

A survivor quoted in Pidhainy's 1953 publication gave the following account of cannibalism in Ukraine during the Holodomor:

*I witnessed the discovery of a slaughterhouse of children in Poltava. It was a small building in the centre of the city. Right next to it was: railroad cooperative store No.1, a railroad first-aid station, a pharmacy and a building for the homeless. A band of criminals lured small children, killed them, salted the meat in barrels and sold it. Refuse was dumped in an open sewer, whose banks were overgrown with high weeds, and they floated away.*<sup>232</sup>

This eyewitness also spoke of mothers coming to this slaughterhouse to look for their children. A number of similar establishments were discovered, including one in Likhivtsi of the Dnipropetrovs'k region and another in Pashkiwsko of the Sever region.<sup>233</sup>

Interviewees from the Waters' study also raised the issue of cannibalism, discussing gangs who roamed the streets, murdering adults and children for food and making sausages from the flesh of corpses. These survivors remember purchasing jellied meat and finding human fingernails in it.<sup>234</sup> It is also known that some overweight people, usually Party members, lived in fear of going out in the dark for fear of becoming meat.<sup>235</sup> When people disappeared, it was generally assumed that they had been cannibalised. Darka, a survivor interviewed for the current study, said:

*If we are talking about missing people, missing children, I bet you they had been eaten by someone, because they couldn't be found ... There, in those years, people were never found. Gone without a trace.*<sup>236</sup>

Fania remembers hearing of people being slaughtered and eaten. She spoke of the fear felt when walking alone at night and the threat of abduction, but was quick to say that 'it was hard to blame people, because they were so hungry':

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*People simply went crazy, hungry people, hungry children, old people — everyone was so poor. There was no help, no pension ... [as was her understanding as a child] it was an awful life ... there was nothing anywhere.<sup>237</sup>*

Evhan and Halina also spoke of cases of people, including themselves, being targeted as possible victims of cannibalism.<sup>238</sup> Parents, in particular, were terrified for their children. Djenia's story reflects the fear that parents felt during the years of starvation.

*Our parents did not let us out of the house, because they were afraid that somebody would abduct us and eat us. If there were dead people lying around who had died of hunger, someone would cut off a piece of flesh and eat it. Like an animal. Not like a human, like cattle. Because they were no longer normal, but were hungry.<sup>239</sup>*

Another survivor said that at the time it was believed that people would stalk kindergartens and catch the children as they came out.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, another believed that children were slaughtered to make sausage meat and one survivor remembers her parents talking about not buying sausage from the market for this reason.<sup>241</sup> Marika's mother bought some jellied meat at the market, in which she found a child's finger.<sup>242</sup>

Olena related a story of a well-dressed woman who always hovered at the front of her house and invited people inside. Fifteen large pickling barrels were found with bodies inside, stocked up for the winter. This woman was arrested and the barrels thrown into the burial pit at the cemetery.<sup>243</sup>

Mila remembered a young boy coming to her home on a Sunday. She spoke of beggars going to the homes in her village, but this boy was twelve or thirteen years old and left her family with a grave story. After sharing their watery soup, he told them that he was afraid to go back home. He said that he had been left with his three year old sister. His little sister had been abducted, killed, and eaten by the neighbours. Mila's family was already struggling to survive and the young man would have been a burden to them, had they let him remain. Mila was unaware of what became of him.<sup>244</sup>

Olena claims that half the village people ate their children after death, rather than burying them and that 'After they ate their children they waited for each other to die'. It did not stop with children, however, for people ate the dead flesh of family members no matter what the age.<sup>245</sup>

Cannibalism was perhaps the worst aspect of the Holodomor, but it must be noted that consuming human flesh, while a drastic measure, was something that helped to sustain the unfortunate peasants. Survivors recalled these tragic stories of cannibalism in a resigned manner, reflecting the lack of any other choice. Danylo spoke of cannibalism being a fact of life.<sup>246</sup>

### *Suicide*

Suicide was one of the few available recourses to stop the pain of a slow death by starvation. After suffering great hardships, some people decided to take their own lives rather than suffer the fate Stalin had determined for them. Families in Shyroka Balka of Dnipropetrovsk are known to have died together of carbon monoxide poisoning. In a starved state, they would light a fire in the oven, block off the chimney, doors, and windows, and wait to die.<sup>247</sup>

A survivor interviewed for Waters' unpublished Australian study, Claudia, stated that there were many suicides by hanging during this period.<sup>248</sup> Such deaths also occurred during the preceding period of dekulakisation. Lesia, interviewed for the current study, recounted her father's suicide by hanging himself from the church bell. He could not bear to see what was happening to his family, who had been labeled kulaks. However, his suicide did not provide an escape for his family, as Lesia's brother was sent to Siberia as punishment for their father's actions.

### *Disintegration of the family unit*

Mykola, a survivor, spoke of how Ukrainian peasant traditions emphasised the family unit and said that before the famine they lived together in multigenerational households and cared for and respected their family members.<sup>249</sup> During the famine, these cooperative, functioning family units were often broken apart by death, imprisonment, or, as people faced their

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total inadequacy to save their families or even themselves, they moved away in hope of finding a better chance of survival elsewhere. People were unable to protect their families or even maintain their previous closeness in the face of the horror of the Holodomor. Of this helplessness, Mila said 'there was no-one to complain to, neither father nor mother'.<sup>250</sup>

In addition to the many families separated by dekulakisation and the associated punishments of deportation and imprisonment, families could also be divided after they joined the collective farms. Marko recalled that his father, although alive and working for the local collective farm, was sent to graze the collective farm's cows, somewhere in the Kherson Steppes, and was forced to live apart from his family.<sup>251</sup>

One survivor, Danylo, said that unexplained disappearances were common and were another way the previously tight family units were devastated during the famine. Danylo spoke of his brother's disappearance and of how, to this day, he wonders if the boy was killed or cannibalised.<sup>252</sup>

Many families were simply destroyed by the famine, with children and other family members dying of starvation. In this situation, those who survived had little choice but to split up to try to alleviate their situation. Parents understood the danger of life in their villages or towns and encouraged their children to leave, in the hope they would find better circumstances elsewhere. For this reason, Sofi left her family, but in doing so lost contact with family members. Sofi believed she still had a sister left somewhere in Ukraine, although she had no idea of her whereabouts and no means of contact.<sup>253</sup> Olena spoke of situations where fathers had left to seek work and thus hopefully help their families, but on their return found their wives and children dead, or children having been taken to an orphanage.<sup>254</sup> Often these children were never reunited with their remaining parent or family.

When relatives managed to somehow escape the starving village in search of better situations, those who remained behind faced the additional mental burden of being separated from their families.<sup>255</sup>

Some people seemingly abandoned their families during the famine, leaving their children to fend for themselves; the culture of familial care dissolved by starvation. These parents were alive but were not physically present for their families.<sup>256</sup> Marika, a young child during the famine, spoke of her mother leaving her and the loss of two sisters:

*Mother went to stay with our auntie. Our oldest sister stayed but two sisters had gone to Siberia.*<sup>257</sup>

Marika eventually went to live with her married sister who lived twelve kilometers away. Marika helped to care for her sister's two children, but there was little to eat there either. Her sister cooked thin soup for Marika and the children, whilst she and her husband were provided with some food at work. Marika did not comment on why her sister and brother-in-law received food, but it is possible they held important positions supported by the regime.<sup>258</sup> One of the survivors from Waters' study noted that people who were teachers were provided with rations and food stamps which assisted their survival.<sup>259</sup>

During the famine, the death of their mother left children in difficult circumstances, even if their father survived. Darka's mother died during the famine, leaving Darka and her siblings in the care of their father. She said 'there were three of us with no mother nor grandmother. We had to look after each other.'<sup>260</sup>

However, unmarried or widowed women often came to fill the places of the lost wives and mothers. Darka spoke of the woman who came to join her family:

*There was a woman who lived in our district. Dad asked her to come and live with us. If she decided to be his wife she could stay because she was living with her brother. She came and she never had her own children. Of course I could not say the word mum. I could not call her mum straight away. She was a bit unhappy about that. However, the youngest one did straight away, she was happy to have someone in the house. It took me a long time before I started to call her mum.*<sup>261</sup>



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Volodya also lost his mother during the Holodomor. She was selling milk by the railway tracks, hoping to earn some money to buy food for the family, and was run over by a train. Volodya's father remarried, but soon turned the new wife out and married a third wife, who was only four years older than Volodya. His new step-mother's parents were dispossessed kulaks, a situation that Volodya found shameful.<sup>262</sup>

Families reacted in different ways to the starvation, as Grossman states:

*In one hut there would be something like war. Everyone would keep close watch over everyone else. People would take crumbs from one another. The wife turned against her husband and the husband against his wife. The mother hated the children. And in some other hut love would be inviolable to the very last. I knew one woman with four children. She would tell them fairy stories and legends so that they would forget their hunger. Her own tongue could hardly move, but she would take them into her arms even though she hardly had the strength to lift her arms when they were empty. Love lived on within her ...<sup>263</sup>*

### *Childhood*

Kelly describes the suffering of children during the period of collectivisation as 'an appalling waste of human life.'<sup>264</sup> Conquest devotes a chapter to the effects of the Holodomor on children at the time, noting that children made up fifteen to twenty percent of those who died on the trains deporting kulaks to Gulags in Siberia.<sup>265</sup> Other children died in exile. In addition, it is estimated that three million children died of starvation during the Holodomor, although this figure does not take into account newborn babies who died without their births being recorded.<sup>266</sup>

Those children who did manage to escape death were left deeply scarred by their experiences, denied not just food, but also the love, affection, and care usually afforded young children. In a state of acute hunger, parents and other family members had little energy for the normal care given to children.





Above: *Begging* by Nina Marchenko, 1998–2000. (Courtesy Morgan E. Williams Collection.)

Young children often needed to take on the role of provider, where their parents were either too weakened by hunger to search for food, unable to work, or unable to bring home enough grain to feed their families. Survivor Maria Fesenko remembers going to the railway yards foraging for any spilled grain or salt with many other children.<sup>267</sup>

The Holodomor destroyed any semblance of a normal education for Ukrainian children. In the current study, of those who remember, six survivors had not gone above the fourth class.<sup>268</sup> Some managed to reach the eighth class.<sup>269</sup> Six reached the eighth and tenth classes.<sup>270</sup> As related in the section on collectivisation, the extreme poverty faced by Ukrainian peasants left them unable to afford winter clothing or footwear, which prevented children from attending school in the winter. Schooling was also interrupted by the death of parents. Yurko, whose mother had died, completed only two years.<sup>271</sup> Others stopped their schooling not because of loss of parents, but in order to escape.<sup>272</sup> In families that remained in Ukraine, sometimes it was necessary for the whole family, including the children, to work if they were to survive.<sup>273</sup>

In some cases, the last surviving members of families were children who were too young to have developed any life skills. Many of these children perished on the roadside with no-one left to enquire about their whereabouts. One survivor spoke of witnessing orphaned children being evicted from their family home, Janina wept as she said: ‘poor children — poor swollen children. They were dying and being thrown out of the house.’<sup>274</sup>

There were thousands of orphans in Ukraine during this period. However, even children with surviving parents could find themselves alone. Some parents abandoned their children in the hope that they would be taken in by another family, or placed in an orphanage where they might be cared for or adopted out, and as such would have a better chance of surviving the famine. Peasants from the villages took their children into the towns and simply left them on the street. Children’s fear of being abandoned and finding themselves in an orphanage was very real during the Holodomor years and was vividly remembered by the survivors.<sup>275</sup> Julia recalled her younger sister repeatedly

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asking their mother not to abandon them. She wondered how, as children, she and her sister had learnt that children were being left by parents at what remained of the local markets. She believed the children were left there in the hope that someone would take pity on them and take them in. Carts collected the abandoned children in the evening and took them to the local orphanage.<sup>276</sup>

Some of the children were taken in by benefactors courageous enough to face the stigma of caring for such a child, whether a child of kulaks or just a homeless child; children joined gangs or found some form of work and supported themselves.<sup>277</sup> Others were placed in orphanages. Despite their parents' desperate hope that the children's chance of survival would be higher in state care, conditions in the government run facilities could be appalling. In the orphanages the children were fed meager rations, described by survivors as tiny pieces of black bread, thin soup, tea, and water. M Osadchy, a member of the Commissariat of People's Education, whose testimony appears in Pidhainy's publication, recounts a visit to a children's shelter in Ulyniwka:

*I saw a horrible sight. The floor of the 'shelter' was covered with straw, and on it lay the skeletons of about 200 children ranging in age from three to twelve years. The interior of the shelter was in semi-darkness, with light coming in through a few small windows close to the ceiling. The skeletons, dressed only in dirty shirts, lay in rows on the dirty straw. When I entered the skeletons moved and raised their heads. Stretching out their feeble hands they wailed, 'Give us some bread, uncle.'<sup>278</sup>*

As orphanages became overcrowded, children were transferred to a walled area 'under the stars' or to 'children's towns' where they starved and died away from public scrutiny.<sup>279</sup> Trucks would collect the bodies and transport them to large burial pits where, with too few people strong enough to bury the dead in individual graves, these unknown orphan children were relegated to mass graves.<sup>280</sup>

By 1935 the collective farms and other local soviet authorities were finally made responsible for caring for homeless children.<sup>281</sup> Conquest asserts that by this stage, there was a generation of children who had little understanding or experience of any beauty of the human condition and who held a distorted perspective of life and human relations. These children suffered physical affects from starvation and abandonment also, having had extremely poor nutrition during the most crucial growth years of their lives.<sup>282</sup>

Conquest asserts that one of the saddest ironies of the Holodomor is that often these children were indoctrinated and brutalised through NKVD schools into becoming the worst of the future Chekists (members of the NKVD, the state security organisation). He states that the children underwent a spiritual, as well as a physical, destruction.<sup>283</sup>

### *Treatment of the dead and dying*

At the height of the Holodomor, people dropped from starvation wherever they stood, dying faster than the Soviet authorities could deal effectively with their bodies. If someone died in a gutter, and another person had the strength to shovel dirt over them, they were buried where they lay. Strangers did their best with whatever circumstances were at hand. People were too weakened by hunger to bury the dead in separate caskets or hold memorial services. A system was set up which saw a cart come through the village each day to collect the bodies, which were then buried together in mass graves.<sup>284</sup> A survivor, Orysia, spoke of the dead being ‘buried in ditches like cats and dogs.’<sup>285</sup>

Josep sorrowfully recalled some of the deaths that occurred in his village during the Holodomor:

*In our village there was one poor family — there were five children — all died. Father and mother went together. One was left but all eventually died. They took them away in carts because there was nothing with which to make coffins. There was no-one to make them either. They buried them. Later people died in the fields.*<sup>286</sup>

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Mass graves became common during the Holodomor. Survivors interviewed recalled the distress many felt when not able to bury the dead traditionally or at not knowing where their relatives were buried. Luba, spoke of her parents' distress when many of their relatives died and were carted off in this manner.<sup>287</sup> As Hanka recalled, 'they threw the corpse in like rubbish. Like the rubbish man who collects the rubbish and uncovers it and it all falls out.'<sup>288</sup>

Stories of people being loaded onto the carts when not fully dead were told by several survivors.<sup>289</sup> Hanka recounted the cruel story of a woman who, weakened by hunger, asked for a lift home on one of the transportation carts:

*They took her by the legs and by the arms and threw her onto the cart. She was crying, to be driven home. They said they would drive her. They drove the bodies to the cemetery, threw them off and then they threw her off. She begged them to take her home where she had children waiting at the kindergarten. They told her the children would stay there.<sup>290</sup>*

Of the awful fate faced by the dying taken away in this manner, Evhan asked with incredulity in his voice, 'How can that be possible?'<sup>291</sup>

The death carts were often pulled by people. People pulled the shafts in front while others pushed from the back. Horses were not used as many, along with other livestock, had perished, either starving to death when their fodder was consumed by people, slaughtered for food, or let loose when no feed was available.<sup>292</sup>

Some of those who drove the carts were local people who needed work. Zoya's cousin in Kharkiv was such a driver during the Holodomor years. Zoya recalled that her uncle drank heavily in order to do the work, as it was so disturbing.<sup>293</sup> The guilt and sadness associated with such a role has its unique place in the history of the survivors.

Bodies were taken from homes without any ceremony and family members might return from the day's work on the collective farm to find people missing.<sup>294</sup> Often, people did not know where their loved ones bodies were taken, the knowledge of where their families were buried was lost to many

survivors. The mass graves were not marked. Mila was away from her home when her parents died, but her sisters were able to inform her of the burial place, although the ground had been covered over and flattened. Mila said, ‘They didn’t make a burial mound. They didn’t want others to know and didn’t make a mound. It’s not right.’<sup>295</sup>

### *International reaction*

Deception was practiced on a large scale in an attempt reassure the western democracies that there was no famine in the Soviet Union. Stalin banned use of the word ‘famine’ in the press and in conversation and anyone who violated this edict could be imprisoned.<sup>296</sup>

Stalin also had model collectives set up, such as the October Revolution in Brovary, near Kyiv, and the Red Star in Kharkiv. Foreign visitors and dignitaries were brought to these ideal collective farms to witness well-housed and well-fed people and animals. In the days leading up to these visits, people would be enlisted in cleaning and decorating the houses, the shops would be filled with food, and acts such as queuing and begging would be prohibited.<sup>297</sup> Misinformation was also disseminated by New York Times reporter Walter Duranty, who was based in Moscow during the 1930s and published inaccurate, pro-Soviet accounts of the Holodomor period. Appallingly, Duranty received a Pulitzer Prize for his articles.<sup>298</sup>

Despite these efforts at deception, there is considerable evidence that the West was aware at the time of the events unfolding in Soviet Ukraine. Information was carried out through reports by diplomatic dispatches and by journalists such as Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones.<sup>299</sup> The foreign diplomatic corps, through a British Embassy dispatch from Moscow, March 1933, reported to London that ‘conditions in the Kuban and Ukraine were ‘appalling’.<sup>300</sup>

Despite being aware of the horror unfolding in Ukraine, there was no reaction from international governments and little relief from other sources, with aid agencies blocked if they attempted to become involved. The Red Cross was unable to respond unless Soviet Russia consented, which they did not and



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archival documents of relief organisations such as those in Geneva, indicate that Germany, together with the Jewish Aid for Russia Organisation, were fully informed of the growing problem in Ukraine and attempted to provide relief but, were turned back by the Soviet authorities and assured that no such problem existed.<sup>301</sup> Serbyn notes that ‘some foreign aid did get through to the German and Jewish Communities’.

Foreign powers, although aware, were unwilling to become involved. The United States administration was working at establishing diplomatic relations with Russia at the time and did not wish to disrupt a potential association.<sup>302</sup> The British position was similar. It seems that they were more interested in developing the Soviet Union as an export market for British manufactured goods and in having Stalin as an ally against Hitler than in the fate of the Ukrainians.<sup>303</sup> Although British Foreign Office records include notes and memoranda which highlight their knowledge of the unprecedented famine in Ukraine, they also reveal that nothing was set in motion to assist the people. Laurence Collier’s Foreign Office notes indicate his reply to a Parliamentary Question made by Sir Waldron Smithers on 30 June 1934:

*The truth of the matter is, of course, that we have a certain amount of information about certain conditions ... and there is no obligation on us to make it public. We do not want to make it public, however, because the Soviet Government would resent it and our relations with them would be prejudiced.*<sup>304</sup>

British documents collected to outline the behaviour of Soviet officials, provide evidence of the famine of 1932–1933 and the fact that it mostly affected the Soviet Ukrainians who paradoxically lived in what is referred to the ‘the bread basket of Europe’, and where the most fertile black soil regions of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic were.<sup>305</sup> Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan uncovered British documents that clearly outlined the existence of the famine. These many urgent messages, received by Consular officials, relief workers, trade workers, and newspaper correspondents who were in the region, indicate that the British Foreign Office had knowledge of what was occurring within the

Soviet Ukrainian Republic during the period of the famine, and it appears that they ‘ignored or suppressed these messages’ at the time.<sup>306</sup>

The Foreign Office documents have left little doubt that the Soviet Ukrainian regions had been targeted with the Soviet authorities requisitioning unattainable amounts of grain for export and forcing the people to starve.<sup>307</sup> The British archives, by virtue of Britain being the first European power to have established diplomatic relations with Moscow, had a wealth of material from dispatches and correspondence about Soviet citizens. Their reports on events in the Soviet Union revealed the causes and consequences of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 albeit through the eyes of Englishmen.<sup>308</sup>

The reports of impending famine had been arriving in the West through various means, with the first arriving in May 1928 by way of Paul Scheffer, the Moscow correspondent of a Berlin newspaper. Collier already anticipated a ‘catastrophe’ and he stated that ‘the days of famine are already sounding their approach.’<sup>309</sup> Stories of specific aspects of grain requisitioning, begging peasants, people trying to flee the famine, and a constant barrage of unsolicited letters from Soviet citizens to the British Foreign Office were noted in the Carynyk et al publication.<sup>310</sup>

The true story was a catastrophe, yet Britain kept its silence about the famine in a country of which little they had little knowledge or understanding. Britain simply did not wish to disrupt trade with the Soviet Union and so did nothing about the famine in Soviet Ukraine.

Although news of the famine leaked out, the Soviet government avoided any negative repercussions from the international community and so the Ukrainians were left to the mercy of the regime.

### *The end of the Holodomor*

Extreme grain requisitioning officially ended in March 1933, but by then starvation and death had become chronic, as Grossman relates:

*When the snow melted true starvation began. People had swollen faces*

## The Holodomor Years

*and legs and stomachs. They could not contain their urine ... And now they ate anything at all. They caught mice, rats, sparrows, ants, earthworms. They ground up bones into flour, and did the same with leather and shoe soles; they cut up old skins and furs to make noodles of a kind, and they cooked glue. And when the grass came up, they began to dig up the roots and eat the leaves and the buds; they used everything there was: dandelions, and burdock, and bluebells, and willowroot, and sedums and nettles ...*<sup>311</sup>

The number of deaths began to taper off by May 1933 and the worst of the famine was over by November of that year.<sup>312</sup> Valya, one of the survivors interviewed, recalled that by the end of 1933, fruit began to ripen, vegetables began to grow, and with the severe restrictions lifted there was again enough of everything.<sup>313</sup>

The end of the Holodomor is commemorated on 27 November each year.

## CONCLUSION

Kardash describes Soviet policy towards Ukraine during the 1930s as 'merciless, repressive and inhumane'.<sup>314</sup> Dekulakisation and collectivisation were deliberate steps taken by the Soviet regime to destroy the culture and unity of the Ukraine, in order to destroy Ukrainian nationalism and independence, separate the peasants from their land, and bring grain production under the control of the Soviet state.

To this end, the Ukrainian peasants endured the breakdown of everything that constituted their lives at the hands of those who should have been caretakers of the people. Stalin, through his decrees and the sanctioned actions of Soviet officials, inflicted appalling atrocities on his own people.

## CHAPTER TWO

# SURVIVAL

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Given the horrific conditions faced by Ukrainians in 1932–1933, it is hard to understand how anyone survived the Holodomor. After great stores of grain and foodstuffs were confiscated by Communist Party activists and measures were put in place to prevent Ukrainians from leaving their villages and towns to search for food, people had to resort to extreme measures to obtain sustenance.

Some survivors managed to leave the villages before the borders were closed and restrictions on train travel were enforced, but others found ways to escape in spite of the restrictions. In a few cases, whole families relocated to areas not affected by the famine, while in others one family member was able to take advantage of corrupt officials to travel from the village to obtain food and then return with it to feed the family.

Where it seemed likely that the whole family would perish, some parents made the hard decision to separate the family, sending children to stay where it was felt they had a greater chance of survival. Young women could also be taken in to other families, either to provide childcare or as a step-mother, and because of this some survived.

Employment that provided workers with a food payment, sometimes in addition to a monetary wage, also helped people to survive and where this payment did not stretch to meet the needs of the whole family, or even the individual, many resorted to theft, undeterred by the harsh penalties. Those in more privileged positions tended to fare better, whether because of higher wages or relaxed restrictions on personal ownership of animals.

## Survival

The Torgsin stores, which so effectively stripped Ukraine of its wealth, gave those with gold and valuables to trade a greater chance of survival.

Most survivors spoke of foraging for other sources of food, including weeds, wild animals, and root vegetables that had been overlooked at harvest time. Survivors spoke of how food was carefully stored and concealed, to avoid detection by the Communist activists, or their starving neighbours.

There were also rare stories of charity and kindness in the face of the horror, with an elderly neighbour helping motherless children, people at train stations giving food to the starving, and beggars occasionally receiving food or clothing.

Disturbing memories of cannibalism and the fear it engendered were also related, though the survivors spoke of this horrific aspect of the famine without blame or recrimination. However abhorrent in any other situation, cannibalism of the dead during the Holodomor helped people to survive the famine.

As many of the survivors interviewed for this study were young children at the time of the famine, a lot of their stories are specific as to how children fared during the Holodomor years. Their memories of schools and kindergartens, family life, and the pervasive fear of abandonment give some insight into how children, as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, managed to live through the Holodomor.

The survivors' memories of the means by which they managed to live through famine, when so many others fell, have been grouped together here and provide further insight into the depravities inflicted upon the peasants and the extremes to which people were forced in order to survive these years.<sup>1</sup>

## LEAVING THE VILLAGES

Chernihiv, in the north of Soviet Ukraine close to the Belarus border, was a place where starving Ukrainians fleeing from the famine and the events unfolding to the south found food and respite. Fedor, who lived in Chernihiv, said:

*What we knew very well was that the famine seemed to be more in central Ukraine, and especially in the south. People from those parts were coming to our region, fleeing the famine. This we knew. They were coming and working among us, [they] lived among us. And we had a sort of saying: Oh, here's someone who's arrived from Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>*

The staple food in Chernihiv was the potato and Fedor believed that potatoes saved the community from the famine. He also spoke of the many forests, both in Belarus and in the north of his region, where mushrooms and fruit were abundant and rabbits and other animals could be hunted for food. While the Holodomor did not penetrate the region, news was carried in by those fleeing the famine in search of food and work. These survivors told Fedor and others in his village that everything had been taken from them, even the produce from their own gardens. Most of those who arrived in Chernihiv stayed in the region; only a few continued on to other areas.<sup>3</sup>

Fania spoke of villagers being so unworldly that they had never before ventured out of their villages or even seen a train. These people did not know what to do when faced with starvation but some managed to escape the hunger in the villages by moving to the cities. The lucky ones obtained work there. Darka remembered some people from her tiny village of fourteen houses 'escaped to the city' and were able to send home some 'dry bread in boxes for their family in the village ... It was like a biscuit but it was just bread.'<sup>4</sup>

Some people survived by moving to the towns and finding work in the factories where workers received a monetary wage rather than the 'trudoden' of the collective farms.<sup>5</sup> Mykola spoke of hunger being a problem everywhere, but noted that factory workers might receive a piece of precious bread as well as wages.<sup>6</sup>

Theodora was employed at a plant factory because her family had been dekulakised and she herself had spent some time exiled to Siberia. She stated that the only positive aspect of working at the factory was receiving the eight hundred grams of bread, part of the daily wage, which made her life somewhat

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easier. Workers were also provided with breakfast.

Theodora spoke of starving beggars gathering anywhere food was known to be available.

*As for the starving people from villages ... we were sitting at tables and they were standing in front of us and waiting until we finished eating that soup. The soup was so watery, we could drink it from the plate ... When we finished eating they would rush to the plate in a crowd to lick it.<sup>7</sup>*

When people arrived at the plant in the mornings, there was a tunnel they had to pass through to reach their workstations. Beggars would try to walk through with the workers to get inside the factory. Some stumbled and dropped dead from starvation. The foreman would make a worker collect the dead bodies. Theodora, weak with hunger herself and not a particularly big woman, was physically unable to pick up the corpses and told the foreman that she couldn't do that job.

Danylo spoke of people leaving his village to search for food elsewhere, but his family, who had been labeled kulaks, could not go because his father had disappeared. Danylo was almost fourteen years old at the time and everyone in his family had to work on the collective farm in order to be fed. Despite the danger, his family eventually decided they had to move on, as there was just not enough food to sustain them. It was winter and they travelled by sleigh. Danylo vividly remembered getting off the sleigh after they were fifteen kilometers into the journey.

*I started running and then I saw the sleigh so far away that I got scared because I couldn't run that fast. There was no road, and I was so scared. I'll never forget it ... Mother told me to get off so that I could get warm ... It was snowing.*

Taras' family fled to the Caucasus before the border closures and returned to the village when the famine ended. His grandmother had refused to

accompany them and perished during the Holodomor, along with many of the family's close friends.<sup>8</sup>

Zirka's family also made their way to the Caucasus. Her father was the first to leave and the rest of the family followed later. They made the twelve kilometer trek to the train station through winter snow. Armed people, militia and others, were acting as sentries, to prevent people from fleeing the village. There was straw in the fields and Zirka's mother hid her family amongst the straw along the way to avoid detection. The family reached the train station without being seen and caught a train to Odessa, then journeyed by boat to the Caucasus to join Zirka's father. There they escaped starvation for the duration of the Holodomor.<sup>9</sup>

Suzanna, Petro, and Zoya all spoke of people leaving their homes and villages to search for food elsewhere. Sometimes they were able to find work at the mines. It was unclear whether they were referring to their own families or to others in their villages.<sup>10</sup> Zoya said:

*... one could hide in the Donbas in the Donetsk Basin where coal was mined and where no-one checked your papers, you earned some money, but you lived in extremely difficult circumstances.<sup>11</sup>*

## TRAVELLING TO FIND FOOD

Fania's father managed to get to Belarus where, she said, there was no famine. He took whatever clothes they had in order to sell or exchange them for some precious grain or flour which he would bring home for his family. This often meant dealing with corrupt officials, as rail travel was by this time forbidden to all from the villages. The journey was very dangerous; if he had been caught, everything would have been confiscated and he could have been imprisoned. Fania also spoke of the risk of being accosted by other people attempting the journey for the same reason:



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*If you came across someone they could attack you and take away everything. It was a risk with no certainty that one could go and bring something back. It was possible that one would go and never come back. But people risked this.<sup>12</sup>*

Although the Communists had closed the borders, some villagers managed to make the risky journey to Russia, with the aid of corrupt officials. In Russia, according to survivors, ‘it was easier to find food.’<sup>13</sup> Lesia’s mother undertook these dangerous journeys to obtain food for her family and while she was never captured by the authorities, one trip brought severe consequences.

*Mother was on the train and unfortunately an accident occurred and the train crashed. In that train there were one or two carriages where people from Ukraine were going to Russia. On the train was all that had been stolen from Ukraine. There were two freight carriages with timber, loaded with such big cut tree trunks. They were being taken to a factory or something.*

*That train was sent off the rails. It is very hard for me to speak about it.*

*When it was sent off the rails, people started jumping off the two carriages and those tree trunks fell right on them. My mother did and was maimed.<sup>14</sup>*

Lesia’s mother was somehow pulled out of the carnage and taken away. She was terribly injured and lay in bed for six months in someone else’s home. During that time, Lesia’s family did not know what had happened to their mother. She eventually healed and arrived back home.

On her return, Lesia’s mother urged the family to leave for Russia because she had seen that life was better there. She believed that the family would all die of starvation if they remained in Ukraine. Lesia’s father agreed. When they were settled in Russia, Lesia’s mother continued to travel back to Ukraine, bringing food and other necessities to her brother and his two children. Her

sister-in-law had died and the motherless children needed her support. Lesia spoke of her mother travelling alone, despite the risks:

*When she went there it was dangerous. People would kill for a piece of bread, and she couldn't go on her own. Someone had to look after her, because otherwise the starvation was so bad that you yourself could be eaten.*<sup>15</sup>

## SEPARATION OF FAMILIES

The price of survival was often the separation of families. Parents faced the dilemma of keeping the family together and perhaps all perishing, or sending their children to relatives where they might have a better chance of surviving.

Mykola's mother took him to stay with a Polish lady, while she remained alone, working on a collective farm. He lived with the Polish lady for some time, but it was a benevolent uncle who saved him from starvation. Mykola had a Polish uncle, whose father had been a land owner who was killed in the Civil War around 1921. When this uncle heard that Mykola was not going to school, he arranged for the boy to live with him. He had work with some Jewish friends in town and lived in a little apartment, twenty five kilometers from Mykola's home. When Mykola's mother brought him there, it was winter and the boy had neither shoes nor trousers. Everything had been taken from his family. The uncle clothed Mykola and sent him to school with new identity documents.<sup>16</sup>

Young women as well as children were handed over to uncles, aunts, other family members, or friends because their own families were not able to provide for them.<sup>17</sup> Irka lived with her grandparents, visited only occasionally by her parents. She continued living with her grandparents after the famine ended.

Unmarried women were also taken in by other families as step-mothers; in many cases these women were not much older than the children they cared

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for. Stefka spoke of her shame at her father's remarriage to a young dekulakised woman after the death of Stefka's mother from starvation.<sup>18</sup>

### PRIVILEGED POSITIONS

Some survivors believe the reason their families had some food while so many others died of starvation, was because their parents must have been members of the Communist Party. One survivor, Maria, only gave a short interview and seemed reluctant to speak at any length of her memories. She spoke of her father being able to travel and never being home. Maria's father told her grandmother that he was an agent, but an agent of what she did not know. Maria believed he held a state job of some kind and that was why he was able to get food from state suppliers. Her grandmother never spoke about Maria's father's work or why they were allowed to keep their farm and grow their own food, which sustained them through the years of the Holodomor. Maria said, 'Now I understand more than I did then.'<sup>19</sup>

Those holding responsible positions on collective farms fared better than the workers. An accountant would be provided for in a superior way because of his position and his family would benefit from this extra food. Josep specifically noted that this was the situation with his grandfather. Most families in the village had their cows confiscated, but his family was allowed to retain one cow. As they did not need to kill the cow for food, they were able to keep it and benefit from the milk.<sup>20</sup>

*We were allowed one cow, but they took away horses and two other cows. It was good that at least one cow was left, because Mother, whatever she had, gave everything to her children. Because one child was only two, he lived only on milk. I was six.<sup>21</sup>*

According to Darka, her aunt's 'husband was a Communist Party member' and as such this aunt lived a little better. Occasionally Darka's aunt would

arrive with some small ‘platsky’, Ukrainian pancakes, which she had cooked from weeds.<sup>22</sup>

Survivors who were old enough to be conscripted into the army during the Holodomor avoided starvation. Volodya spent time in the army in a town on the Dnieper River. He indicated that he was grateful to be in the Red Army at that time as Kharkiv, the city he was from, faced severe famine and was one of the worst hit cities during the Holodomor.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Yurko spoke of people dying in his village and the surrounding area and gave a figure of about five thousand deaths, but said that no-one died in his own family. His brother was ‘with the Soviets’, apparently a Communist Party member, and Yurko was in the army where he was fed.<sup>24</sup> Other family members were able to get milk and bread through what he referred to as family ‘connections’.

## TORGSIN STORES

Survivors mentioned the Torgsin stores in their interviews<sup>25</sup> and these state-run stores have also recently become a topic for discussion amongst Ukrainian scholars.<sup>26</sup> Vasyly Marochko states this gold was ‘a dangerous asset because it was part of sacred spiritual traditions ... family valuables, crosses, wedding rings, baptismal crosses’. Such items were dangerous because of what they symbolised; religious belief in a Communist country could result in persecution. Those with gold were also vulnerable to assault, robbery, or even death at the hands of the starving, seeking to survive by trading the valuable items for bread. During the Holodomor, items that had been handed down through the generations and which were part of the national spirit, were reduced to trade items, tempting to thieves, their value measured by the small amount of food they could buy.<sup>27</sup>

At the Torgsin stores, in exchange for their precious jewelry or other valuables, Ukrainians received coupons that they could later exchange for food. Eye-witness accounts record starving people dying while waiting in kilometer long lines to reach the Torgsin stores, but even reaching the store to trade their

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valuables was not enough to save some people. Sometimes the exchange of coupons for goods could take months. People with coupons often died before they could redeem them and even after receiving food, people often died.<sup>28</sup>

Stefka's mother owned some gold earrings. During the Holodomor, her grandmother told her not to wear them, or they could be ripped from her ears and stolen. Later, Stefka's father cut the earrings in half and her mother traded them at the local Torgsin store. She would go to the Torgsin store at a time when people wouldn't see her, to trade the gold for up to two kilograms of flour. The family wasn't wealthy, but they traded what they had in order to survive and so never faced the extreme physical degradations that destroyed others during the famine. As Stefka said:

*So we weren't swollen, we were not swollen.*<sup>29</sup>

Lesia's mother also traded at the Torgsin store:

*Mother took along her only jewelry, such a precious necklace and everything ... those bloody Soviets opened a shop, it was called the Torgsin ... It was good, because you could get bread there, a loaf of bread for a gold ring or something else. They tried to acquire all the gold that people had ... I survived, because my mother was exchanging gold and other things in the Torgsin to buy a piece of bread.*<sup>30</sup>

The food available at the Torgsin stores was of the highest quality. Zoya remembers her mother taking not only valuable gold and silver jewelry but also the silver cutlery to exchange at the Torgsin for a kilo of flour, half a kilo of sugar, a lump of butter, and cereal. The flour she received was white, unlike the flour they were familiar with.

In Zoya's words, the Soviet government 'wrung valuables from people, because whoever had anything, took it there to the Torgsin store, to save their family.'<sup>31</sup>



MADE IN USSR

## COLLECTIVE FARMS

Workers on the collective farms were fed a type of boullion soup or potato soup during harvest times. The thin, watery soup was made from wheat and prepared near the threshing machines whilst they worked.<sup>32</sup> Every little bit helped, but this soup was not enough to sustain the workers and nothing was provided to feed their children and other dependents at home. Many farm workers resorted to theft from the collective farm to feed their families.

Theft of state owned property was punishable by penal service or execution and guards were placed in the fields at collective farms, to prevent people from raiding the crops.<sup>33</sup> Despite the harsh penalties and the guards, the thought of starvation outweighed the fear of consequences for many people. Evhan said:

*... we survived only on what my father took from the collective farm and hid, so we survived.*<sup>34</sup>

Darka's mother worked in the fields on the collective farm while her father tended the horses. Sometimes the horses would be given a type of grain to strengthen them, as fodder was scarce, and Darka's father would take a handful of this grain and smuggle it home, where it was boiled and eaten.<sup>35</sup>

Hanka spoke of women tasked with milking the

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*Left: What Kind of Harvest Will It Be?* (detail), 2004, T. Shevchenko. (Courtesy Morgan E. Williams Collection.)

cows drinking some of the milk when they were not being observed.<sup>36</sup>

Nina remembered people stealing the new emerging ears of wheat and being caught and imprisoned. Others searched for forgotten or overlooked frozen beetroot in the soil.<sup>37</sup>

## BREAD

Bread was spoken of repeatedly. It was the staple food of Ukraine and yet, in the ‘bread basket of Europe’, it was denied to the very people who grew the grain.

Orysia spoke of sucking bread, rather than chewing it, to make it last.<sup>38</sup> Darka stated that if you had enough bread then you were happy. Bread was life.<sup>39</sup> Yurko remarked that ‘No-one died in my family. We had bread.’<sup>40</sup>

Lesia recounted a tale of stolen bread. Her family lived in a single room after having been dekulakised and thrown out of their home. Her mother cautioned her to remain inside when she was eating the little bread they managed to obtain. On one occasion, Lesia went out while eating her bread and a man passing by snatched it out of her hands. On hearing her cries, Lesia’s mother ran out and comforted her, but told her daughter: ‘Leave him alone. He’s poor, he’s got nothing.’ On hearing those words the man stopped and began to cry. ‘I took the bread from the child because I haven’t had any for months and I only live on loboda [a weed in Ukraine].’<sup>41</sup>

In order to receive bread in the city, people had to queue. ‘If you wanted bread you had to stand in the queue. Everywhere in Kharkiv there were queues, queues, queues all the time’, said Irka.<sup>42</sup>

Both of Halena’s parents worked and she remembers getting bread from the station by lining up with work coupons.<sup>43</sup> People were given 200 grams per day in exchange for their work coupon. This bread had to feed their whole family, including any elderly grandparents who lived with the family.<sup>44</sup>

Marika’s story of bread collection is poignant.

*We walked two kilometers to town for bread. We got up at two am in*



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*the morning and walked the two kilometers for bread. Mother, my sister and I stood in lines. I stood in one place, mother in another and the sister in another. We could not stand together for they would not give you the bread. We stood.*

*Mother took some bread, I took some bread and my sister also took some bread ... The bread wasn't worth anything but it was like bread — it was baked from something like straw, sawdust (usually discarded on gardens/fields) ...*

*We arrived at home. Mother brought out the bread and put it on the table and asked 'Well where is your bread?'*

*Only the crust was left. It was soft — we walked and picked and picked and, my sister and I ate it ... We were smacked. It is not only for you it is for others ... If you don't go for bread then you won't eat. We had to go, but how often we got a smack for going for bread but only bringing home the crust.<sup>45</sup>*

Most survivors who discussed bread, however, noted that children brought the bread, or any other food they received, home to their parents. Ella remembered that even very young children seemed to understand that the situation was very grave and that the parents should control the distribution of food for the family, if they were to survive.<sup>46</sup>

Sadly, there were many cases of people finally obtaining some bread only to die soon after consuming it. Petro spoke of starving people dying from eating bread too fast.<sup>47</sup>

## ANIMALS

Nina spoke of how lucky her family had been that the authorities did not confiscate their cow and that they had grass to feed this cow. Families who had chickens were forced to hand over the eggs and could face trouble if the chickens did not lay. Those with pigs were required to provide the meat after

slaughter. Nina's father butchered their remaining piglet while it was still young and hid the meat from the Communist activists collecting the quotas. When questioned about the pig, he lied and told them that it was small and had died because they had nothing to feed it.<sup>48</sup>

Darka's mother and Irka's grandmother were each able to somehow acquire a goat, which sustained their families with milk and cheese.<sup>49</sup>

Most families had their livestock taken, so other animals were hunted as sources of meat. In Odessa oblast hedgehogs were in abundance and families took advantage of this opportunity. Mykola recalled that when every food source had been depleted, including 'the good horses', his mother caught hedgehogs, slaughtered them, and cooked the meat for her family. While Mykola's mother was fed at the collective farm, he was denied maize soup at school because his father had been dekulakised. Although Mykola remembered the hedgehog meals with incredulity, his mother acted out of the necessity to feed her son.<sup>50</sup>

Geese were plentiful in Ukrainian villages before the Holodomor. Valya lived in Poltava, a place severely affected by the Holodomor. When it became clear what the authorities were doing, her father slaughtered some geese and hid the meat. This fed his family for a short time. Valya's father also received food at his workplace and on some occasions he was given pork or beef, which he was able to bring home to his family.<sup>51</sup>

Nina and Danylo both spoke of seeing people eating cats to survive<sup>52</sup> and Zirka recalled:

*When we came back from the Caucasus [after the Holodomor had ended], we didn't see a dog or a cat anywhere. They had all been eaten by people.*<sup>53</sup>

Orysia spoke of watching a brother and sister who had caught a rat:

*Blood was dripping. They each had one end in their mouths, and were sucking.*<sup>54</sup>

## FORAGING AND UNCONVENTIONAL FOOD

Stories of consuming grass, weeds, dead animals, tree roots, leaves, lime tree blossom for tea, and rotten vegetables, abound in the interviews.<sup>55</sup> These testimonies sometimes defied belief and illustrated the desperation of hunger.

Some survivors remember eating ‘mamalegga’, a kind of corn meal. ‘Makuha’ was also available to some for a time. It was a type of cattle fodder, made by pressing sunflower seeds and removing the oil, producing a kind of ‘cake’ in pieces. Evhan recalled that sunflowers often grew wild in gardens and in the famine years makuha became part of the diet of the starving until the sunflowers were all eaten.<sup>56</sup> Luba’s family ate the sunflower seeds until the plants were depleted.<sup>57</sup> It was one of the only foods that sustained them. Makuha was not substantial but it served its purpose for the time that it lasted.

Djenja’s mother had little to give her children who were crying for food. They ate whatever she could provide and in winter that included leaves from trees.<sup>58</sup>

Horse meat and old grass were on the menu in Irka’s house.

Several survivors spoke of ‘loboda’, mentioned in Mykola Bondarenko’s artwork (see page 119), as one plant that sustained people during the Holodomor.<sup>59</sup> Ella noted that in summer her father was able to find some ‘loboda’, also called goosefoot weed, from which they made soup but that the situation was worse in winter.<sup>60</sup>

Constipation was a side effect of the diet endured by the Ukrainians during this period. Darka remembered the pancakes her mother used to bake in the oven, made out of wheat husks mixed with water. They were a staple for the family and seemed to relieve the symptoms of constipation.

Marika spoke scathingly of people these days not eating potatoes which are a little burnt by the sun. She recalled digging rotten potatoes out of the snow in winter.

*Everywhere on the farms, people would go looking — we would bring those potatoes that were collected, remove the skin and put them in the pot, but, oh the worms were huge! Well when you threw them in the water they would rise up ...*

Her last words on the subject were, ‘Whatever you ate, you ate and survived.’<sup>61</sup>

Katerina spoke of springtime and some ‘green stuff’ growing, perhaps sorrel. Her mother gathered the leaves and cooked and fried what she could, making patties and soup from the weeds. When Katerina and her siblings went out, their mother would say, ‘Don’t tell other children what you ate, because other children don’t even have that ... Don’t tell anyone what you ate because other people will come and take your mother away, or kill her, or something else, God forbid.’<sup>62</sup> Her fear was over weeds. Katarina, like others who survived, struggled to tell her story.

Suzanna remembers being so hungry that she and her brother took a belt belonging to their father, lit a fire, held the belt over the flames until it melted and became soft, then chewed on it. The two children could not bring themselves to confess what they had done, but their father had guessed. In the circumstances, what could he say or do? He himself went out collecting grass and any corn seeds that might have been left in the fields, to try to feed his family.<sup>63</sup>

## HIDDEN CACHES AND HOME PRODUCE

Many survivors remember their parents going to great lengths to hide any food they might have from their neighbours and the authorities. Grain and other foodstuffs were stealthily buried so as to avoid exposure by neighbours in equally dire straits or discovery by Communist activists.

Irka’s father had kept bees at some stage and had buried some of the honey. So as not to alert the neighbours, he stealthily dug it up in the dead of the night and woke his family to share it in secrecy.

When spring arrived, Nina’s mother began to hide in the ground what little she could find or prepare to preserve the food for times of greater need.<sup>64</sup>

The authorities would not let anyone seed their own small plots of land. Ella’s mother took the risk and planted potatoes. She managed to save some young potatoes before the remainder of her crop was confiscated.<sup>65</sup>

## Survival

Keeping caches of food was dangerous; if the hidden store was found by Communist activists penalties could be severe. Zirka's family were dekulakised and fled to the Caucasus to survive the famine, leaving behind food for her grandmother who refused to accompany them.

*Those who could hide something somewhere did — like between two walls. My father did that for my grandmother so that she could have something to eat. He hid two buckets of wheat. She died but didn't open them. She left him a letter saying that she knew he would come back home, and didn't want to involve him in any problem if the grain was found.<sup>66</sup>*

Zirka's grandmother knew that had the hidden wheat been discovered, her son would have been sent straight back to prison or even executed when he returned home. Zirka's father believed his mother chose to die rather than endanger him. It was a supreme act of selflessness.

## BEGGARS AND CHARITY

Zoya recalled people going begging from house to house looking for bread that didn't exist.<sup>67</sup> Marko noted that the beggars came from villages where people were starving, hoping to find jobs that paid them in bread.<sup>68</sup>

Seven survivors spoke of the desperate people who roamed villages and towns, knocking on doors or simply begging in the streets.<sup>69</sup> Sometimes they brought items to sell, but the villagers were so poor that they had nothing to give and could not afford to buy.

Marika remembered people coming to her family's door with bags hanging on their chests. 'Please give me your leftovers. Give me anything,' they would beg. They were grateful to be given old clothes, even if they were ripped and worn. According to Marika, the old clothes were traded for needles, cotton and buttons. People had been left with nothing to wear as well as nothing to eat.<sup>70</sup>

Marika remembers her mother being very upset when she found that someone in the family had given away some of their old clothes. Her family also

needed such goods. Nothing was unusable in those times. On one occasion, when they saw an old lady coming to the door begging, they closed the door and shut the window. The old lady knocked for some time before finally giving up and moving on.

*What could we give her? We didn't have anything ourselves. In autumn there were still a few potatoes that we could give, but in spring we didn't want anyone to come near us.*<sup>71</sup>

Josep has a similar memory of a poor beggar with swollen legs coming to his house and saying, 'Auntie [a common honorific], give me a piece of bread'. His mother replied that they had no bread and the beggar moved on. This was a memory that Josep still found distasteful and distressing. Before the famine they had been friendly and generous.<sup>72</sup>

Zoya and Sofi also recall the beggars asking for bread.<sup>73</sup> Sofi remembers the shabbiness of the beggars' clothes and their desperation. She said that some of the beggars were from a nearby village. People were too embarrassed to beg in their own neighborhood and would go to another village.<sup>74</sup>

Some people, traveling through the famine ravaged parts of Ukraine, gave food to children and others in need at the train stations. Consequently, beggars targeted the stations.

Zoya's mother knew many people at the train station who sometimes helped by providing her with pieces of bread or with potatoes. Zoya wasn't sure whether the food was simply given to her mother or if she had to pay for it in some way. She said that there were still good people who helped others during the Holodomor.<sup>75</sup>

Irka spoke of many people coming to her village from other villages searching for food. It was especially sad at the train station where many gathered begging for food. Irka remembers going to cry at the station, but that because many other people were begging for food no-one took any notice of her. Everyone was desperate to find something to eat so no-one bothered with a crying little girl.<sup>76</sup>

## Survival

As a young, hungry child, Mila's lot improved when her older sister went to live with another family, to care for their newborn child. This family was in a better position and Mila believed she would have died if not for the kindness of this other family.<sup>77</sup>

Marko noted that it was because of his mother that his family survived. The family was large and while everyone did their share to help provide for the family, his mother knew many people at the local station who were better off and they shared whatever they could with her.<sup>78</sup>

Darka remembers the kindness of an old lady who lived next door and who took an interest in Darka's family when their mother died. The neighbour would cook up potatoes and come to the house with some hot potatoes for the children. She also shared the peas she collected and would bring combs of honey over on a plate. This was unusual in such difficult times but for some reason, not understood by Darka as a young child, this woman had enough for herself and decided to share what she could with a motherless family.<sup>79</sup>

## CHILDREN

Many of the survivors interviewed in this study were children at the time of the Holodomor, many were very young. They witnessed events and lived in circumstances that they could not fathom at the time and even as adults, living in Western Australia, could not yet discuss openly. As one survivor said, 'Now when I think, I can't speak about that.'<sup>80</sup>

The experiences of children and the ways in which they survived starvation form a specific sub-set when considering the question of how people survived the Holodomor, their circumstances and experiences were often quite different from adult family members. In most cases parents were in no position to provide for their children, as would be expected in the normal course of things, so children had to fend for themselves to a greater or lesser extent. Trying to stay alive was the prime objective in the lives of children during the Holodomor.

### *Kindergarten*

Survivors spoke of ‘kindergartens’ attached to the collective farms.<sup>81</sup> The children were separated into different age groups and a form of schooling was conducted, but the primary function of these kindergartens was to babysit the very young children who could not yet work on the collective farm. If children had been orphaned they might also be taken in by the kindergarten.

For the duration of the Holodomor, in some kindergartens, the children received one meal a day. It was usually around 200 grams of heavy rye bread called ‘palanytsya’ and a meager portion of soup.

*They gave a watery soup ... half a glass of water and they poured a little milk in it and a piece of bread, like this [survivor indicates less than a slice]. Black bread.<sup>82</sup>*

Darka remembered that the soup did not keep the children’s hunger at bay and they had to forage for other food.

*You ate a little bit of soup and then half an hour later you were hungry again. We used to pick all sorts of berries out in the forest.<sup>83</sup>*

Not all children were included in the kindergartens, however. At her kindergarten, Hanka was given bread and a watery soup each day. She would carefully crumble the bread into tiny pieces and put some of them into the soup, while saving the rest for later in the day. She explained that one didn’t actually drink this soup of water and milk, but licked it so as to extend and savour the experience.<sup>84</sup>

On one occasion, Hanka realised that a little boy, starving and swollen, was intending to steal her food. He positioned himself underneath the table and swiftly reached up with one hand and grabbed the bread that she was saving for later. Hanka remembers being extremely upset and indignant, crying with anger, while fully understanding that although this precious food was all she had for the day, the boy who stole from her would not be getting anything.

That child did not belong to the collective farm’s kindergarten. He was



## Survival

so hungry he had been picking up tiny crumbs off the floor while the other children ate their soup and bread. He was removed by an adult who asked Hanka why she had given bread to the boy.<sup>85</sup>

### *School*

During the winter of 1932–1933, some schools served a meager breakfast to children. This food was called ‘pidporoka’ or ‘zatirka’ and was intended to stop them from ‘falling over from weakness.’<sup>86</sup>

Zatirka consisted of a little rye flour mixed with water, then salted and boiled. Two hundred to three hundred grams was given to each child. It was like a thin gruel, much like what the farmers fed their pigs before the Holodomor. Slowly, in spring, some sorrel was added to the gruel and later some potatoes.<sup>87</sup> This was the only meal of the day for many children and was mentioned by many Ukrainian migrants in their interviews.<sup>88</sup>

*Just like dogs, when they eat dry biscuits, the latter swell in the stomach; so those flour rubbings [zatirka], also filled our stomachs.*<sup>89</sup>

In some areas, school children were given a daily piece of bread. Most children took it home to share with their family. As head of her class, Halena was able to get a few extra pieces of bread which she always took home and gave to her parents.<sup>90</sup>

Sadly, these school meals were not enough to save many children.<sup>91</sup> Valya remembers going to school and finding that friends were no longer there, they had died. She herself was ill from hunger and was away for two weeks, when she was able to return she found that there was only one class of children where there had previously been two.<sup>92</sup>

### *Family life*

There were great variations in how children were cared for by their families during the famine and even when parents were living, children were often sent to forage for themselves. While some parents did their best to provide for their

children, other seemingly abandoned their families and their children battled against great odds to stay alive.

It was clear from the onset of the interview with Marika that her situation was particularly harsh. Although both parents were alive, she and her siblings were left to forage for themselves with no evident assistance from either parent. Her mother worked on a collective farm and like other collective farm workers, she was fed, but there was nothing for her children. Marika's father worked as a driver for a doctor and lived on the premises. He earned enough to sustain himself, but no extra to support his family. Neither parent shared what they earned with the children.

Marika could not believe that as children they were left alone during those years. They were left with no food and nothing to drink. She spoke tearfully of her childhood and sense of abandonment:

*We had nothing! I don't know what they thought about us children! ...*

*There was no food. Oh God. My twin and I — at home — well what can you do? Stick to those walls when there is nothing, no food, no drinks?*

*Let's go to our father. We went to him but he was not there. He had gone to the village. The door was open so we went into the house. Father had some bread and he had some jam. We took it and ran away.*

*There were some bushes near our father's place. We sat down and ate the bread and jam and brought the rest home and hid it.*

*In a few days our father came. Were you there? He asked. No.*

*We got into everything because we were the youngest and we were hungry. If we were not hungry we wouldn't have gone there and stolen the food.*

*Well he didn't say anything. They [the doctor and the father] began to lock doors.*

*After a few days, well, where will we go [for food]? We will go to our*

## Survival

*father's place. We got there, he wasn't there and the door was closed ... So we got in through the window and stole the bread again. But we didn't take it all. We broke some off and left a piece.*

*They came back and saw that someone had been in and left just a piece of bread. Again they locked up everything, the windows, the doors — we couldn't get in there again.<sup>93</sup>*

And so another source of food was closed off to the starving girls.

Other parents kept their children close to home and provided whatever sustenance they could. Katerina remembers her mother keeping the children at home, to prevent them from talking with other children about what they had to eat at home. Her mother believed it could place a family in jeopardy if it was known that there was food, or better food, available at their home. Children could not help but talk and compare. Katerina's parents were scared of what the repercussions could be if their children mixed with others.<sup>94</sup>

The Ukrainians had only their own immediate family for help and support during the Holodomor. Teenagers went to work on the collective farms not only to be fed but to help feed their younger siblings left at home. Mila's sixteen year old sister did precisely that. At the farm she received soup and a slice of bread each day, and saved this bread for Mila, her three year old sibling.<sup>95</sup>

## THEFT

Theft and burglary, almost unheard of in many communities, became common as communal life and human relationships disintegrated. Dolot, in his testimonial publication, tells of how children, after watching parents suffer or die and knowing that they also faced an agonising death from hunger, developed the courage to steal, such were the effects of starvation.<sup>96</sup>

Orysia, a survivor interviewed for this study, spoke of the desperate hunger that drove her, as a child, to risk the wrath of the militia and steal food from the collective farms.

*We children ran about ten kilometers to the fields where the wheat was growing. We took bundles with our hands, until we had blisters.*

*They [the guards] had large whips, horses and, when they hit you, well ... Whoever could whistle would do so or call out or something and we would escape one by one. As you left the field one went this way, one went that way.*

*But, the Communists, all the Communists — they didn't want us to eat. How many children did they kill? The children fell under horses. For me, that was barbarism. On horses with whips they struck and a girl fell. And they did this to a hungry child. They left but she was already dead.*

*This is what God gave me, this is how I was judged, and this is my faith.<sup>97</sup>*

Mykola also resorted to stealing in order to sustain his life and help his mother. There were mills in his village that were targeted by children:

*At school they all knew about it — everyone knew about it, but most importantly, all their parents — they were all enemies of the state [according to the authorities]. Everyone used to steal from the mills.<sup>98</sup>*

Mykola spoke of harvested grain being left to rot in the local post office, which had been converted into a grain storage facility, as the train station was too far away to transport the grain. He joined other children who were trying to get into the grain store. Someone threw a stone through a second floor window and rye began to pour out. Mykola quickly took off his cap and filled it with the falling rye and then ran to avoid being caught by the guards. He remembers that when he got home his ears had 'nearly frozen off' but 'everyone at home was overjoyed'.<sup>99</sup>

## ORPHANS AND ABANDONED CHILDREN

The meager rations given at the schools and kindergartens helped some children survive, but where they were the last surviving members of a family, children's circumstances became extreme.

## Survival

Nina spoke of children surviving the Holodomor despite the death of their families. In her village, many people perished leaving children to survive them. These children seemed to survive by scavenging for beets or anything they could find, but this was dangerous as the law in place against theft of state property stipulated harsh penalties, including death, regardless of age.<sup>100</sup> In families where the surviving children were a little older and more capable, the children could help each other and the survival rate appeared better.<sup>101</sup>

A generation of orphans resulted from Stalin's Holodomor. Those who were fortunate were adopted by people who did not have children or had lost their own, others remained in orphanages.<sup>102</sup> Some interviewees thought the Soviets believed that in these orphans they had obtained malleable children, who could be turned into solid Communists.<sup>103</sup>

## PRISON

Sometimes the worst outcome actually worked in a child's favor. I listened to the tape of this interview several times to ensure that the translation was correct. Ella explained that for a period of nine months during the Holodomor she was fed by her father, a builder who had been imprisoned for bringing home remnants off building sites. Her mother would put her on a train and she would visit him in prison where he would feed her. Ella laughed when recounting the absurdity of the situation.<sup>104</sup>

*At least they had soup. At least they fed them in prison ... but we didn't have anything. Stalin took everything away.*<sup>105</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The experiences shared by these survivors were extremely challenging to listen to. Given the obvious reticence of many to speak about some subjects, I was left wondering about the horror of experiences that were not spoken of. Their survival through this terrible period in history is certainly testament to their personal strength and endurance in an inhuman situation, but it can also be





seen in many cases to be mere luck or chance that these individuals survived where so many others perished.

One point of interest is that in most interviews, food is spoken of in specific measurements. The survivors share a preoccupation with the measurement of food that is reflective of the Communist Party's control of everything, down to the last grain of wheat.

It was very evident that the Ukrainian migrants still felt the pain of the Holodomor in their lives. Some of the survivors spoke with reticence bordering on shame of how they obtained food and what they ate, and often those interviewed spoke as if the events they described occurred to others, as though to avoid facing the truth of their own experiences.

To support information provided by people who lived through these years, the Institute of National Remembrance — Commission of the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation; Ministry of Interior and Administration, Republic of Poland; The Security Service of Ukraine Branch State Archives; Institute of Political and Ethno-National Studies at the national Academy of Sciences Ukraine have worked together and provided us with the most comprehensive authentic outline of the situation in Soviet Ukraine throughout 1932–1933.<sup>106</sup> The collection of official documents indicates clearly that the situation was well known by diplomats of the day.

The documents confirm the results of research that people ate 'like cattle' during the Holodomor.<sup>107</sup> They confirm too that when all dogs, cats and birds had disappeared from the landscape, having been eaten to sustain the hunger, the people faced mass deaths and in cases noted in different documents, were forced to resort to the desperate act of cannibalism. The first acts were reported from March in 1993 and these were from different oblasts (regions of Soviet Ukraine).<sup>108</sup>

The lucky people were those who by some miracle had been able to cross borders and migrate elsewhere but such attempts to escape was often stymied by the border blockades by the central authorities.<sup>109</sup>

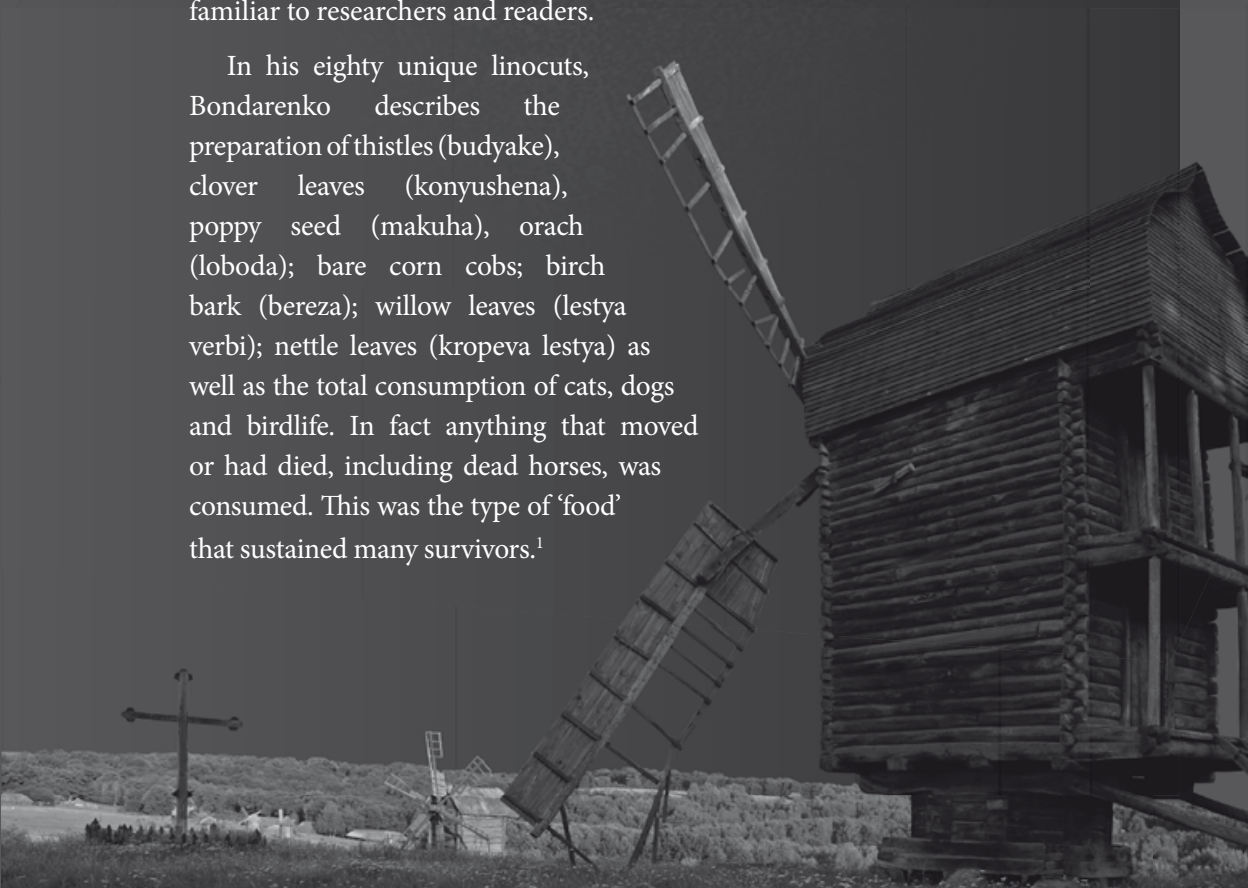


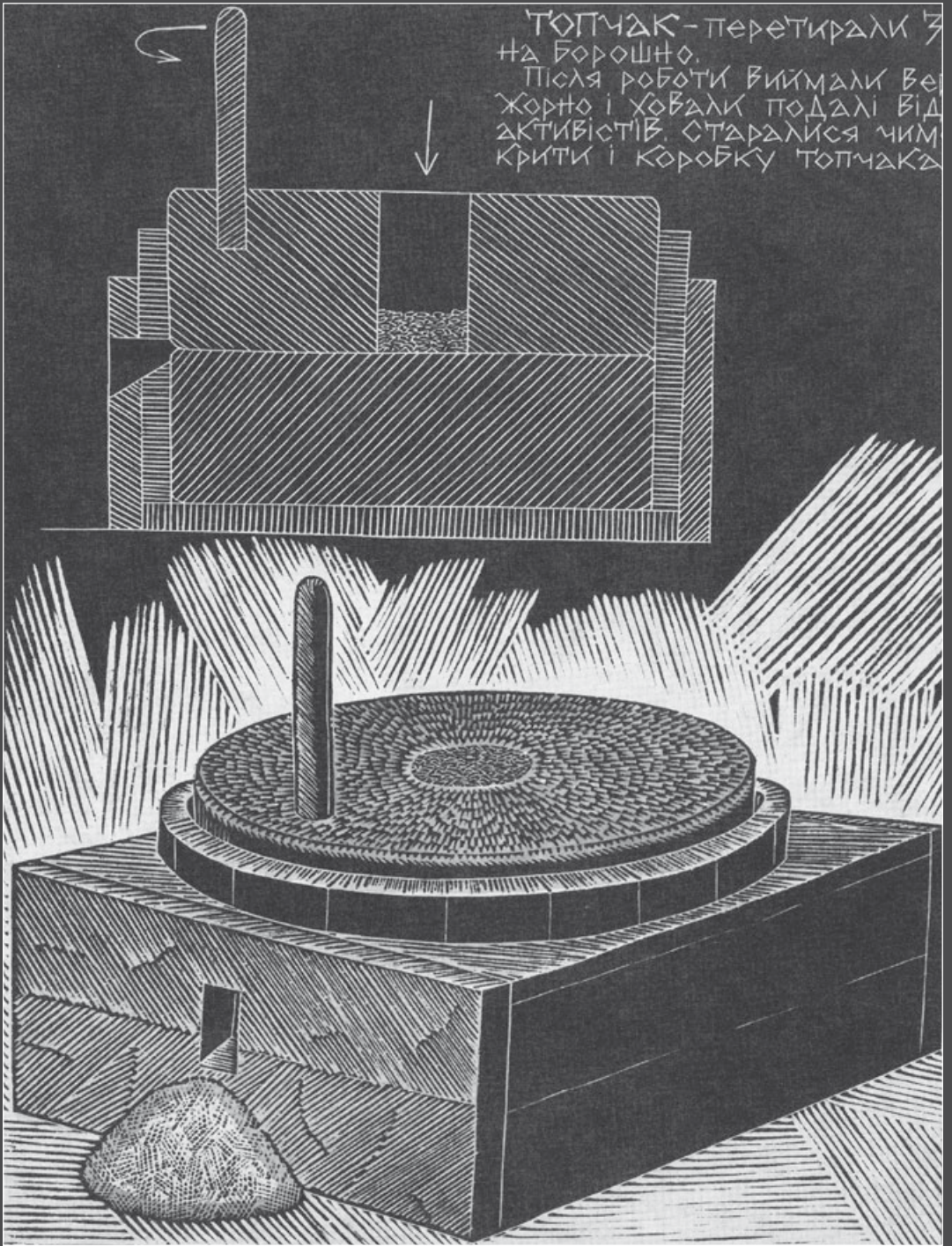
# THE BIRDS STOPPED SINGING, THE DOGS STOPPED BARKING

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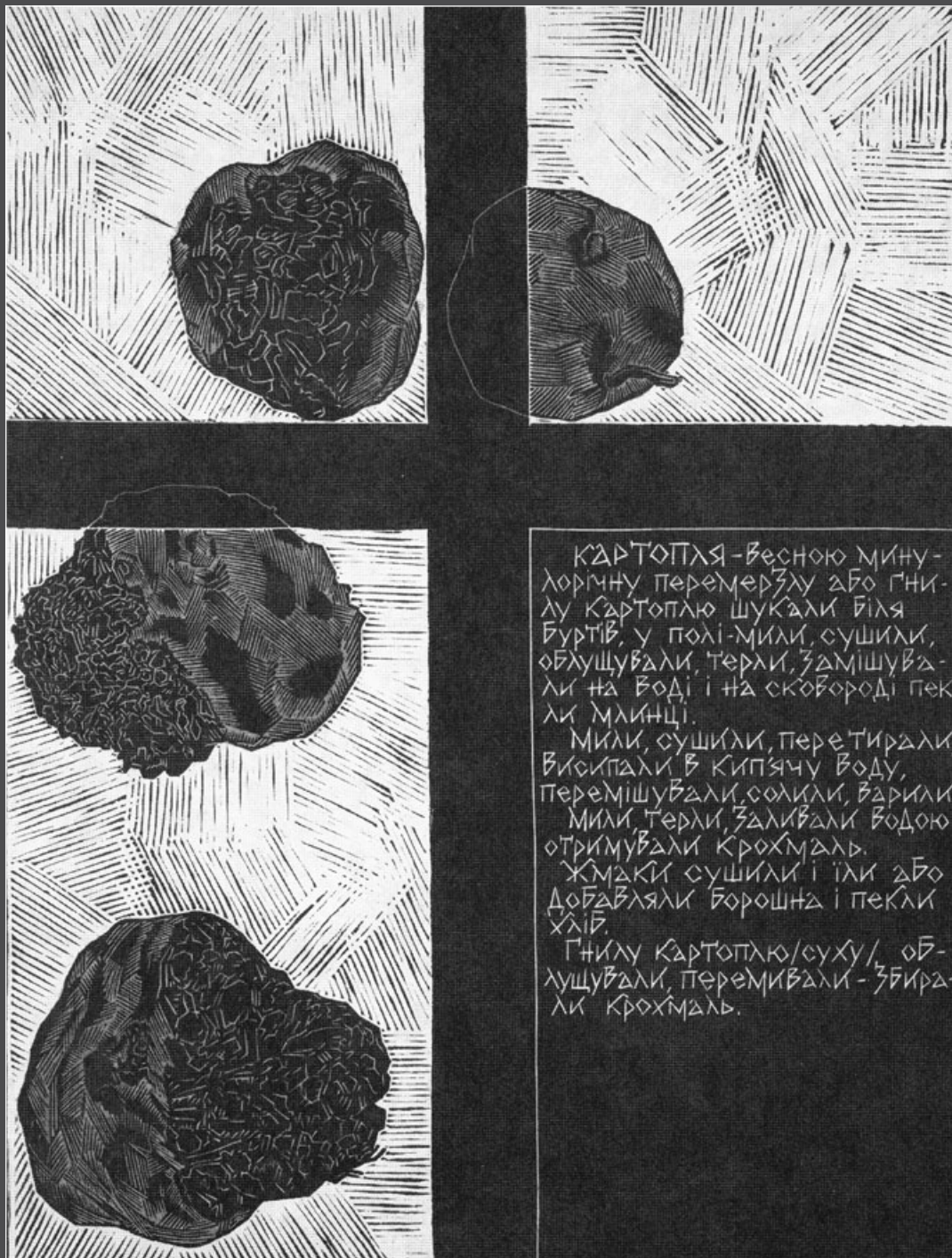
Mykola Bondarenko, a Ukrainian graphic artist, was born in Sumy, a region affected by the Holodomor. Bondarenko's artwork is an attempt to remember those who perished there and in Soviet Ukraine during this tragedy. Before creating his series of linocuts, he questioned Holodomor survivors and decided that rather than creating images of emaciated peasants, he would portray the food they had been forced to eat. He also included depictions of the recipes and tools used in preparing the food. His graphic depiction of the Holodomor is a moving tribute and particularly worthy inclusion in any reference list on the subject, as it provides descriptions of weeds and animals that may not be familiar to researchers and readers.

In his eighty unique linocuts, Bondarenko describes the preparation of thistles (budyake), clover leaves (konyushena), poppy seed (makuha), orach (loboda); bare corn cobs; birch bark (bereza); willow leaves (lestya verbi); nettle leaves (kropeva lestya) as well as the total consumption of cats, dogs and birdlife. In fact anything that moved or had died, including dead horses, was consumed. This was the type of 'food' that sustained many survivors.<sup>1</sup>





Mills were used to make grain into flour. After the job was done, the upper part was removed and hidden from the eyes of the activists. The lower box part was usually covered with something.



КАРТОПЛЯ - Весною мину-  
 лорічну перемерзлу або гни-  
 лу картоплю шукали біля  
 буртів, у полі-мили, сушили,  
 облущували, терли, замішували  
 на воді і на сковороді пек-  
 ли млинці.  
 Мили, сушили, перетирали,  
 висипали в кип'ячу воду,  
 перемішували, солили, варили.  
 Мили, терли, заливали водою  
 отримували крохмаль.  
 Жмаки сушили і їли або  
 добавляли борошна і пекли  
 хліб.  
 Гнилу картоплю/суху/ об-  
 лущували, перемішували - збира-  
 ли крохмаль.

Potatoes, Linocut, Mykola Bondarenko. (from Ukraine 1933: A Cookbook.)

In the spring last year's rotten or frozen potatoes were searched for in the long heaps of soil and leaves in the fields, then washed, dried peeled, shredded, and mixed with water and made into pancakes.

Also potatoes were washed, dried, shredded poured into boiling water, salted, mixed and cooked. Potatoes were washed, shredded, covered with cold water and the starch that separated would be removed. Rotten/dried up potatoes were peeled, washed and used for starch.



Thistle stalks were peeled and eaten raw.

## CHAPTER THREE

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# LIFE AFTER

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# THE HOLODOMOR

The Holodomor finally came to an end in late 1933, when Stalin ceased grain requisitioning, but the suffering faced by Ukrainians did not end with the Holodomor. Indeed, the interviewees did not end their stories with memories of the Holodomor, but went on to describe their lives after the famine, sharing stories of immense hardship, terror, and suffering, as well as reflecting on their lives in Western Australia.

Post-Holodomor, the Ukrainian people faced another repressive period in the history of the Soviet Union, the time known as the ‘Great Terror’.<sup>1</sup> This was followed by World War II in 1939 and the Great Patriotic War in June 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany. While many initially hoped that life in Ukraine under the German occupiers would be better than life under the Soviet regime, this hope soon faded. The Germans introduced forced transportation, taking Ukrainians to labour in Germany.

With the end of World War II, these forced labourers faced repatriation to Soviet Ukraine, where they were viewed as traitors and could face execution. Those who resisted repatriation spent up to seven years in Displaced Persons Camps in Europe, before finally being resettled in other countries.

The Holodomor survivors interviewed for this study ended their long journey in Western Australia, where they gradually made lives for themselves. Victims of trauma and genocide who have survived experiences such as the Holodomor face difficulties when resettling as migrants in new countries. In her discussion of postwar migration to Western Australia from 1945–1964, Peters notes that the ‘psychological transformation’ faced by migrants is very

complex. Socially and culturally their new lives are very different and are often beset with problems.<sup>2</sup> To assist in understanding the Ukrainian migrants' experiences in their new country, studies into the migration experiences of other victims of trauma are referenced.

## RUSSIFICATION OF UKRAINE

In early 1933, the Soviet government replaced the Ukrainian language with Russian as the official language of instruction in all schools, Conquest asserts this was a move to further weaken Ukrainian nationalist tendencies. In some eastern regions, particularly the Kuban region, the schools were turned into Russian schools.<sup>3</sup>

By 1933, the authorities flew black flags in the villages where every resident had died of starvation. It was a signal to collect the dead.<sup>4</sup> Many of the survivors interviewed for this study stated that entire villages died out during the Holodomor and in many of the surviving villages, significant portions of the population died.<sup>5</sup> Almost half of Fania's village died during the famine.<sup>6</sup> Kardash's 2007 publication contains testimonies of survivors from the regions of Ukraine most severely affected by the famine. He states that 'Ukraine is filled with the lost names of former villages, and the whole country, down to the last village, faced this Golgotha', the Holodomor.<sup>7</sup>

According to one survivor, Ivan, once the villages and towns had been emptied of Ukrainians through dekulakisation, collectivisation, and the ensuing starvation:

*Stalin sent in the Russians. Now what is to be done? Today we have Russians there.*<sup>8</sup>

Another survivor, Olena, said 'They came and took over the houses and settled in our Ukraine.'<sup>9</sup> Theodora's family was evicted from their home and left their village, but returned during the German occupation of Ukraine in 1941. She recalled that very few of their fellow villagers remained; there were a few

poor people who had survived the Holodomor, but the rest of the people in the village were Russians.<sup>10</sup>

Taras' family, who had fled to the Caucasus before the border closures, returned to their village after the Holodomor to find that many people had died, including Taras' grandmother who had refused to accompany them, and many close friends. Taras' father was appointed the head of the collective farm on their return, so the family lived reasonably comfortably.<sup>11</sup>

Moroziuk writes of survivor accounts and archival records that document Russians taking over the villages and towns belonging to those who had died of starvation. Moroziuk was a Member of the Ukrainian Association of Holodomor Researchers, Kherson Oblast, part of the Odessa Oblast in 1932–1933 cites a collection of documents and materials found in Kyiv which detail the resettlement of households from Russia's Gorky and Belarus to the Odessa Oblast. Moroziuk notes evidence of the resettlement program, a 'secret report by the All-Union Committee for Resettlement under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of December 29, 1933'. Report number 38, was sent to the head of Gulag Berman regarding the resettlement of the households into abandoned Ukrainian homes in the Odessa Oblast.<sup>12</sup>

Such resettlement provides some explanation for the predominance today of a Russian population in those regions where the famine had been at its worst during the time of grain confiscation and dekulakisation.<sup>13</sup>

## AFTER THE HOLODOMOR

The Ukrainian migrant survivors provided little specific information about their lives in the post-Holodomor period before the time of forced labour in Germany. There are some small mentions of behaviour such as drying and saving bread long after food was available again.<sup>14</sup> After the Holodomor, people were able to obtain white bread, which they considered better than rye bread. Irka spoke of her grandmother kissing bread and of how her mother would put it in the oven to dry, then cut it into pieces, and store it in sacks. Irka's mother

feared that the family would again be faced with starvation and she hid bread so that they would be prepared.<sup>15</sup>

Fitzpatrick documents that life continued to be difficult for the Ukrainian peasantry. From her research into Russian archives, she notes that all sources, published and archival, persistently ignored peasants and those living in the villages. The focus of the documents remained on the regime's production and procurement, with more information about collective farm livestock than about people. Most of the material Fitzpatrick uncovered relates to records of state and party bureaucracies during a very repressive Stalinist climate. She notes that educated Russian society had little or no contact with the countryside during these years. However, Fitzpatrick was able to source a small number of memoirs and used these to reconstruct some sense of what life was like.<sup>16</sup>

Fitzpatrick tells the story of the Tvardovskii family, who were dekulakised and sent to the Urals, where they moved around for some years, not able to settle anywhere and not able to return home. Other men fled to places in Kazakhstan and began a life without their wives and children. Deportees often found work in industrial operations, including iron foundries, coal mines, and logging companies. They had neither the means nor the permission to return to their own regions. Many Ukrainian peasants went to work in the mines of Donbas where living conditions are known to have been horrendous and working conditions dangerous.

The number of peasants who went to work on state farms increased substantially during the early 1930s but this provided only a temporary refuge from the famine. Young people who were called up for military service used this as a way of escaping the state collective farms. Training programs for young people and further education were also seen as a way out of the farm and a means of transitioning to an urban life. The major complaint by peasants during 1935 was the lack of respect, arbitrariness, and brutality in the exercise of power shown to them by those in authority.<sup>17</sup> This was followed by a period of repression and purges during 1937–38.



## Life after the Holodomor Years

Organised religion had already paid a heavy toll as a result of repression prior to the Holodomor and during the years of collectivisation and famine. Fitzpatrick writes of the resurgence of the church and believers during 1936–7 and notes the case of a Kyivan peasant woman who dressed in vestments and directed liturgy and prayers. However, there was another crackdown on religion in 1937 during the elections for the Supreme Soviet.<sup>18</sup> The 1937 census contained a question on religious beliefs, and this led many to believe that there would be more religious tolerance in Soviet Ukraine. However, the ensuing revitalisation of religion began to ‘impinge on politics’, bringing a resurgence of Soviet paranoia that linked religion to anti-regime conspiracies and subversion. The result was large-scale closure of churches and the disappearance of many priests.<sup>19</sup>

This period post-Holodomor also saw a collapse of the crafts related to peasant life and a resultant change of culture. Peasants who continued to practice traditional crafts, such as producing felt boots, were accused of showing capitalist tendencies and taxed punitively.<sup>20</sup> More urban customs began to predominate, with the movement of many villagers to urban centres in search of food and a better chance of survival during and after the Holodomor. Public health and medical facilities were poor with the 1937 census showing one hospital bed per thousand people. Fitzpatrick states that rural medicine was left to the traditional ‘wise women’ and that the inadequate medical care in country areas was a subject of complaint during the 1936 Constitution. Widows and children went without treatment because they could not afford it. She notes that prior to collectivisation, hospital treatment was free.<sup>21</sup>

It was during this time that a problem developed which was to last for many years, that of orphaned children and abandoned wives with children they could not support. These children, if not placed in an orphanage, became vagrants and often went into a life of crime. Peasant custom decreed that orphaned children were the responsibility of the extended family, but in the fractured post-Holodomor family structure this was no longer possible. To address this issue, a law was passed in 1936 which made the chairmen of rural Soviets

responsible for appointing guardians and arranging housing for orphans.<sup>22</sup> By 1937, oblast and rural authorities were reprimanded for failing in their duty and allowing children to be pushed into a life of vagrancy and degeneracy.<sup>23</sup> The children had been left to fend for themselves.

Figes discusses a mother's search for the children she had to leave behind when she was sent to the Gulag. He states that the end of World War II saw the first mass release of prisoners from the Gulag. This mother, Maria Ilina, was the director of a large textile factory in Kyiv and had been arrested as the wife of an 'enemy of the people' in 1937. She was eventually able to locate one of her daughters, Marina, and remove her from the orphanage where she had been placed, to take her to live in Cherkassy. Mother and daughter lived together for twelve years but were not able to develop a close relationship. Figes states they were too damaged to open up to each other. Maria was too afraid to tell her daughter what she had experienced in the labour camps and Marina was too afraid to ask. This continued until the mother's death in 1964. Marina learned that she had two brothers when one reappeared in 1955, and she was told of her other sibling's death. She lived with her remaining brother in total silence as she slipped into depression, consumed by memories of her past.<sup>24</sup>

Although deported kulaks regained their civil rights in 1934, a 1935 decree denied them permission to return to their homes and native villages until the late 1940s and early 1950s. 1937 saw a new wave of terror against kulaks, with officials fearful that kulaks would retaliate for their previous harsh treatment. Even when the kulaks were eventually able to return to their villages, they were not permitted to rejoin the collective farms, for fear they would take revenge for their mistreatment. They were forced to survive as best they could and Fitzpatrick notes that this required them to enter into dubious agreements and transactions. Many violated Soviet law in order to acquire land, bribing the rural soviet chairman so they could squat on state land. For most, it was safer to live away from their home villages, where they were unknown and could hopefully escape some of the persecution associated with having been branded enemies of the people.<sup>25</sup>

## Life after the Holodomor Years

Miron Dolot provides a simple overview of life after the Holodomor and notes that most people had no choice but to remain working on the collective farms. Dolot was separated from his family when he enlisted in the army in World War II and he does not know what happened to them from that point on. He was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans and interned in Stalag 3 in Germany. After the war, Dolot decided to stay in West Germany as a displaced person and finally emigrated to the United States. These bare facts provide a basic idea of what life was like for him after the Holodomor.<sup>26</sup>

Fitzpatrick outlines how World War II brought more suffering to Soviet Ukraine. Procurements and taxes rose further. She further notes that the period between the end of the war and Stalin's death was the harshest the people had endured since the early 1930s.

## GREAT TERROR

The mid-1930s marked a radical shift in Stalin's power. According to Weitz, at this time Stalin 'took immense interest in the proceedings of political show trials and signed tens of thousands of warrants for mass executions.'<sup>27</sup> From 1936, political repressions, purges, and show trials in Ukraine extended the assault on a people who had experienced the Holodomor. This period of Soviet history is known as the Great Terror.

The Great Terror saw a huge expansion of the powers of the state and further violations of human rights. The survivors interviewed remembered this period with horror. Conquest, in his publication *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, notes that 'there was no longer a section of the community reserved from the operation of arbitrary rule', and that the suffering of Ukrainians under the Communist Party increased immeasurably during these years.<sup>28</sup> Mass deportations, executions, and trials, were part of Stalin's moves to rise to power through creating extreme terror in the populace. Naimark states that Stalin's actions were effective in destroying any opposition to absolute rule.<sup>29</sup> Robert Service, a Soviet historian, speaks of Stalin using both physical and mental torment on his victims, 'degrading them

in the most humiliating fashion' Service notes that Stalin would keep even his closest confidants in 'unrelieved fear'.<sup>30</sup>

Kuromiya quotes figures of 267,579 Ukrainians arrested between 1937 and 1939. During the same period, 122,237 Ukrainians were sentenced to be shot. The statistics are not definitive however, as many of those arrested and imprisoned were transferred to Kyiv or Moscow, making it difficult to compile precise numbers. Kuromiya notes that the groups hardest hit during the terror were:

Party and government officials, people with non-Bolshevik political records, industrial managers and engineers.<sup>31</sup>

Although it was the Soviet Ukrainians who faced the worst of Stalin's wrath, many Soviet Ukrainian officials refused to become agents in the extermination of their own people. This resulted in a huge purge of the local Party and State apparatus lasting from 1933 until 1938.<sup>32</sup>

Mass graves of victims of the Great Terror of 1937–38 have been uncovered in various parts of Ukraine. The site of one such burial ground is in Rutchenkove, Donetsk.

The survivors shared various memories relating to the Great Terror. Larissa's family, who lived in a village in Kolomya, was taken to Siberia on 10 February 1940. They did not go alone. The Communist authorities murdered many of their fellow villagers, but all of the survivors from the entire village were sent to Siberia. Larissa remembers seeing a mother and daughter thrown down a well by Soviet guards. She remarked that if her family had not been sent to Siberia they would have been executed. She did not disclose the reason for this mass deportation and execution, and it was believed that she did not know.<sup>33</sup>

Halena spoke of the time of the Great Terror as being marked by betrayals of fellow men. She stated that in order to qualify as a Communist, one had to nominate two or three people as being against the Soviet Union. Halena's father was betrayed in this way by a neighbour who lived opposite her grandfather's home.<sup>34</sup>

## Life after the Holodomor Years

Although accused of being anti-Soviet and subsequently imprisoned, Yurko lived through his harsh punishment. He remembered clearly his time digging canals.<sup>35</sup> Others, like Danylo's family, were more fortunate. Danylo's father worked in a local council office and was told there, in strictest confidence, that he was going to be dekulakised and exiled to Siberia.<sup>36</sup> The family escaped from Soviet Ukraine by train to what they called 'a free country', Germany. Had Danylo's father stayed behind he would have faced the same fate as that of Zoya's father, who was arrested, charged, and imprisoned for being a Ukrainian nationalist. The last of the family's land was also taken away from them.

While my primary aim in carrying out this study was not to investigate the years of the Great Terror in detail, it is important to note that this period impacted upon the Holodomor survivors and the study records their memories of the time. As Fitzpatrick notes, 'on the scale of peasant trauma, the terror of 1937–1938 paled in comparison with collectivisation and dekulakisation of the 1930s'. He notes that the 1932–1933 famine was more terrible and, along with collectivisation and the events of World War II, is remembered as more significant by those who survived it.<sup>37</sup>

## GERMAN INVASION

In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression pact called the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. On 22 June 1941, in what was called 'Operation Barbarossa', Hitler broke this pact and invaded the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> World War II documents from the State Archive of Kyiv Oblast, indicate that 'Ukrainians were classified as 'Untermenschen', or sub-human, and their land, the 'breadbasket of Europe' was 'Lebensraum', or arable lands that Hitler wanted to colonise. He sought to liquidate and enslave the Ukrainian population. The archival records detail Hitler's order of 16 December 1942 to obliterate Ukrainian 'guerillas', including women and children.<sup>39</sup>

Johan Dietsch writes of Ukrainians trapped between the Soviet and Nazi regimes after the years of the Holodomor and the Great Terror. He notes that

they were vulnerable to victimisation because there was effectively no formal Ukrainian state that could protect them.<sup>40</sup> As the German front advanced into Ukraine, the Soviet army burned as much as they could in their retreat, so as to leave little behind for the Germans.<sup>41</sup>

Given the history of brutal Soviet repression, it is not surprising that, in the winter of 1941–42, some Ukrainians viewed Germany's occupation as a better alternative to life under Stalin. Many initially believed that the Germans were liberators.<sup>42</sup> They 'hoped with the end of Soviet rule their country would enjoy a better life and perhaps some form of national sovereignty'.<sup>43</sup> However, they soon found that they were ruled by another brutal regime which authorised the looting of properties, indiscriminate killing, the rape of women, and the burning of villages. The Germans found the collective farms extremely useful, as they provided a means of collecting grain and other produce for themselves, leaving the Ukrainians to starve yet again.<sup>44</sup>

According to Magocsi, Hungarian forces served alongside the German. He mentions the 1944 campaign which defended the road to Budapest. Similarly, Zoya, one of the survivors interviewed, spoke of the Hungarians, saying they looked like paupers, 'those who had been sitting at the church in rags begging for a piece of bread'. The German units had supplies and took whatever else they needed from the Ukrainians, but the Hungarian conscripts were supplied with nothing.<sup>45</sup>

Another survivor, Marika, shared an horrific memory of the German occupation. She witnessed the atrocities of pogroms against Jews, near her village in Ukraine. She was one of a few children who witnessed Jews being herded by German soldiers up onto a local hill. The children watched these people being undressed and having their pockets emptied. They then saw the victims falling into ditches which had been dug as their graves, executed with machine guns by the soldiers. After one group had been shot, within half an hour there were others standing in their place. The procedure was repeated three times. Hearing of these events, some young men in the village went to get the German policeman. He arrived in a German uniform but Marika and others who had witnessed the massacre were too frightened to speak to the

police of what they had witnessed, fearing for their own lives.<sup>46</sup>

Marika remembered people going to look at the fresh execution site and finding that the Germans had covered up the bodies. She said that the ground was still moving and blood was rising to the surface because the ravine had not been dug very deep. The Germans did this, she said angrily, yet nothing happened to them. She spoke of Ukrainians being accused of 'beating' the Jews but she said that she saw with her own eyes German soldiers murdering Jews during the occupation.<sup>47</sup>

Historian, Norman Davies, estimates the numbers of Ukrainians who perished during the German occupation as between six and seven million. This matches what he believes are the six or seven million who were starved to death on Stalin's orders during the 1932–1933 famine. Davies regards the Ukrainians as 'the nationality that suffered the largest total of civilian war dead during the Second World War'.<sup>48</sup>

## FORCED TRANSPORTATION AND LABOUR

The Nazi occupation led to another tragedy for Ukraine, with thousands of people transported as forced labour to Germany.<sup>49</sup> Hitler ordered the forcible deportation of people from Ukraine to work in German factories and homes and on farms, whilst the German men were serving in the military.<sup>50</sup> The war economy of Germany had become dependent upon such foreign labour.<sup>51</sup> Wyman, in Peters, states that by May of 1944 this labour force made up approximately thirty percent of the Third Reich's industrial labour force and twenty percent of the total labour force.<sup>52</sup>

The workers were known as 'Ostarbeiters', the German word for workers from eastern Ukraine, and were permitted to write to their relatives via a postcard system to the Kyiv Oblast. However, these letters never reached their destination. The many letters were kept in a secret archive in Germany, *Collection R-4826*, closed to researchers, until the records were declassified in 1990. The highly emotional letters contain the testimonies of Ukrainians who 'express their longing to return home and concern about relatives and friends'.<sup>53</sup>



Most of these Ukrainian labourers were teenagers and people in their early twenties, but, according to the archived letters, some were as young as twelve and as old as sixty.<sup>54</sup> They received little or no financial remuneration for their work. Peters has comprehensively documented the lives of people who migrated to Western Australia after World War II. She writes of a fourteen year old Ukrainian boy from Tarnopol, recruited as forced labour in 1942. He was given one hour to pack before being taken on a goods train to work at the Cologne railway station.<sup>55</sup> His story is similar to those told by many of the Ukrainians survivors involved in this study.

By June of 1943, Ukraine had become fully involved in the campaign to import labour into Germany to work for the Third Reich. Propaganda told of





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the benefits of working in Germany, with land to be had, a good wage, free housing, and medical care. It was actually promoted as a patriotic duty to defend ‘your fatherland’ and to defeat Bolshevism. The messages urged that German youth was going to the front and Ukrainian youth ‘must perform its labour duty’.<sup>56</sup>

In reality, young Ukrainian villagers were rounded up by German policemen with dogs and forced into cargo vans. ‘On 2 May 1942, some 1,400 young people in Kiev [sic] were arrested this way’. From March 1943, three thousand labourers were forcibly recruited each day. Most of the ‘eastern workers’ were female and they were said to work harder than their western or Balkan counterparts. From the middle of 1942, those attempting to escape from the roundups were shot. By 1944, 50,000 eastern ‘maids’ as they were called, mostly Ukrainian, were working in German households.<sup>57</sup>

The recruitment process involved medical examinations and people went to some length to fail these medicals in order to be deemed unacceptable. Self-inflicted illness became a mass phenomenon. People provoked diseases such as scabies, by using different herbal preparations that caused swelling or roughness when rubbed on the skin. Such behaviour was very common amongst girls and women facing the prospect of deportation.<sup>58</sup> One of the survivors interviewed, Djenia, spoke of burning herself with caustic soda in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid being transported out of Ukraine. She had hoped that if the wounds looked like scabies that might dissuade the soldiers from taking her.<sup>59</sup> Berkhoff states that in one town over a thousand young people caused injury to themselves in order to avoid the roundup.<sup>60</sup> Under German rule, even Ukrainian doctors joined the deception by giving out false diagnoses and prescriptions and even inducing illnesses. These physicians placed themselves at great risk and many faced punishment.<sup>61</sup>

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*Clockwise from top left:* Annella Perzylo, in the white blouse second down from top row, Siegen Displaced Persons Camp, located in the American Zone of Germany, c. 1946.

Annella Perzylo, second from left, with friends at Siegen Camp, c. 1946.

Young DPs living at the Siegen Camp, c. 1946.

Only single people were deported, causing a rush of marriages among quite young people. For the unmarried, pregnancy was the only legal way to avoid deportation, although in some cases, authorities forced women to abort their unborn children.<sup>62</sup> Workers were taken under threat from their beds in the middle of the night.

Twenty one of the Ukrainian migrants interviewed for this thesis spoke of being taken as forced labour to Germany. Their stories were all tragic.

According to Hanka, the German soldiers took one child from each family. The first time the German soldiers rounded up the young people for transportation, Hanka hid. However, as she returned from the top of a hill, herding the family cow, she was accosted by a soldier. He demanded, 'Are you ready?' and she replied, 'To go where?' She told him she didn't know anything. When he reminded her that it was about going to Germany, she told him Germany had nothing or anyone for her, that it was a strange land to her, and she had things to do in her village and was needed there to help her mother. But the soldier told Hanka that she had to go and would not let go of her hand. She was told to go home and tell her parents that she would be leaving at a particular time the next day. She was sixteen years old, the eldest of three children.<sup>63</sup>

My own mother, Stephania, was taken to Germany from her home in Ternopol when she was only sixteen. Her eldest sister was so distressed at being taken away from her family that the next child was ordered to go. She was equally distressed. The third sister, Stephania, volunteered to accompany her frightened sibling. However, the two girls were separated when they reached Germany, taken by different 'employers'. Stephania was handpicked from a line-up by a farmer. In some ways, she was one of the lucky ones. The couple loved her so much that they did not want her to leave at the end of the war. The free labour of a fearful, compliant, pious, and hard-working young girl was not easy to come by. These were defining years in my mother's life and they coloured her views on safety and authority, and the manner in which she raised her own children.<sup>64</sup>

Nina spoke of the Germans taking children as young as sixteen years old

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from her village. Nina was the only child of an elderly couple and although she knew three days in advance that she was to be taken, she did not wish to increase her mother's suffering and did not tell her parents until the last day. Nina did everything for her parents, but she had to go. A soldier had told her if she didn't, then her father would be executed. She said she didn't want that on her conscience and she didn't have anywhere to escape to. Still, she spoke of her immense anger and disbelief that her father did not fight the German police to stop them from taking her away. Nina said that she was so angry with her father that she stopped dreaming of him. Although she wrote home often while in Germany, her letters did not reach her parents, and she had no further contact with them. Her anger was such that she would not return to Ukraine even though she stated she 'wanted to go back so much'. She eventually accepted it as her fate in life, how it was 'meant to be' for her.<sup>65</sup> There was generally a feeling of acceptance regarding the events in her life.

Tonia stated that the Germans occupied her town twice. The first time was in 1942, when the villagers resisted working for the occupiers, the Germans soldiers resorted to forcibly arresting people. The Red Army counter attacked and eventually forced the Germans out. However, the Germans were more successful the second time, in 1943, and they began rounding up children to take back to Germany. Tonia's mother attempted to intervene. She went to the office the Germans had set up and told them not to take Tonia, as she was her eldest daughter and was needed at home. The German officials threatened her, saying, 'Well you have another one at home — we will take her as well'. So Tonia's mother had no choice but to let Tonia go, or she would have lost both of her children.<sup>66</sup>

Stefka begged not to be taken, as did her mother, who lamented that Stefka was her only daughter. The soldier allowed Stefka to stay as long as he could, but at the end of autumn her time was up. She was told that if she didn't get to the collection point, they would take her little brothers instead.<sup>67</sup>

Djenia began to cry and struggled to speak when relating how she was taken as a forced labourer. She was thrown into a wagon with straw on the floor. She was told to stand straight up and get moving onto the wagon. The

soldier had a gun and threatened to shoot her if she ran away. Djenia said, ‘It was winter, where would we run to?’<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Mila spoke of crying her heart out on the transport train and said that she told God she was putting herself in his hands because she didn’t know where she was going. She remarked that by this time Ukraine only had old people and children left and, ‘the rest were taken to Germany — even twelve year old girls.’<sup>69</sup>

For the young Ukrainians, being transported to Germany as forced labour was immensely traumatic. Many were told that if they resisted, others in their family would be punished or taken in their place. Even without this atmosphere of intimidation and violence, the prospect of transportation was terrifying, involving separation from family and all that was familiar. Until this time, many Ukrainians had never left their villages and now they were to be transported to a different country. For those left behind, having lived through the years of dekulakisation when people could disappear so abruptly, having a child taken in such a brutal way, to a far off place, was heartbreaking. Despite this, there was little resistance. In order to appreciate this apparent weakness of the Ukrainians in failing to fight against the forced transportation of young people, the fact that they had endured both the Holodomor and the Great Terror in the lead up to the German invasion has to be considered. The people had no means or energy to resist and no way to cope but with unwilling compliance.

Once taken from their villagers, the young Ukrainians were initially transported to Przemysl, just over the border in Poland. There, they were deloused, a process that led many to think they were to going to be executed, as they were lined up and stripped naked at one end of the delousing station and emerged at the other end to collect their clothes and dress.<sup>70</sup> In Germany, the workers were required to wear a badge on

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*Right:* Ivan Oliynyk. Workers were forced to wear ‘OST’ (‘OST’ — Eastern Forced Labourer) on their outer clothing.

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their clothing. This much resented badge identified them as eastern workers, with the letters 'OST' (east). The workers were housed in camps and suffered abuse, bad housing, and poor food.<sup>71</sup> One of the survivors interviewed, Valya, spoke of the constant food shortages that they faced. She remembered many people dying from lack of food and commented that although the Germans also faced shortages, the workers were worse off, as they only had what was left over.<sup>72</sup>

Berkhoff notes that the eastern workers were treated worse than any other foreign workers. Girls and women were fearful that they would be put to work in brothels.<sup>73</sup> One of the survivors interviewed, Djenia, spoke of girls she knew who became prostitutes by force.<sup>74</sup> The contemporary songs of the time express profound sadness, with themes of leaving school





and study, and becoming slaves in a foreign land.<sup>75</sup> Herbert states that many of the Ukrainian forced labourers, who had starved during the Holodomor, starved again in Germany in conditions that were ‘little different from those in concentration camps’. He reveals that ‘disgusting brutalities’ unimaginable in their ‘cruelty and arbitrariness’ were part of everyday life.<sup>76</sup>

The families of workers who escaped were punished. Not only did the Nazi authorities arrest the relatives of the escaped workers, they sent them to labour camps and burnt down their farms and homes.

Germany used these forced labourers for many different types of work. One survivor, Bohdan, was based in a factory that repaired water pipes and waterworks of all kinds. After cities were bombed, Bohdan and the other workers were enlisted to repair and reset the pipes and machinery to good running order. He also spent time digging canals to lay pipes.<sup>77</sup> More than

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*Clockwise from top left:* Maria and Michael Klimak, forced labourers and DPs in Velbert DP Camp, Germany.

United Nations Refugee Association (UNRA) and DP Camp police force.  
Michael Klimak far right, front.

Michael Klimak’s forced labour railway worker certificate, Germany, 1948.



# Zeugnis

Herr <sup>a</sup> Klymek, Michael geboren am 18.9.1922  
Pokrimzi, Kreis Je-  
datschu war beschäftigt:

bis 7.1941 als 10.4.1945 Zuschläger  
und Elektro-Schweißer bei  
(Reichsbahnstelle) Reichsb.-Auspasserungswerk  
Witten

<sup>a</sup> Klymek war Bediener einer Elektro-Schweißmaschine  
(Schweißen von Hemmschuhen, eisernen Schwellen und  
Weichenhaken).

Führung: gut

Leistungen: gut



Witten, den 27.10. 1948

Reichsb. Auspasserungswerk  
Witten  
(Reichsbahnstelle)

*Reichsbahn*  
(Name und Amtsbezeichnung des Leiters)  
Reichsbahn Oberinspektor



half of the workers were women and girls<sup>78</sup> and many were taken to work on farms. There they laboured from 5am until 5pm every day, in addition to performing kitchen duties, cleaning, and whatever else the farmer's wife required.<sup>79</sup> This was the fate of my own mother.

Some of the young female workers faced very hard labour, being relegated to carrying iron from one train carriage to another. The iron was secured in bundles and it was hard to carry such loads. Fania labored in such a way with another young woman:

*She loaded it on her shoulder and I on mine, but she was taller and I was shorter, so I always had black shoulders. They gave us nothing to protect ourselves, no padding, nothing.<sup>80</sup>*

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**From top left:** Annella Perzyllo, second from right, with other young women taken as forced labour to Germany, c. 1943. They were called 'eastern workers' or, if working in German households, 'eastern maids'.

Michael Klimak's Arbeitsbuch





Fania spoke with a heavy voice about how difficult the work was for her. When they finished for the day and went back to where they were housed they had to contend with all manner of bugs. She shook her head and said that there was nothing left to suck out of them, but the bugs sucked at their bodies all the same. Every night a policeman with a dog checked that all the workers were there.<sup>81</sup>

Ukrainian forced labourers were also dispatched to work for the German Army. Katerina spoke of the night that the soldiers came to collect her. They told her parents that they needed her to dig trenches. The soldiers told her not to pack anything but a change of clothes because they might be bombed. They could

not carry suitcases. She said that her parents were forced to let her go, because otherwise they would have been arrested. Katerina was fifteen years old.<sup>82</sup>

Some of the survivors did not elaborate on their time in Germany and just made a short statement about forced labour. Suzanna said that in 1943 she was taken to Berlin where she lived in a camp. The feeling she expressed was of weariness at having to tell a story that had a tragic ending.<sup>83</sup>

Zoya, aged eighteen at the time she was transported to Germany, described herself as a naïve schoolgirl. She was taken in by a German woman to help at the woman's home. For some reason, this woman took a liking to Zoya. The husband belonged to the German SS and he had been appointed to work in Ukraine. When he came home, he and his wife would argue about the events occurring in Ukraine. This was distressing for Zoya.<sup>84</sup>

The SS officer told his wife about the atrocities they were carrying out against Jews in Ukraine. Zoya remembers one story that concerned a doctor, 'a very intelligent woman', who was tortured and hung, just to terrorise others. After the war Zoya heard that the SS officer had been charged and sentenced to two years in the mines at Sachsen in Germany. Whether this sentence was for war crimes or for some other offence, she was unaware.<sup>85</sup>

Sofi was placed on a farm where her tasks involved working in the house and the fields and milking the cows. She did not have a day off for three years. When she was finally given a rest day, it was to go to church. The church was a distance away and the workers needed to catch a train to get there. When she arrived at the church, with many others, they were rounded up and taken to a police station. The police questioned them about whether they had permission from their bosses to be away. Some had permission and some did not. They were beaten and told to get back on the train and return to their workplaces.

*That's how we saw the church. They wanted us for confession. Probably to find out something. We didn't have confession nor time at church. It was rather cruel.*<sup>86</sup>

Several survivors related their experiences of the bombing during their time

## Life after the Holodomor Years

in Germany. Sofi remembered being taken one night by her farm mistress, along with the lady's children, and running away from the farm because of bombing. The Russian and American forces were bombing at the same time. Sofi still has vivid memories of that night.<sup>87</sup>

Mila worked on a German farm for two and a half years, during which time bombs dropped near the farm house. The blast from one bomb blew her off her feet and she fled to a nearby bunker in town for safety. She was very frightened and finally emerged from the shelter after a day or so and went back to work.<sup>88</sup>

There was little stability in their lives in a strange country. The labourers were frequently moved around. Yurko spoke of being transported from Dresden to a place in the province of Bavaria.<sup>89</sup> No regard was given to the safety of the workers, with many being sent to labour in areas where they were at risk from the bombing.

For the Ukrainian survivors who were transported to Germany as forced labourers, one inhuman event was replaced by another in the history of their lives. In Fania's words:

It was not good when there were Communists, but when they took us to Germany, we were taunted there as well.<sup>90</sup>

## THE END OF WORLD WAR II

When the war ended in 1945, the Ukrainians in Germany were liberated from their period of forced labour, but their ordeal did not end. They became displaced persons (DPs) and faced forced repatriation to the Soviet Union, where they would be labeled traitors.

At the end of 1943, at the Yalta Summit Conference, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin had re-affirmed the Atlantic Charter and agreed on post-war occupation issues. The eastern half of Europe was 'handed over' to Stalin.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, at the end of World War II, the Soviets made claim to any displaced persons from Belorussia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.<sup>92</sup> Elliot, discussing the Soviet repatriation campaign, states that the Soviet

regime 'demanded total repatriation because nonreturners posed a threat to the credibility of propaganda that stressed the unqualified wartime devotion of all Soviet citizens.'<sup>93</sup> It would have shown a failure of the Communist system of government for citizens to be seen as not wishing to return. The Ukrainian political refugees were particularly vulnerable, having opposed both the Soviet and German takeover of Ukraine.<sup>94</sup>

Many refugees were 'repatriated' at bayonet point by American, British, French, and Canadian soldiers.<sup>95</sup> Stargardt notes that approximately 482,880 people were moved back into the enlarged Soviet Ukraine. The Ukrainian forced labourers in Germany were encouraged to believe that they would be welcomed back to the Soviet Union and so many began their transportation back to Ukraine. However, the repatriated citizens were classed as traitors and Stalin reneged on his promise of safety, promptly sending many of them to Siberian Gulags as traitors, or having them executed.<sup>96</sup> The Western Allies' involvement in this forced repatriation scheme and the resultant loss of life displays their naiveté in their dealings with the Soviet regime.<sup>97</sup>

Stebelsky notes that the Soviet Union used various methods to effect the handover of 'their citizens', including blackmail, kidnapping and the employment of secret service agents to instigate quarrels amongst the refugees. These methods led to many people either not reporting their nationality or changing their identity.<sup>98</sup> Some, including a large number of Cossacks, committed suicide rather than returning to the Soviet Union.<sup>99</sup>

With the end of the war, some Ukrainians who had not been transported to Germany also faced recrimination from Soviet authorities. From August to December 1945, thousands of Ukrainian citizens, both DPs and those who had remained in Ukraine, were interrogated and the authorities decreed that most had not resisted the German invaders. Thus they were treated as enemies, spies, or saboteurs. The Soviets created what they called a 'filtration file', a dossier, on the people thus classified which was then filed in the KGB archives. These files caused problems not only for those who managed to escape through migration, either through the DP camps or later from Ukraine,

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but also those who were still in the Soviet Union. The distrust of the Soviet citizens, both those remaining and those returning to revisit homeland, was to last for decades. These archived files, 115,940 in total, were a Soviet state secret until 1993.<sup>100</sup>

Survivors spoke of their fear at the prospect of repatriation. Halina destroyed her father's arrest document and all the papers she had of her qualifications as she thought the Americans were going to take her back to Ukraine and she wanted no incriminating evidence to assist that passage. By this point, the Ukrainians were already aware that to return was perilous.<sup>101</sup> Marko had married in the DP camp and his wife wanted to go back home to Ukraine but he said, 'Where? To that hell?' and talked her out of it.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Volodya spoke of the awareness among Ukrainians of the dangers that awaited them if they were repatriated:

*Stalin didn't tell Roosevelt and Churchill that he would bring his people to court; he said all of them should be sent back. We understood that we would become parasites. They just needed a free labour force. I thought that I would be arrested if I went home.*<sup>103</sup>

Josep was actually transported 120 kilometers into Soviet territory before he realised what was likely to happen. He escaped and returned on foot to the English zone. He stated that once he reached the English zone he knew that he would be safe. There, he joined a Ukrainian DP camp. Josep spoke of friends who chose to return to the Soviet Union:

Some didn't get home but were lost to Siberia. Some went back home. They had longer roads, only back to the village, to the collective farm.<sup>104</sup>

## DISPLACED PERSONS

With the end of their time as forced labourers, the Ukrainians in Germany faced what Williams calls the 'beginning of something unknown, disturbing, [and] painful'.<sup>105</sup> Many knew that family as they had known it no longer existed for them, with many friends dead as well. Freed from unpaid labour, but still

displaced from their homes, they experienced a deep sense of loss, of not knowing who they were, what they should do, where should they go, or where their home now was.

During the initial repatriation process to Soviet Ukraine, many people returned but, as noted previously, many others resisted. Subtelny states that about 220,000 refused to return to Ukraine and thus became Displaced Persons (DPs). Of this number, the minority were political refugees and the majority were those who had been forced labourers in Germany. The latter were generally poorly educated and single.<sup>106</sup>

A contemporary, post-World War II, definition of a displaced person is:

*A person in Germany, Austria or Italy, who is out of his country of former residence as a result of events subsequent to the outbreak of World War II and, is unable or unwilling to return to the country of his nationality or former residence because of persecution or his fear of persecution of race, religion or political opinions.*<sup>107</sup>

The Ukrainians in the DP camps organised themselves well enough to resist repatriation back to the Soviet Union as ‘Soviet Citizens’, but this left them in a difficult and often dangerous place. Luciuk states that the DP camps were ‘hotbeds of intrigue, arenas within which competing political movements sought to assert themselves and gain control ... They were sociological and psychological cauldrons.’<sup>108</sup> Vasyl Markus, editor of the Encyclopedia of the Ukrainian Diaspora, details the complexity of the organisations that emerged as a result of the social conditions of collective life in the DP camps. Unemployment or semi-employment provided a climate that was receptive to political mobilisation. He states that many years after the DP experience, the same political parties are still existent.<sup>109</sup>

Luciuk provides some of the most insightful data regarding the DPs and life within these refugee camps. He notes a significant report developed by an Inter-Allied Psychological Problems Group that was attached to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration at the time. Luciuk states that it was ‘not

## Life after the Holodomor Years

only the physical impact of this forced displacement but the moral and mental consequences as well' that were assessed by this group.<sup>110</sup> The report concluded that all the DPs had experienced the same issues. They were:

*Cut off from family, community, and national ties, connections which normally provide an individual with basic stability, affection, and support all people require. The loss of these ties often left people lonely, homesick, depressed, disbelieving, and cynical. These effects, moreover, were magnified by the tremendous menace to life itself which most of the refugees had faced during a war in which their enemy had waged nothing less than a 'biological war on population trends.'<sup>111</sup>*

Luciuk cited the Study Group's judgment that the 'moral and psychological disturbance caused by Germany [was] probably greater than the physical devastation'. Consequently, the refugees were left 'certain about nothing' and

*... insecure about the duration and nature of the exile, about the fate of family and homeland, about whether basic needs would continue to be met, about whether there would ever again be an opportunity to realize personal ambitions, rebuild a career, or even start leading a normal existence ...<sup>112</sup>*

In the camps the refugees lived with groups of people who were in the same situation, some of whom might have been thought of as the enemy. Their sense of reality had disappeared and memories of home and a strong desire to return there permeated their emotions. What followed was a rebuilding of a semblance of cultural communities. Many of the refugees were eastern Ukrainians, Ukrainian Orthodox, and survivors of the Holodomor and the ensuing Great Terror in Ukraine.

In *Searching for Place*, Luciuk writes about the DP experience and the migration of Ukrainians to Canada after World War II. His account provides a disturbing picture of life for these people in the camps of Europe, as well as following their migration and settling in to Canada.<sup>113</sup> Life in the DP camps was said to be better than life in the Soviet Union<sup>114</sup> but conditions were still harsh, with insufficient food and poor medical facilities. One survivor, Valya,

spoke of illness and death as a result of malnutrition, stating that the mortality rate was high among DPs in the camps.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, a survivor interviewed by Grinchenko, spoke of his time in a DP camp:

*Starvation after the war again. And you know that starvation is more horrible than war, that is for sure. You know it is said, Anything but war! No! Anything but starvation and cold! If only not to endure starvation and cold! We were fed up with seeing swollen bodies everywhere.*<sup>116</sup>

Peters' research discloses that the largest group of displaced people after World War II was eight million young Europeans, which included those from Ukraine. Rations for their labours in DP camps consisted of 'turnip soup given once a day ... two hundred grams of bread, a little margarine, that's all.'<sup>117</sup> These people admitted to begging or stealing whenever they could. It was reminiscent of the Holodomor.

Nine of the survivors interviewed spoke of their time in DP camps.<sup>118</sup> There, they again faced hardship, displacement, loss of family, uncertainty, a yearning for their homeland, vulnerability, fear of the future and for their safety, and felt a basic desire for love, relationships, and some stability in their lives.

The move to the camps was difficult for some, as people who had already been forcibly transported from their homes found it difficult to move on once again from now-familiar surrounds. One survivor, Hanka, spoke of not wanting leave the farm she had been laboring on. She wanted to remain and help the German lady who owned the farm. Hanka had met a young man by then, also a Ukrainian brought in as forced labour. He had different ideas for her, however, and arrived one day to persuade her to leave the farm and join the many young people who had signed in to one of the DP Camps. This young man was to become her husband, and she thanks God and her husband for sending her to the camp and not back to Ukraine.<sup>119</sup>

Marko had been laboring on a small farm and was forced to move to a DP camp after the farmer said he could no longer feed him. The camp he joined was not far from the Austrian border and had three blocks housing Ukrainians.



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There were Orthodox and Greek Catholic priests in the camp and Marko lived on the floor where there was a Greek Catholic Church. He worshiped there because he did not want to go to the Russian church, having such negative memories of the Russian influence in his young life.<sup>120</sup>

Stefka found herself in a Polish refugee camp. She said that stealing became rampant with the arrival of the American soldiers. People were confronted with things that they had not had for some time and the temptation was too great after having faced so much deprivation.<sup>121</sup> Valya spoke of saving half of whatever foodstuffs she could get and smuggling it to her husband. He met her within the gates of the camp, for food was not to be taken elsewhere or it would be confiscated, and she would try to pass the food to him without being seen. Conditions in the camp were difficult, and people were very careful not to be seen to have extra food to avoid facing begging or theft. People in the camps were only allowed to have what they were given.<sup>122</sup>

Djenia also spoke of food shortages in the camps. She was placed in an 'international kitchen' and in this camp, while Ukrainians were given boiled unpeeled potatoes, the French 'had better food than in a German restaurant'. The French refugees told Djenia and others that 'their country fed them', meanwhile the Ukrainians were given nothing as Stalin sent no supplies to the DP camps. She said that Ukrainians needed the compassion of others to survive their time in the DP camps.<sup>123</sup>

As people lived for up to six or seven years in these camps, marriages inevitably occurred. However, in most camps, married couples were not able to cohabit as there were separate barracks for the sexes. Partnering in a DP camp, without the support of parents and family, must have been extremely difficult and the marriages formed were not necessarily the kind that the DPs might have dreamt of for themselves. Traditional Ukrainian marriages were to people well known to the family and were often pre-arranged. Few of the survivors interviewed who were married in camps spoke of love unions. These young people, having lived through and continuing to endure further physical and mental trauma, had to make quick decisions and some security, in the

## Silent Memories – Traumatic Lives

form of a partner, was better than life as a single refugee in a strange land. Hass notes that such commitments between Holocaust survivors were often a result of an unusual amount of mutual dependence and protectiveness.<sup>124</sup> This could be also attributed to marriages between Holodomor survivors.



With marriages came children, but infant mortality was very high in the camps, with many babies born to undernourished mothers dying. Infants also died as a result of inadequate facilities to cope with what are now considered simple newborn conditions, such as jaundice. Often babies who were stillborn or died soon after birth were taken from their mothers and disposed of without any formalities.

It was against such a background that some people spoke of their spouse as being a good provider or a good parent.<sup>125</sup> The personal relationship was almost inconsequential, as they tried to establish themselves and provide for their families in the camps and then Australia. They made the best of what they had. The most important reason for marriage seems to have been security, something the Holodomor had taken from people.

For some, life in the camps was somewhat of an improvement on their previous experiences. Tonia spoke of being assigned to work in the kitchen of

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*Clockwise from top left:* Trembita Men's Choir, Salzburg, 1945–1949. Fedor Melnyczuk playing the Trembita — a didgeridoo type instrument.

Ukrainian Youth Organization 'Plast': DP Camp, Dinkelsbuhl, 1946.

Young Ukrainian DPs in Germany, 1946. Anna Zagwocki (née Handza) second from right.



## Silent Memories – Traumatic Lives

the camp that she joined. She said that compared to what she had eaten as a labourer ‘the food was heaven. The rice was boiled and in buckets’. She also met and married her husband in the camp. He had been a prisoner of war and came to the camp after liberation. The couple’s first child was born in the camp.<sup>126</sup>

Some Ukrainian DPs simply picked themselves up and began rebuilding



their lives, accepting any opportunities that were offered. One such, Evhan, set out to organise camp schools and cultural events. Within the camps there were teachers, artists and people with plenty of time and enthusiasm. This man continued his education in the various subjects that were offered. He tried to remember this time as a more positive experience during a very tenuous period of his life. He did not have much to say and it seemed that although his memory of life in the DP camp was clear, he did not wish to dwell on the negative aspects of it.<sup>127</sup>

### MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF VICTIMS OF TRAUMA

Under the UN Geneva Convention, a refugee is defined as ‘any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.’<sup>128</sup> The following section considers the findings of several studies into the experiences of refugees in settling into their new countries. The issues highlighted by these studies provide valuable insight and parallels to the experiences of the Ukrainian Holodomor survivors who migrated to Western Australia post-World War II. Although the main focus of my study is on memories

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*Clockwise from top left:* Wolodymyr Zagwocki and friends driving in DP Germany.

Anna Handza and friends, DPs in Germany.

Newlyweds Anna (Holodomor survivor) and Wolodymyr Zagwocki, DPs in Germany.

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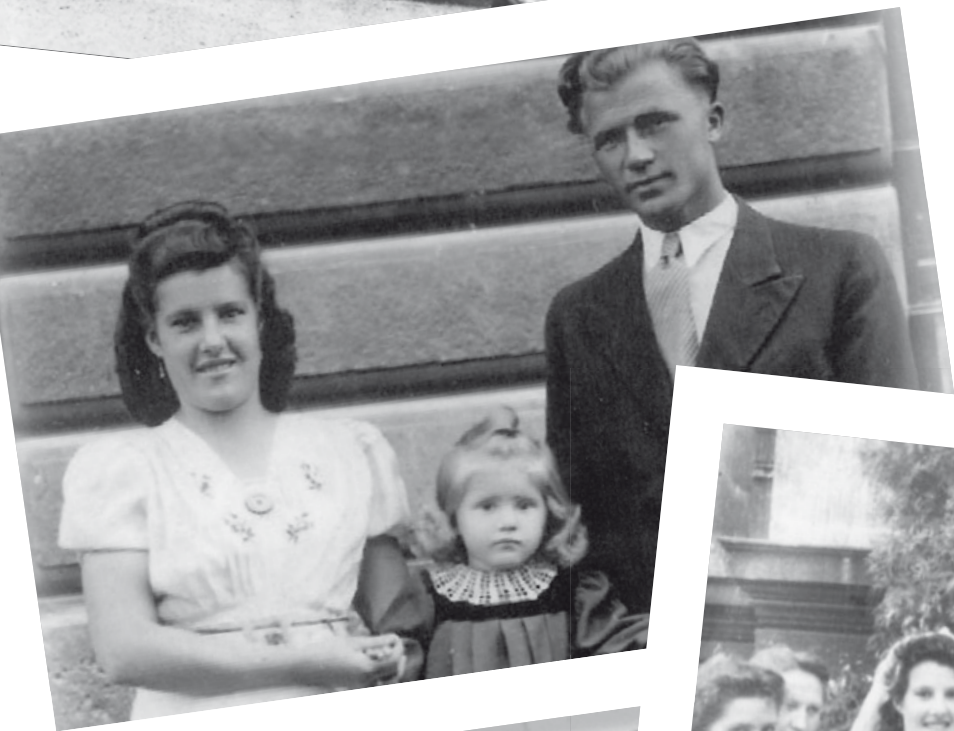
*Next page, clockwise from top left:* Fedor, Stefania and 3 year old Maria Melnyczuk (top, left of statue), with other Displaced Persons in the Hellbrunn Castle DP Camp.

Testimonium Copulationis (Marriage Certificate) of Stefania and Fedor Melnyczuk.

Stefania and Fedor Melnyczuk, Wedding Day, 1946, Hellbrunn DP Camp, Salzburg.

Stefania Melnyczuk in the DP Camp, Hellbrunn (once a palace or manor), Salzburg, Austria.

Stefania, Maria and Fedor Melnyczuk, Helbrunn DP Camp.



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Parochia Salzburg-Liefering

TESTIMONIUM COPULATIONIS

parte officii parochialis rit. graeco cath. in Salzburg Ecclesiae Monasterium notum  
statumque fit, in libris metricalibus copulorum huius Ecclesiae tom. — pag. — reperiri sequentia:

Annus	Sponsus					Sponsa			Testes		
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Anno Domini Millesimo nongentesimo quadra- gesimo sexto, mensis Maii, die 16. copulati sunt 16. V. 1946/	Liefering-Lager		McMyzank Theodorus filius Ste- phani et Mariae Truchan agripola in Repen ad Lansch, Galixia.	graeco-orthodoxa	1928	8. Februarii noctis	Vencank Stephania filia Leme- onis et Euphrosiae Baran, agripola in Lrankiwei ad Tarno- pol, Gali- xia.	graeco-orthodoxa	4. Maii 1924	puella	Gil Enge- nino, Lohandnik Paulus. —

Matrimonio hinc benedicit Marcus  
Gil, decanus et parochus huius. —

Quas testimoniales manu propria subscribo sigillaque Ecclesiae parochialis corrobora

Salzburg-Liefering Die 16. Maii  
Marcus  
par. et. p.

of the Holodomor and events related to it, the interviewees' experiences of adapting to life in Western Australia are relevant in considering the long-term effects of the Holodomor.

Medical examiners Burnett and Peel write of asylum seekers and refugees to the United Kingdom which, as a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, provides sanctuary to people fleeing persecution. Their paper provides useful insight into the plight of refugees repatriated to other countries after escaping repression or surviving trauma. Burnett and Peel indicate that in 2001 there were 21 million refugees in the world, many of whom had faced 'political repression, deprivation of human rights, and harassment. In camps, refugees may have experienced prolonged squalor, malnutrition, lack of personal protection, and deprivation of education; children may have been deprived of the opportunity to play normally'.<sup>129</sup>

Burnett and Peel state that most asylum seekers are highly skilled and previously enjoyed a high standard of living. Many have paid a high price, both financially and physically, enduring arduous and costly journeys to reach places of asylum. Often they are provided with a living allowance and dispersed to areas within the new country that are in outlying regions, where housing is cheaper but where the inhabitants do not have much experience of refugees. If they move to a major city, such as London, to escape racial abuse or to be nearer family or community members and social networks, they lose their financial entitlements and can end up swelling the ranks of the destitute in the city. Many refugees live below the poverty line.

Many refugees have grim experiences in their new countries. Burnett

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*Clockwise from top left:* Wolodymyr Budz with his son Eugene in Bad Aibling, 1948.

Ukrainian DPs in Germany.

Wolodymyr Budz, sitting in the middle, at Bad Aibling, 1948.





and Peel note previous research that discusses the difficulties refugees face in obtaining services such as health care, including problems associated with registering with general practitioners. However, Burnett and Peel also note that health workers in turn had cited many difficulties in dealing with refugees, including ‘the language difficulties, pressure of time, lack of understanding of cultural differences, and lack of expertise. Refugees are perceived as having huge needs that are difficult to fulfill and as being very demanding.’<sup>130</sup> Burnett

and Peel recount that refugees' health problems are often the result of their traumatic experiences, which can include death of loved ones, loss of identity and status, torture, poor housing, discrimination, and racism. Consequently, refugees are reluctant to make any demands of health professionals as they do not necessarily perceive these issues as coming under the umbrella of health.

Much of Burnett and Peel's research resonates with the experiences of Ukrainian migrant refugees, who lived through the Holodomor, forced labour in Germany, pressure to return to Soviet Ukraine after World War II, and prolonged periods in DP camps of Europe. Like the refugee migrants of Burnett and Peel's study, the Ukrainians in DP camps experienced food rationing, malnutrition, and isolation from normal life. Children were born and raised in these abnormal circumstances, without homes, extended families, or stable community life.

While Burnett and Peel's study notes that many refugees had previously experienced a high standard of living, this was not the case for Ukrainian refugees, who were generally poorly educated and unskilled. However, like those in Burnett and Peel's study, the Ukrainian migrants were dispersed to outlying country towns, where the inhabitants were suspicious of this influx of foreign migrants. In Western Australia, some Ukrainian migrants were sent to Northam, to live in the Holden Camp at the disused army barracks. Unlike later refugee migrants to Australia, the Ukrainians could not choose to move to more urban areas as they were required to work off their passage over a period of two years before they were permitted to move elsewhere. However, unlike the refugees in Burnett and Peel's study, as they were the first wave of Ukrainian migrants to Australia, moving to larger centres did not offer them the support of community or social groups.

For the Ukrainian migrants, isolated in country areas, serious health problems meant transportation to Perth for treatment. Many were reluctant to seek medical assistance, or draw attention to themselves in any way, so they simply 'got on with the job at hand' regardless of illness. They were reluctant

to place themselves at the mercy of the authorities, particularly to journey to a distant, unfamiliar location to seek treatment.<sup>131</sup>

There is not a great deal of information on early settlement experiences of refugees from Bosnia, Iraq, or Afghanistan in Australia or elsewhere. This prompted Peter Waxman to explore 'the impact that pre-migration and post-arrival experiences have on the initial economic adjustment in Sydney, Australia of recently arrived refugees.' In fact, Waxman notes that although there were over a half a million humanitarian refugees settled in Australia during the postwar period, accounting for about ten percent of the national population growth, there is a scarcity of information on their early settlement. The post-arrival experience of refugees in those countries who provided entry status and the impact on the settlement experience was, according to Waxman, scarce.<sup>132</sup>

Waxman notes that there is more available literature related to the adjustment and settlement of the Indochinese, especially the Vietnamese, in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. He suggests that in the case of Australia this may have something to do with the significant impact the early resettlement had on Australia. Male refugees arriving from 1992/93 to 1996/97 had a probability of unemployment 20 points higher than the next unemployed group. By focusing on three refugee groups that were seen as racially different to mainstream Australia, being from Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and about whom information is lacking would assist in contributing to information on the early settlement experience of such groups of people.<sup>133</sup>

The themes that emerge from Waxman's study replicate those already mentioned in the Burnett and Peel study of refugee experiences in the United Kingdom. Waxman's survey of recently arrived refugees in Australia found that the impact of public opinion, policies, and established ethnic communities affected the new refugees. The main issues faced by those in Waxman's study relate to: age; gender; ethnicity; level of English proficiency; loss of extended

family; extent of past torture and trauma endured; location of housing and access to support networks and social infrastructure including child care and education; level of schooling and foreign education, education or retraining undertaken in Australia; type of assistance provided; similarity of economic and labor system in home country to that in Australia; health issues; number of wage earners and dependent children in household; expectations; the state of the economy on arrival; length of residence in Australia; and racial discrimination.

English language difficulties gave the refugees the greatest problem in assimilating in all facets of the Australia, both socially and economically. Waxman made a series of recommendations based on the outcomes of the study and advised policy changes that would see an extension of English language tutoring past the level of functional language proficiency and increased funding for bridging courses for gaining recognition of overseas qualifications. He also states that there should be more flexibility in recognising overseas qualifications, skills, and experiences. One of his final recommendations was for the federal government to provide low-cost loans over an extended term to allow sponsors to finance the arrival of families.

Many of the issues Waxman addresses are relevant to the experiences of the Ukrainian migrant survivors, but as Waxman notes, the language barrier was the biggest hurdle for Ukrainian refugee migrants to overcome. The migrants attended English language classes, but it was many years before they developed fluency. Panich states that from a four week program, migrants were expected to learn enough English to develop proficiency and become completely independent and employable.<sup>134</sup> With such a basic level of English, both their self-confidence and confidence in their work performance were low. The predominant preference at the time for employing Australian workers made it even more difficult for the migrants to access employment. Prejudice and discrimination was faced by all post-war migrant refugees.

Authors Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, and Lacherez explore the impact of

pre-migration trauma, post-migration living difficulties, and social support on the mental health of 63 resettled Sudanese refugees who were accepted as humanitarian entrants to Australia during 2001. According to the authors, Australia has accepted approximately 130,000 refugees from African nations. They note that the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs found that African refugees experienced far greater stress and social difficulty than any other migrant group. Their emotional distress, anxiety and depression levels were greater and more suffered from grief related disorders. For this group, simply reflecting upon their existence in the world at this time of their lives was difficult.<sup>135</sup>

Schweitzer, Melville, Steel and Lacherez outline the relationship between trauma, coping strategies, and outcome. All of the predictors or themes mentioned in the previous studies discussed here were listed by these authors. They state that trauma disrupts five broad systems in victims' lives: personal safety, interpersonal attachments, sense of justice, identity or role, and as mentioned previously, existential-meaning. For African migrants, the differences in Australian culture seem to challenge their sense of identity and belonging. The Sudanese were considered an extreme group in terms of the trauma and hardships they had suffered and the impact this had on their mental wellbeing, which was the focus of the Schweitzer et al study. The authors report that, for these refugees, 'being separated from their families, experiencing violence, witnessing murder of families or friends and being deprived of basic needs' had 'a detrimental effect on mental wellbeing. Loss of significant loved ones in the migration process and social isolation in exile were also common'. Such experiences further manifest as 'increased vulnerability that combined with psychological stress result[s] in poor adjustment' to their new home.<sup>136</sup>

The situation was replicated with the post-war Ukrainian migrant refugees.

A study by Farida Tilbury from Murdoch University in Western Australia also has a focus on the mental wellbeing of migrants, examining whether there is a causative link between migration and depression. She quotes a number of

research studies which reveal similar outcomes to that of the above study. A unique outcome of her research into depression as a manifestation of mental distress related to the refugee experience, is the revelation that the western term depression is not a term found in African languages, including Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, and Sudanese Arabic dialects., One of her respondents, an Ethiopian with a psychology degree from Western Australia, noted that such terminology meant little to rural and less educated Ethiopians.<sup>137</sup>

Participants in Tilbury's study also indicated that it was culturally inappropriate to discuss emotions in many African societies. A Sudanese man explained: 'We are not like Australian people who are able to speak openly about their problems ... We always try to hide our problems ... Displaying distress or talking about it may be seen as complaining'. A man from the north of the Sudan spoke of community members 'feeling shameful' if others knew of their problems. Participants revealed feelings of isolation and simply not belonging and felt that Australian culture was a hundred percent the opposite from theirs.<sup>138</sup>

The loss of traditions, women learning ideas that their menfolk might consider culturally inappropriate and expectations from western health, education, and social workers and conversely, the reluctance on the part of men to adapt to a different culture and way of life were all factors in the difficulties these African refugees faced in settling into life in Western Australia.

Many of the same issues can be discovered in the discussion about the Ukrainian refugees in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The fear and silence originally generated by Stalin's regime was used as a tool for coping amidst all of the issues impacting on the new life. Interviewees revealed feelings of isolation and simply not belonging through their different appearance and accent and felt that Australian culture, food and religious practices was different to theirs.

A particularly interesting case study conducted prior to 2006 by Loretta Baldassar of the University of Western Australia highlights transnational caregiving as an important phenomenon of the migration process. Baldassar

drew her ideas from a previous study she undertook, with Baldock and Wilding, of 200 life-history interviews and observational studies of migrants and refugees in Perth and their parents and family in Italy, The Netherlands, Ireland, Singapore, New Zealand, and Iran.<sup>139</sup>

In Baldassar's study, the caregiving practices of recent Italian professional migrants and Afghan refugees were compared. Care for those left behind did not end with migration. She identifies five types of care: moral and emotional support, financial assistance, practical support, personal care, and provision of accommodation. The last two requiring the migrants' presence through visits to their country of origin. Baldassar considers the most important of these forms of care to be the exchange of moral and emotional support. Family expectations that the migrants, as 'good' children, would look after their aging parents, could lead to migrants developing a sense of guilt. This issue appeared to be more troubling for Afghan refugee families, because of the lack of care provisions in Afghanistan and the difficulty for them, as new migrants, to provide much help. The survivor guilt at 'leaving loved ones behind' was palpable among refugees in Baldassar's study.<sup>140</sup>

In discussing their lives in Western Australia, the migrant survivors of the Holodomor interviewed for this study also spoke about their experiences of transnational caregiving. In many cases the migrants could not afford to do much for family members still in Ukraine, but those in Ukraine believed that migration to Australia meant wealth and that the very fact that someone could travel so far back to Ukraine must imply that the visiting family members were very rich. As such, the secondhand or inexpensive clothing that was the usual parcel of goods sent back home was often deemed to be not enough.

One survivor, Hanka, stated that she had stopped providing anything for her Ukrainian relatives, such was her disappointment with the attitudes she had faced in her village. It became clear that what she could afford was not good enough.<sup>141</sup>

Katerina's reflections on her return to Ukraine where she was met with

suspicion by her family as well as the authorities. Initially, she spoke of the difficulty obtaining papers to travel to Ukraine. It was 1975, Ukraine had not yet gained Independence, and there were strict controls on both entry and exit from the country. Once there, she was required to report to her home village where police questioned her regarding why and how she had originally left Ukraine. 'I told them that they knew well that I had been taken away as a child and transported by train, to Germany', Katerina said.<sup>142</sup> She spoke of being treated with some hostility by those in the village and even by family members, as she was assumed to have become a wealthy westerner.

However another survivor, Stefka, tracked her family in Ukraine down after migrating to England after the war, before she eventually came to Western Australia. After locating her mother in Ukraine, Stefka supported her until her mother's death. Stefka was not aware of any social security arrangements for the elderly in Ukraine during that period of time, they relied upon family for their care and livelihood and as such were particularly at risk during the Holodomor itself and the ensuing years of hardship and trauma.<sup>143</sup>

The experiences of Ukrainian migrants who remember the years of the Holodomor in Ukraine, followed by the German occupation, and then became displaced persons from the labour camps of Germany after World War II, have similar outcomes relating to migration settlement in the receiving country of Western Australia as the refugees discussed in the studies above.

## THE UKRAINIAN MIGRANT EXPERIENCE

The Ukrainian migrant experience postwar was very much interrelated to forced repatriation and migration of refugees. Fortunately, when the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) came into effect in 1948, policy regarding the DP refugees shifted from forced repatriation to resettlement.<sup>144</sup>

Through the IRO, the earliest migration of DPs was to countries adjacent to Austria and Germany, whose industries had been devastated but, after



war casualties, lacked the labour force to cope with the work of rebuilding. France offered legal protection and Belgium recruited DPs for compulsory work in their coal mines. This latter drive was abandoned after 1947 and those Ukrainians were assisted to migrate to Canada.<sup>145</sup> The largest migration was to Britain, providing 'European Workers' for three years of manual labour designated by the Ministry of Labour and National Service after which the restriction would be lifted. Other migrations were minor but one major effort was to Australia and the Americas from 1947.<sup>146</sup> A significant number were resettled in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela. The majority of Ukrainian refugees migrated to English speaking countries of North America and Australasia. The United Kingdom admitted 76,987 refugee migrants from DP camps. With the assistance of the IRO, more than 45,000 Ukrainian DPs migrated to the United States, 25,772 to Canada between 1947 and 1951, the number was a little lower for Australia, and approximately 250 migrated to New Zealand.<sup>147</sup>

The DPs migrated to whichever country would take them. Sonia Mycak classifies them as political refugees who had been the victims of Soviet occupation, Soviet persecution, Nazism, prisoners of war, homeless civilians, enforced labourers, and political dissidents.<sup>148</sup> Fear of separation was paramount for newly formed families escaping the ravages of the war years, and Australia was often chosen because the entire family was able to migrate together, which was not the case with other countries taking DP migrants. Canada, for example, took the male first followed by the wife and children twelve months later.

Luciuk examined the events leading up to the migration of the DPs to Canada and the discussion began with initially the British and Canadian Governments finally realising that the DP refugees were not so much a problem in the camps of Europe but more of an opportunity of resettling suitable people who would contribute to a host country willing to accept them. He spoke about those who were too ill, too old and those who stayed on to care for them who became the forgotten refugees.<sup>149</sup> They were the ones who remained in the camps or

somehow found a place in Germany and Austria.

Isajiw and Palij noted that camp life as DPs had left its mark on the Ukrainians, which in turn influenced life for Ukrainians already in settled communities in the United States, Canada, and Brazil.<sup>150</sup> The DPs did not adjust easily into the Ukrainian Canadian way of life. Disillusionment and feuding amongst the two groups impacted on the resettlement of this refugee community. Issues such as the political developments within the DP camps spilled over into the resettlement in Canadian Ukrainian Society.

The Ukrainian DPs had been allowed into Canada to fill semi-skilled positions that Canadians would not fill. It was also felt that they would be a counter to the Ukrainian Canadian Left. Although Luciuk has not specifically outlined how life was like for the DPs and the postwar refugees in terms of living conditions and challenges in Canada, his publication has provided this history with valuable insight into the DP experience within postwar Europe. The situation was far more complicated for Ukrainian DPs migrating to a country with an already settled Ukrainian society than what was encountered in Western Australia. The population numbers were also a distinct difference in both the existing group and those who migrated there.

The Ukrainians in the DP camps were from different regional, religious, cultural and political backgrounds and did not always get along well with each other and yet they were part of the biggest political emigration in Ukrainian history.<sup>151</sup>

## THE 'NEW AUSTRALIANS'

The eastern seaboard of Australia has seen a few dedicated Australian academics such as Michael Lawriwsky and Marko Pavlyshyn, together with visiting overseas scholars, working to raise the profile of Ukrainian migration to Australia over past years. In Western Australia it is Nonja Peters, Director of the Migration, Ethnicity, Refugees and Citizenship Research Unit at Curtin

## Life after the Holodomor Years

University of Technology, who published what can be viewed as a watershed account of migration to Australia and in particular Western Australian. Her comprehensive publication of many years of research covered the ethnic diversity and population growth as a result of Australia's postwar migration policy and the associated outcomes.

Postwar Ukrainian DPs who migrated to Australia faced rival recruiting teams from countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Argentina in the different camps.

Arthur Calwell became Minister for Immigration in Ben Chifley's post-war Labor government and was the chief architect of Australia's postwar immigration scheme. Calwell promoted the scheme as the government suggested that Australia's security would be enhanced by increasing its population:

*We must populate or we will perish. We must fill this country or we will lose it. We need to protect ourselves against the yellow peril from the north. Our current population of 7,391,000 (about one person per square mile) leaves a land as vast as Australia under-protected.*<sup>152</sup>

The scheme and its slogan, 'Populate or Perish', developed as a result of the two world wars and the threatened Japanese invasion. Australia took approximately 182,159 DPs in total, and these refugees were traditionally seen, by the Australian government of the day, simply as a means of developing the labour force, and increasing the population.

During the same period, 1946–1951, Australia also assisted the passage of 140,000 British migrants. Webster cites that British newsreels were constantly running the message that Australia wanted British men and women with courage and enterprise. It was such a concerted effort that a publicised celebration of the millionth postwar migrant to Australia in 1955 was a British migrant.<sup>153</sup>

The newly arrived DPs, who conformed to the White Australia Policy of the Australian government of the day, were known as 'New Australians.' As Webster noted, while the title assigned to them gave the impression of belonging, it was

actually a euphemism for non-British migrants and ‘signified a hierarchy of belonging’.<sup>154</sup> The Minister for Immigration, Calwell, hoped that there would be ‘ten British migrants for every migrant of other origin’.<sup>155</sup>

Upon arrival in Australia, the female DPs were handed documentation that registered their occupation as ‘domestic’, while the men were registered as ‘laborer’. Children were initially excluded, but by 1949 families were being accepted. The migrants arrived with the understanding that parents and children might be separated until homes could be found for them. The only obligation Australia had was to accept the ‘new Australians’ into the workforce, according to Isajiw no particular political or cultural obligation was ever intended.<sup>156</sup>

While Australia accepted families, the DP refugees that were admitted to Britain were all single, able-bodied, and in good health. The British authorities did not want children, nor did they desire mothers. These migrants were all called ‘European Volunteer Workers’. Those accepted were mostly women from the Baltic States, who took up domestic work in Britain. Interestingly, Australia’s preferred candidates for migration were also people from the Baltic States, and this led to all New Australian migrants being referred to as ‘Balts’, a term that was not appreciated by those not from that region.

Peters noted that Australia was in a particularly advantageous situation in terms of bargaining for the refugees. Australia placed a precondition of two years of labour. For the sum of ten pounds per migrant Australia selected the refugees according to requirements based on race, a certain standard of health, a certain standard of physical development, and a stipulation that the refugee would be placed in jobs selected by the Commonwealth for a period of two years. This was in accordance with an agreement with an International Refugee Organisation open-ended indenture.

This two year work contract was not used against any other migrant group. The Ukrainians, and other DP migrants, were to undertake jobs that took them to small country towns, with neither conveniences to assist in adapting

## Life after the Holodomor Years

to the new life, nor an understanding of the life they had been forced to live in Europe.<sup>157</sup> The New Australians could be sent anywhere, irrespective of their education, background, or experience. Work was usually on the roads, railways, airports, and the building of homes.<sup>158</sup> The DP stamp often turned into a slur. European DP immigrants were often treated badly in their new home, while they struggled to cope with strange conditions, food rations, and life in tents in outback camps. According to Mycak, the culture shock was acute, which heightened existing levels of anxiety and depression among the refugees.<sup>159</sup>

Migration to Australia began in 1947, peaked in 1949, and then dropped by 1951.<sup>160</sup> Between 1947 and 1953, Australia received over 170,000 migrants from DP camps under the International Refugee Organisation resettlement agreement.<sup>161</sup> When Ukrainians began arriving in Australia in the late 1940s, mostly from DP camps in Europe, they faced a society that viewed them, according to Lachowicz, with both 'parochial suspicion and patronising egalitarianism'.<sup>162</sup> They did not speak English, came from places unknown to most Australians, and it was not understood by Australians why they had come to Australia.<sup>163</sup> Peters includes details of a report to the government by the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council that notes that a publicity campaign should be launched to 'condition' the Australian public about the benefits of the new migrants to the country. Australians were to make them welcome, so the migrants were not 'driven in upon themselves by such epithets as Pommy, Scowegian and Reffo, and then blamed for creating little colonies of their own'.<sup>164</sup>

Peters provides accounts of the different migrant groups in terms of the country of origin, which includes the numbers of Ukrainians under the categories of males and females and also by labour market status.<sup>165</sup> However, she provides few specific details regarding the Ukrainian refugees other than the occasional mention alongside another group, such as Polish migrants. Peters mentioned that the unskilled Ukrainian migrants who had been farm labourers 'found a better quality of life in Australia than was possible in their country of origin'.<sup>166</sup>

Peters outlines the migration events and policies of the era and also covers the difficult aspects of job opportunity, language proficiency, and impediments to working and living in Australian communities. Peters notes that, as an example:

*Many of the advantages associated with pre-existing socio-economic ethnic networks — such as being able to access jobs, housing and schools via kin, the church and ethnic community — were erased by the racism visited upon prewar and postwar Greeks and Italians.<sup>167</sup>*

Any discussion regarding life and difficulties for the new postwar migrants to Australia mirrored the discussion already noted by other researchers regarding their first years in this ‘land of honey’ which were spent:

*in sweatshops, or as factory fodder, as labourers on road or chopping wood. There was little ‘milk’ nor honey for them — just sheer hard work. As for Southern European male children, well the fist ruled the day for them in the schoolyard!<sup>168</sup>*

By 1952, most war refugees had resettled in western democracies. The Western Australian ones were grateful for not having to return home, and were full of animosity toward the Communist system left behind.<sup>169</sup> It was said that the best thing about migration was the exposure to foreign culture and the opportunity to look critically at the Soviet way of life, which, compared to life in their new countries, appeared dismal and unsafe.<sup>170</sup>

The Western Australian migrant survivors’ feelings were strongly in favour of their new home, even though, as Isajiw noted, there were no ‘political obligations or cultural obligations’ to such ethnic groups, making up 0.2 percent of Australia’s population at that time.<sup>171</sup> Australian Senator McManus, the Federal Organising Secretary of the Australian Democratic Labor Party in 1966, describes the Ukrainians as having a strong national feeling and standing firm ‘for freedom and independence.’ He remarked that Ukrainians were active in causes that sought to defend freedom, which he said ‘could well be an example to our own

Australians ... because they have seen both Fascism and Communism in action and despise both.<sup>172</sup>

## MEMORIES OF LIFE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Those who arrived in Western Australia as migrants, after years of deprivation following the Holodomor and World War II, arrived without any chattels and needed to begin life from scratch. Most couples arrived with one child. A survivor, Djenia, spoke of coming to Australia:

*I arrived with two suitcases and a one year old child in my arms. That's how we lived. It was hard.*<sup>173</sup>

The first home the migrants experienced in Western Australia was another camp. The DP migrants were transported to temporary accommodation that was usually 'disused or underutilised ex-army camps or Royal Australian Air Force bases.'<sup>174</sup> Northam and Cunderdin were expressly for the Europeans. These camp sites were many kilometers out of Perth and transport was a three-hour steam train ride followed by a bus or truck trip to the accommodation site.

After enduring an arduous sea journey where families were segregated, the migrants faced further segregation at the camps, with men often housed in separate dormitories from the women and children. Mycak states that the migrants slept, ate, and conceived families in very primitive conditions.<sup>175</sup> The camp accommodation was usually dormitory style, with army blankets separating couples or families. This was the case at Northam. Some accommodation was canvas tents with dirt floors. Volodya, one of the survivors interviewed, spoke of this style of tent-living in different migrant camps lasting for between five and seven years for many migrants.<sup>176</sup> In her interview, Valya spoke of life in the camp:

In the camp there was only a six-foot tent, and there was everything — ants, and flies, and possums, and infection.

*I remember it, it was a bit unpleasant from the start, but I started talking to other women, we shared our grief, talked about what, how and where to*

*go for things we needed, and started getting used to everything.*<sup>177</sup>

Of life in the camp, Ella remarked that while the food at the Northam camp was not particularly palatable, at least they were fed!<sup>178</sup>

Peters' first-hand account describes how living in barracks or tents afforded the migrants little privacy. Natural light was only able to come in via the gap between the eaves and the iron walls. They faced added distress caused by bed bugs and reptiles, with cases of children dying from snakebite. The winter conditions brought many other challenges, including flooding, mud, wet clothing, dirty children, and limited ablution facilities.<sup>179</sup>

The most distressing situation facing the migrants in these camps was, according to Peters, being organised 'along the lines of a German Wehrmacht operation, with lines, block leaders, reveille, inspection, lights out and bed checks', that would have sent many straight back to Europe, but for the difficulty of getting back to Europe with no money and nowhere else to go with an even more uncertain future.<sup>180</sup>

Camp life for families did not encourage stability for their first years in the new country, with men being transported to different towns to fulfill their two year work contract. These men would leave on Monday and return on Friday. Their isolation in the camps meant that many women did not learn English until their children went to school. When the men returned on weekends, there were no normal relations with the family as they were relegated to their respective dorms.

A survivor, Nina, spoke of her family's early years in Australia:

*My husband was in the bush the whole time, because he worked with wheat when we first came to Australia. Well, he worked on the wheat farms ... he was away the whole week. He only came home on the weekend. I lived in Currambine in a tent. Later, we bought a house in Northam. We couldn't buy it by ourselves, so we bought it with others — with some Yugoslavians.*<sup>181</sup>



## Life after the Holodomor Years

The location of employment for a migrant family's main bread winner was organised according to the workplace contract categories that they were signed up for. This impacted on their labour market options and the payment they received. The DPs were in a different category to those who had migrated under British and European agreements, and were deemed to only be suitable to be 'placed in service to the rest of the community'. Their migration had been endorsed by the unions only with the proviso that they could not be used as strike breakers or take any position which Australian labour could fill. These same unions did not interfere, however, when the migrants worked for up to seven months without a day off.<sup>182</sup>

A survivor, Valya, spoke of women taking up domestic work, as she did in a hospital, while others worked in hostels and schools.<sup>183</sup> Peters notes that the parents of young girls who were sent to fill domestic positions were quite opposed to their daughters being employed at such a young age, which for many went against their cultural background. Life brought many such difficulties that resulted from cultural differences. The language difficulty, resulting in people not understanding what employers were telling them, was followed by a common practice of migrants being shouted at as if they were deaf.<sup>184</sup>

After working the two years required of them, the Ukrainian migrants were able to move to other towns, but many either could not find work elsewhere or could not afford to leave the camp accommodation. As a result, many people stayed in the camps for up to seven years. Those who left often shared a house with another family out of necessity. Migrant families earned such low salaries that they paid up to 50% of their income in rent for only part of a residence. Relationships were stretched in these crowded conditions and families made frequent moves in pursuit of a reasonable property to rent and a harmonious home life. Ignorance of local conditions compounded their plight, as they were often unaware of any entitlements to assistance. When they were able to purchase a property, most families built their home over time with the help of other families and spent the first years in a tent, garage, or the beginning of a back verandah. Peters states that 'Privacy became a utopia'<sup>185</sup> and my own, vivid,

## Silent Memories – Traumatic Lives

childhood memories attest to the truth of this. Migrants' homes were generally humble and many of those interviewed were still living in their original houses. Others had shifted to smaller dwellings after the death of a spouse.

The women who stayed at home in the camps, to raise children, experienced the worst of the strangeness, isolation, and homesickness. Peters indicates



## Life after the Holodomor Years

that for some, these pressures were so severe that they resulted in alcoholism, domestic violence, mental breakdown, or even suicide. She notes the increase in Health Care Ministers complaining of the health care costs of the migrants requiring hospitalisation from 1950 onwards. Migration, wartime trauma, torture and dislocation were increasing the incidence of breakdowns. Many, unable to communicate in English, suffered in silence.<sup>186</sup>

Peters notes that postwar migrants felt that Australia was a cultural desert 'where you could fire a cannon through the streets of Northam and hit no-one'.<sup>187</sup> Any possible entertainment was also not equally available to both men and women. For example, women were not permitted in bars. Mixing with Australians required the migrants to learn many new customs and behavioural codes, this, coupled with learning a very difficult new language made assimilation difficult. The children of migrants chances of gaining entry into professional career paths were lessened with difficulties in written and spoken English. A Polish mother was quoted in Peters' publication as saying that teachers were unwilling to help 'New Australians'.<sup>188</sup> The Ukrainian migrants, unlike other postwar migrants, could not assimilate with an existing similar ethnic group in Western Australia as they were the first of such a large 'wave' of their kind.

There has only been one 'wave' of Ukrainians arriving in Australia in contrast to the multiple waves from other nationalities. This has seen Ukrainians bind together by common factors such as the organisation of cultural life in Australia. James Jupp who was the Director of the Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies at the Australian National University, Canberra, remarked at the 1990 Conference on Ukrainian

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*Clockwise from top left:* Kelmescott Migrant Camp, Western Australia, 1950–1952. From left: Mrs Pilkiw, Mr Budz, Mrs Budz, Mr and Mrs Mazurak, Mr and Mrs Myroniuk, Mrs Wowk, Mr Pilkiw, unknown children.

Ukrainian migrants, the Paszko family, Noggerup Camp, Western Australia.

Paszko family, Noggerup Migrant Camp, 1949.

Settlement in Australia that the Ukrainian community was under threat from ‘the withering of the foundation generation and the severing of links with the homeland culture’. The Ukrainians were however, highly organised communities, generally gathering around Ukrainian language churches. The Catholic and Orthodox churches were said to have integrated well into Australian mainstream structures and were a powerful factor in cultural maintenance.

The Ukrainian communities were not powerful enough to exert any political influence in Australia and only controlled those within the Ukrainian community. Jupp spoke of the importance of the arrival of future Ukrainian immigrants and although there has been trickle over the years the numbers have not been significant.<sup>189</sup> There was a group of ethnically Ukrainian migrants from Yugoslavia, in 1969–1971, that had settled in Geelong in Victoria. They assimilated and adjusted well to the Ukrainian community and functioned as a large group.

A survivor, Nina, stated that the only contact her family had with Europeans once they had moved from the Western Australian migrant camp was with a Russian family and a Ukrainian family. Her children would come home and cry about the name calling they faced at school. The children were set upon because they could not speak English perfectly. Nina spoke of not having an extended family or trusted friends she could call upon to help her with childcare and the difficulty of having to take her young daughter with her to work.<sup>190</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the early setbacks and the sense of isolation, the Ukrainian migrant refugees were pleased they had migrated to Western Australia.<sup>191</sup> Marko spoke of his life in Australia:

*I live here as if I am in paradise, as if I got to paradise. They gave us as much to eat at the canteen as possible and then, I signed a contract with ... [a company] and worked for two years. Then they told me, ‘You’re free.’ We went to Perth. Another family [name withheld] who were from*





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*Above, clockwise from top left:* Migrant Western Australian Government Railway (WAGR) workers, 1949. Wasyl Perzylo third from right wearing a hat.

Wasył, Annella and daughter Erica Perzylo, with their first home in Western Australia (whitewashed dwelling on the right of the photo) and a newly constructed timber building, 1949.

Migrant workers taking a break from tending railway lines in Wagin, 1950.



*the same camp was already there and told us to buy land. There were other neighbours, they also said that we should buy land and so we did. Three Ukrainian families bought at Redcliffe. Together we started building houses. We were so happy. We celebrated. That's life!<sup>192</sup>*

Such enthusiasm was evident from many of the survivors. They arrived, were alive, and were happy.



## CONCLUSION

Although the famine ended in 1933, the Western Australian Holodomor survivors endured more trauma before finally coming to settle in Australia.

The German invasion of Ukraine saw children as young as twelve taken from their families and forced into unpaid, often dangerous labour in Germany. There, many again faced appalling living conditions, persecution, and the near-starvation that went with the food shortages of World War II.

When the war finally came to an end, the Ukrainians were freed from forced labour, but faced a new threat: repatriation to Soviet Ukraine. Many returned, only to face death or imprisonment as punishment for their supposed betrayal of the Soviet Union in not resisting their German captors. The Ukrainians who defied the Allies' ill-informed attempts to repatriate them

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*Clockwise from top left:* Wundowie Migrant Camp. Fedor Melnyczuk far right entertaining on the banjo.

Early migrant years, Wolodymyr Budz working at the Perth Metropolitan Water Supply.

Ukrainian Wedding in Western Australia, c. 1956.

were now homeless and adrift from their families. They found themselves in Displaced Persons camps, and most remained there for several years. In the camps, life continued on, in a fashion. People married and children were born, but the camps were a poor substitute for a home and again the survivors faced malnutrition and disease.

Accepted by Australia, in return for a two-year labour bond, the survivors set out to begin a new life. They were sent to remote areas to work off their two-year obligation to the government. During this time, they again lived in camp accommodation.

Though they faced hardships and some discrimination, with little government assistance, many of the survivors spoke of their relief at being in a place of safety, with sufficient food, where they were able to build a better life for themselves and their children. One survivor, Irka, said that their history makes them grateful for access to such ‘wonderful things in Australia, and we appreciate what we have.’<sup>193</sup>



# DP CAMP 566

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## *Cornberg*

Cornberg was a town built to house forced laborers in Germany during World War Two. One of many the Germans built during the war, it is about 181 kilometres west-south-west from Berlin.

Cornberg was in the Canadian/American zone after the war. In 1945 the American armies threw everyone out of the town and made it into a Displaced Persons (DP) town. The Americans did not know that the people who were originally forced to live there were not German but were those people forcibly brought to Germany to work for the German war effort. It was quite a tragedy. It is unknown to this author what became of approximately three hundred people who were thrown out for the incoming DPs.



From 1945 to 1949, Cornberg and its former convent were a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) DP camp for ex-forced laborers from the Soviet Union (Ukraine) and Poland. It was here where they waited for emigration clearance to overseas migrant placements such as Western Australia.

The UNRRA was an organisation that was founded during the Second World War and was in Europe from 1943 until December 1946. It was then replaced by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO).

The UNRRA was mainly involved in supporting military administrations in the repatriation of Displaced Persons (DPs). They served in the liberated areas of Europe.

UNRRA could be compared to the Red Cross organisation.



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*Previous Page:* The Perzylo family and other DPs, Cornberg, 1949. Erica Perzylo (child) third from the right, being held by her mother Annella (née Markova), with Wasyl Perzylo beside Annella at the rear. The Perzylo family lived in Cornberg for three years. The child in the front middle is Slawka Paszko (now Shilo) with her parents. It was Slawka's third birthday. She remembers being told that she was having a party because there had been no Christening party after she was born. This family was about to leave for migration to Western Australia.

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*Left:* Wasyl Perzylo, the pillion rider, Cornberg, c. 1946.

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*Below, clockwise from top right:* The UNRRA police squad in Cornberg during its time as a Displaced Persons camp. (Courtesy Roman and Judith Hrynenko.)

Annella Perzylo, second from left with friends during winter at Cornberg Camp. All waiting to emigrate.

Ukrainian funeral procession, Cornberg, 1949. Little Slawka Paszko remembered this funeral and having to view the 'sleeping' person.



The Ukrainians who were placed in Cornberg believed that it was only for Ukrainians but in fact it was also for Polish ex-forced labourers. Ukrainians and Poles had been forced from their homes in 1941–42 and sent to forced labour camps. They were classified by the Germans as as *Ostarbeiters* (Eastern workers).



The Ukrainians who lived in Cornberg were assisted by the Americans, who provided everything from donated clothing to food deliveries every few weeks. What foodstuffs the DPs did not want, such as cigarettes or chocolates, they exchanged for foods such as sauerkraut or sausages with neighbouring villagers. There were many marriages in Cornberg as the young people paired off for a new life before emigrating to overseas destinations and the unknown.

In recent years, if DP migrants could prove they had been involved in forced labour, they could receive a German or Austrian pension. It depended where you had been placed to work and if you could provide some proof of that time. Most had kept their Arbeitsbuchs (workbooks). If you had a child during this time, there was further compensation.

The Ukrainian DPs had quite an influence on the township. Local Catholic Christians started building the barracks church in 1945. Ukrainians from the Camp completed it in 1945–46. Unfortunately, during the summer of 1956 the church burnt down to the foundations. The Queen Mary Catholic Church was built from 1956–1957 to replace the DP barracks church. A memorial stone, inscribed in Ukrainian, German and English, was embedded in the walls of this church to commemorate the 350th

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*Below, clockwise from top left:* Young Cornberg families enjoying a warm Easter picnic in a field near their accommodation.

The wedding of Annella and Wasyl Perzylo, Cornberg, 1946. Paternal grandparents of author's daughters. Brides often sewed their own wedding dresses with fabric sourced from clothing donations from the US or anywhere local if possible. The Europeans were always dressed as best as they could be, mostly from the refugee donations brought in mainly from the US. They were a very proud people and kept up high standards even though they were in DP refugee camps.

A group of the residents of Cornberg. Annella and Wasyl Perzylo on either side of Christmas tree .



anniversary between the union of the Ukrainian Church and Rome. There is also a bell, placed in the back of the church, with an inscription that reads: *St. Volodymir Ukrainian Church in Cornberg R.B. 1947. 27. 7.* Today the church is the Hotel-Kloster Cornberg.

*Above from left:* St. Volodymir's bell and its inscription. (Courtesy Roman and Judith Hrynenko.)

The burning of the barracks church, 1956. (Courtesy Roman and Judith Hrynenko.)

## CHAPTER FOUR

# — LONG TERM EFFECTS OF — THE HOLODOMOR

Although the famine ended in 1933, for survivors of the Holodomor, its effects were still felt many years on. Like survivors of any genocide, the long-term psychological effects of the depravities they experienced in their childhood and youth have had a strong impact on the Western Australian migrant survivors throughout their lives. Similarly, as many came to their new country with no possessions or money, their economic position was drastically changed by the events they lived through.

The history of Soviet Ukraine has been a turbulent one. The effects of Stalin's authoritarian regime have left a profound legacy. Soviet writers such as Berger believe that the events of this era have left long-term effects.<sup>1</sup> The collectivisation policy coupled with dekulakisation, the Holodomor, and the Great Terror that followed, have left their mark on a nation suffering what Conquest terms a 'blow dealt to the consciousness of the population.'<sup>2</sup> Graziosi states that 'Who has been the victim or even just the witness of ... such conflict ... has often bore its imprint for the rest of her or his life.'<sup>3</sup>

There has been little research into the effects of the Holodomor on survivors and their descendants. Ivan Bahryany, a witness to the Holodomor, was subjected to spending half his life in concentration camps and prisons 'of the Bolsheviks', during this period. He states the Holodomor and the aftermath resulted in 'a type of human being, prevalent in the USSR, intimidated, suspicious, silent and fatalistic'. This man was a Ukrainian artist and he dared to protest in the form of a fable. Ivan watched as family members were

executed in front of him for being kulaks. 'I'll see that blood as long as I live' were his words. He ended his testimony with the statement that he was fully aware that in permitting his testimony to be published he risked the murder of his entire family.<sup>4</sup> Testimonies such as Ivan's were collated and published as early as 1953. They were candid recollections remembered by people who were children during the period surrounding the Holodomor. They correspond to the stories gathered for this study.

The long term impacts of their experiences on those who survived the Holodomor were reflected in the testimonies of the Western Australian survivors. This material is unique; as yet no studies have focussed upon this aspect of the Holodomor and few studies in Western Australia focus on the long term effects of trauma related to post World War II migrant refugees. This valuable material will enhance understanding of migrant refugees in Australia as well as more specifically of the Ukrainian migrant refugees who lived through the events of the Holodomor of 1932–1933.

The 'misery caused by searches, confiscations, arrests, executions, deportations' and all the tragic ordeals that were confronted by them, will never be forgotten.<sup>5</sup> Sundberg, in his role as President of the International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932–33 Famine in Ukraine, briefly touched upon the effects of the famine and spoke of the sufferings of the Ukrainian people in one paragraph of the report. He notes issues of:

*serious physical and psychological disorders of those who survived malnutrition ... the moral degradation caused by the increasing desperate search for food ... the jealousy, the fights, the informing, the murders or suicides by hanging ... the immense moral distress of the Ukrainian people.*<sup>6</sup>

The following chapter outlines the long term effects of the Holodomor on its survivors that became apparent in the course of this study.



## MEMORY AND SILENCE

### *The code of silence*

As with victims of the Holocaust, Ukrainian survivors were subjected to cruelty and terror and were for many years unable to tell their tale.<sup>7</sup> The code of silence developed as a method of protecting against the disorder of life and violence to which people had been subjected.<sup>8</sup> For Holodomor survivors, their silence about the famine years was linked to feelings of fear and shame as well as a desire to look to the future, leaving behind the events of the past and protecting their families. This internalised code of silence was also enforced by external influences, by the Stalinist era Soviet government's repressive tactics and the fear they engendered and also by the silence maintained by international governments on the famine. The survivors who participated in this study are among the last to break their silence and time is running out for the remaining survivors to speak out.

During the Soviet era, people feared they would face repercussions from the authorities if they spoke out about or even spoke of the events of the Holodomor years; it was safer to remain mute. This fear kept many silent for years after the danger of reprisals had passed. The measures Stalin used in enforcing his ban on speaking of the famine generated a fear that permeated the psyche of the Ukrainian survivors and ensured that it was not openly discussed for decades. The famine was edited from public memory.

Due to their relative isolation and smaller Ukrainian community, the Western Australian migrant refugees maintained this silence longer than survivors living elsewhere, such as those living in Canada and the United States who were part of larger Ukrainian communities and were perhaps able to draw strength and safety from those numbers.

Alongside the fear of speaking out, there was a strong belief amongst the Ukrainian community in Western Australia, not unfounded if the events post-World War II are taken into account, that Stalin would annihilate them

if they returned to Ukraine. For years, this prevented many from returning to their homeland. There was always the fear of jeopardising family still living in Ukraine, even if they had no knowledge of their whereabouts or whether any relatives even remained alive. Surprisingly, given the time elapsed, such fears still exist. This may be due to the distance between Ukraine and Australia. The interviewees had little knowledge or understanding of the research being carried out internationally focused on this event in history and perhaps do not understand how much Ukraine has changed in the intervening years.

Western Australians generally, are not well-informed about the events of the Holodomor. There are no Ukraine studies courses at any University in Western Australia. Any information about developments in Ukraine that survivors might have received via correspondence with someone in Ukraine, may not necessarily be believed, so the fear of repercussions for breaking their silence or daring to return, remained alive in the minds of these survivors.

Additionally, the Soviet cult of informing on one's neighbours and the fear of being informed upon in turn, engendered such a strong distaste for betrayal in some people that it became difficult for them to speak out against any wrongdoing. Mace states that this 'situational morality ... evolved out of the morally bankrupt system of Communism.'<sup>9</sup>

The international lack of reaction to the man-made famine in Ukraine was continued through to recent years by international silence and lack of recognition of the events of the Holodomor. The general public is generally unaware of the Holodomor, for which there are few monuments or commemorations outside of the Ukrainian community.

The Australian public knows little about the lives of the Ukrainian migrants in Western Australia and in the face of such unawareness, the survivors have generally remained silent. Interviewees such as Nina spoke of not having 'permission' to speak to anyone about the Holodomor.<sup>10</sup> In some cases, as with Larissa I was the first person the survivors had told of their memories.<sup>11</sup> Fears ran deep and trust was clearly an issue. It is doubtful whether some of the

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

survivors would have spoken to a non-Ukrainian, particularly if that person had no prior knowledge of the Holodomor. As Maria said:

*One shouldn't talk but keep your mouth shut, because if you tell Australians it will be the end. It's better to keep your mouth shut.*<sup>12</sup>

The same survivor also repeated a typical saying:

*'Tremaj yazek za zubame' ['Keep your comments to yourself', or literally translated, 'keep your tongue behind your teeth']. If you tell Australians, they won't believe it. Keep your comments to yourself.*<sup>13</sup>

This silence, particularly outside of the Ukrainian community, can be linked to the international silence and lack of education about the Holodomor among the Australian general public, but may have other causes. Grabowicz of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute identifies this behaviour as resulting from a 'chronic state of fear' dating from the Stalinist period. She speaks of 'emotional autism' and 'suppressed pain' as being outcomes of life during this era of executions, purges, and incarcerations. With such experiences came a lack of trust and loss of 'an elementary sense of security'. A whole generation of Ukrainians became 'emotionally paralysed and paranoid'.<sup>14</sup>

Jewish Holocaust survivor Primo Levi felt that survivors were at times judged and cruelly repelled by people who did not understand what they had experienced.<sup>15</sup> This may have been an underlying fear preventing the Ukrainian migrant refugees from telling their stories.

The code of silence was not only created and enforced by external influences, when considered on an individual level, survivors' feelings of guilt and shame may also have prevented them from speaking about their experiences during the Holodomor years. Merridale states that many people who survived the 1932–33 famine believed in their own guilt and that many witnesses inside the former Soviet Union also believed, and still believe, in the culpability of those who were starved or imprisoned in camps.<sup>16</sup> Even those who have received their rehabilitation documents may still feel guilty and be considered

as such by others. Many young children suffered and died. Those who survived believed that they had been punished for their families' so-called crimes.

Holocaust survivor Primo Levi spoke at length of not having any sense of proportion between the privilege of surviving and the understanding of 'misdeeds' that could not be revoked and were unproven, with horrific consequences.<sup>17</sup> This feeling of guilt was very much manifest within the hearts and minds of some of the Ukrainian migrants and must contribute to their reluctance to speak of their experiences.

One survivor, Halena, had barely spoken to her husband of her experiences in Ukraine, and her silence seemed to stem from feelings of guilt. Her memories of Ukraine were so bad that she never wanted to return. Her family had been labeled kulaks and it seemed that this left her with a long-lasting feeling of shame and a belief that somehow she and her family were bad people for having owned property, horses, and farm animals.

At the time that people were brought together in Displaced Person camps in the allied zones of Germany, Austria, and Italy, the term 'survivor' was not yet in common usage, Holocaust victims were not recognised as such and it was some time before any understanding of the Jewish Holocaust experience emerged. It has taken even longer for the reality of the experiences of the Holodomor survivors to be acknowledged. The code of silence is both a cause and an effect of this delay in acknowledgement.

### *Destruction of Ukrainian national memory*

As a result of the code of silence, and particularly as due to the repression of the Soviet regime, in its aftermath the Holodomor became not only an assault on the Ukrainian people, but an assault on their memory. The nation's memory was silenced during the years after the Holodomor. Reid states that those who remembered the event did not share their memories with their children or grandchildren for fear of 'compromising their careers, even their lives.'<sup>18</sup> Maniak also states that the old people who remember do not like confiding in strangers and are dying fast.<sup>19</sup>

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

Letters sent from villages to various government departments during the famine years document the degree of human suffering at the time<sup>20</sup>, however Maniak states that the primary research burden that needs to be undertaken today is the collection of stories and memories from the survivors of the Holodomor:

*The memory of the people is an underappreciated source of knowledge. From one remembrance to the next, the history of a generation unfolds. From the history of generations we have the memory of a nation.*<sup>21</sup>

Ihor Kopytko, Chairperson of the Dnipropetrovs'k Association of Researchers of the Manmade Famine and Genocide in Ukraine, remembers the Holodomor and its effect on him:

*The manmade famine left an indelible imprint on my mind, although I was a six year old child at the time. We lived on the outskirts of Dnipropetrovs'k, and every day we saw cartloads of corpses being carried to the mass burial ground near Sevastopol Park. At that time, there was a low lying vale there next to the railway station. By all accounts, the bodies brought there were those of the people who had fled the countryside to the city in search of at least some food. I remember mother say in a shaky voice, looking at the carts full of dead bodies, that these were our bread-winners. But, in fact, people avoided speaking on this subject at the time and later. For example, I do not remember any of my colleagues at Dnipropetrovs'k University's Department of History ever starting a conversation about the famine in all the years of Soviet power although they came from the countryside and must have witnessed those events, judging by their age. I can recall just one instance when an acquaintance of mine was unwary enough to mention aloud the 1933 tragedy. He was soon summoned to the KGB for a heart-to-heart. Later, during Gorbachev's perestroika, I worked in the archives, discovering one vivid picture after another.*<sup>22</sup>

From 1985 onwards, perestroika allowed more freedom to discuss Soviet

history. Alexis Berelowitch, a sociologist specialising in contemporary Russian society and a teacher at Paris IV University notes that once people, especially the intelligentsia, were allowed to speak more freely, they began to reflect on the past and try to make sense of it. There was a sense of shock and shared responsibility about the crimes of the era but this feeling, of what Berelowitch calls ‘national humiliation’, weakened the desire to delve into ‘the darkest years.’ He states that historians are still devoting most of their efforts to publishing official archives rather than ‘remembering for society as a whole ... and reconciling [Russian people] with their own history.’<sup>23</sup>

Grabowicz predicts that the deep wounds in survivors’ psyches would begin to heal and Ukrainian society revive through the return of historical memory and the deeper sharing of collective feelings.<sup>24</sup>

### *Living with a dual reality*

Urvashi Butalia’s study of India’s partition records survivors living with memories of that event stating, ‘we have put all our forgetting into working this land, into making it prosper.’<sup>25</sup> The Holodomor survivors behaved in a similar way: they simply got on with setting up a new life in a new place as best they could, each time they were moved.

For Holodomor survivors the mental act of surviving is complicated. Merridale states that those who ‘rebuilt their lives in the new world, developed ways of coping with a dual reality.’<sup>26</sup> Merridale’s dual reality is similar to what Wanner calls ‘two personalities’. It is a reflection of decades of living the Soviet habit where people ‘secretly knew one thing and publicly another.’<sup>27</sup> Many Ukrainians have lived with a dual reality since surviving the Holodomor, with one reality carefully hidden deep in their consciousness.

Salverson describes the ‘surrealness’ of memories and testimonies, and how survivors have found it disorienting to have such memories, whilst attempting to define themselves and establish relationships with others. She states that

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

these memories displace the terms upon which people function and rob them of a sense of happiness and interaction with the world around them. The act of forgetting in itself became a strategy for survival and the fragments that were remembered were kept private. Merridale states that survivors had 'no framework for remembering.' She also believes that the public silences over the years have been a type of violence in themselves, noting that there were none of the usual structures of civil society that work to build remembrance, such as ex-prisoners associations or charities. To tell the stories of what their studies and memories reveal, researchers and survivors need to 'cut their way through well-rehearsed state-sanctioned fable'.<sup>28</sup>

Salverson states that 'by naming the loss and accepting its burden, it is possible for the subject to re-enter the world'.<sup>29</sup> This description could be applied to the Western Australian migrant refugees, with their memories of the Holodomor and its aftermath. They had moved on, raised families, and established their new lives in a new country, but they were not in any way desensitised to the trauma they had lived through. One survivor, Olena said:

*It seems to me that I am always there. I don't want it but it gets in my head by itself. I think that I will die with it.*<sup>30</sup>

Sofi, an eighty-one year old survivor who was proud of being still very much in control of her faculties, spoke of her dislike of speaking about the past and how she tried to forget and look to the future. She recalled how her confidence was broken during the years of trauma, especially following the war, when she had experienced bombs dropping around her. She remembered flames being everywhere and the fear that she could be blown to pieces at any moment. Although she spoke of always trying to look towards tomorrow, she said she had been having nightmares for a long time.

*When the lightening comes and thunder ... Oh no, the war is in your sleep.*<sup>31</sup>

### *Single ‘technicolour memories’*

Huyssen views memories as ‘more than only the prison house of the past.’<sup>32</sup> Memories are a number of stored scenes. Fige discusses the way trauma victims deal with their recollections, noting that their memory becomes fragmented and ‘organized by a series of disjointed episodes (such as the arrest of a parent or the moment of eviction from their home) rather than by linear chronology’. Fige includes a quote by Alexander Dolgun, a US Consul Clerk, arrested for ‘espionage’ in 1948, whose statement illustrates this aspect of memory:

*There are episodes and faces and words and sensations burned so deeply into my memory that no amount of time will wear them away. There are other times when I was so exhausted because they never let me sleep or starved or beaten or burning with fever or drugged with cold that everything was blurred.*<sup>33</sup>

Fige notes that such memories are found in the Holodomor archives of the Memorial Society. Ukrainian migrant refugees recall particular scenes in considerable detail. Their visualisations and descriptions of certain poignant moments formed the basis of their accounts of what happened to them during the Holodomor and beyond.

Holocaust survivor Primo Levi distinguishes between episodes recalled ‘in technicolour’, which he believes were essential to describe, and others that portray the everyday routine, the ‘grey material’. He speaks of memories ‘in technicolour’ as being single, clamorous, terrifying episodes that ‘prevail and invade the canvas.’<sup>34</sup>

‘Technicolour memories’ were reported by twenty one of the forty-one survivors interviewed in the WA study.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that some others may have been afraid to talk about such powerful memories and withheld them. This was the case with Vera Minusova, discussed in Fige’s publication. Vera Minusova lived in constant fear. When she was seventeen years old, during the Terror, her father was arrested and shot. During her interview she asked



## Long term effects of the Holodomor

the interviewer to turn off the tape recorder at different points during her interview as she became too distressed to continue talking.<sup>36</sup>

In gathering the survivor testimonies, my first encounter with a 'technicolour memory' occurred with the first interview. Hanka shared a detailed description, as described on page 110, of an event that occurred at the collective farm kindergarten she attended as a child during the Holodomor years. The children were given bread and water once a day. Hanka showed the size of the piece of black bread with her hands and spoke of how she carefully broke the bread into pieces, put some crumbs into her soup, and set aside the rest for later, only to have it stolen by a starving child with a runny nose. This boy watched her, pushed his head near her, and then got under her table to steal her crumbs. The story went on at some length; she described her tears and how she dealt with the bread crumbs, mixing them into the soup and licking the soup to prolong the effect. The scene had been stored in its entirety over the years and seemed to be her reference point for the events of the Holodomor.<sup>37</sup>

Other interviews revealed many such stories, where a survivor's focus on a major incident left them with an indelible imprint of a particular time during the Holodomor. Nina's 'technicolour memory' was of walking past a house on her way to school with a friend and hearing a child screaming. They discovered an abandoned baby and a young boy covered in maggots alone in the house. Nina and her friend alerted their teacher and the two children were taken away. Nina spoke of not being able to sleep for a long time, haunted by the sight of the screaming baby and the thought that an infant could die in such a terrible way.<sup>38</sup>

Children who witnessed the arrest of family members faced years of anguish at the mere hint of a similar experience. Halina recounted:

*I will tell you what was difficult for me. What was particularly difficult for me from 1933 was when they came to arrest my father. We had a little porch which went into a small kind of corridor. There was a pantry*

*and then the kitchen. Next to the kitchen was my room. My parents and my sister were in another room. They could probably hear it but when they [the militia] came to arrest my father [a kulak], they bashed on my window because it was on the porch. So, it's only the last twenty years now that I don't shake when somebody knocks on the window.<sup>39</sup>*

A memory that haunted Tonia for many years, involved hearing what she described as ‘the clop, clopping of horses hooves in water, splashing, hearing the murmur of people talking, seeing a blanket over herself and a child screaming and crying.’ Despite the distress this memory caused her, she could not remember what it all meant. Tonia’s mother had also survived the Holodomor, but had not migrated to Australia. When she arrived in Western Australia for a long stay in 1969, Tonia questioned her about this memory. The mother explained that the blanket covered Tonia as they secretly left their village. The child screaming was her younger sister, who was two months old at the time and needed to be fed, but because it was wet and cold, they were not able to stop anywhere to feed her. She was amazed that her daughter had remembered that night.<sup>40</sup>

As Lesia recounted, on page 95, her beloved mother made illegal border crossings for food, always alone so as not to attract attention. On one trip, the train Lesia’s mother was travelling in was derailed and she was seriously hurt. Strangers cared for her for six months. Although weak and still injured, she eventually returned home. Lesia described her achingly painful joy in seeing her mother again, when all she could do was kiss her hands and her feet, a common act of extreme respect in Ukrainian culture. The gratitude and love that she felt had indelibly imprinted that moment in her mind.<sup>41</sup>

Orphaned or abandoned children not only faced starvation but lacked the love and care that would have come from their parents. Suzanna recounted the memory of being found by her father years after he had been released from imprisonment. Her mother had perished. Suzanna had been taken in by another family for a year and then returned to an orphanage. She found out

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that her father was looking for her and he eventually tracked her down and took her back. This was her 'technicolour memory'. To think that you had lost everyone would have been devastating for a child and the joy of reclaiming one parent would have been great. Father and daughter remained together only until she was taken as forced labour to Germany in 1943.<sup>42</sup>

Orysia spoke of finding out her best friend was cannibalised by the child's mother and the child's head being discovered in the house. However, Orysia's technicolour memory is of the moment she was taken from the orphanage to begin what she called 'another life'. She had been orphaned by dekulakisation and dumped in the snow at seven years of age. She was taken around by the authorities, who tried to encourage someone to take her in, before she was finally placed in an orphanage. She remembers praying surreptitiously, as it was not permitted to even make the sign of the cross. She demonstrated during the interview how she did this without it being detected. Orysia was rescued from the orphanage by a teacher who decided to bring her home to be company for his own two children. Unfortunately the cook and housekeeper of this household was a Komsomol, a member of the Communist Youth, and took a dislike to the little 'capitalist orphan', as Orysia referred to herself. The cook withheld food from the little girl and while the situation improved after a time, Orysia was never formally adopted by the family.<sup>43</sup>

Petro's story of being thrown onto the street when the family was dispossessed, seeing his father arrested, watching his grandmother die, followed by the death of his father, all in quick succession was vividly recalled.<sup>44</sup>

At the age of seven, death became commonplace for Olena but she remembers that she seemed to be crying all the time during the years of the Holodomor. She always cried at night. One night her mother pulled her close and asked what was making her cry and she recounted what she had seen. On her way to school she had seen dead children being taken from houses and placed on a cart. She was upset by the deaths but also by the fact that the children had been laid out without coffins or shrouds, as would have been

traditional, and carried by cart to the cemetery. She had walked along behind the cart with others and watched as the children's bodies were tipped into a pit near the collective farm. She said that the bodies were not even placed in the hole. 'They wouldn't use their hands.' Children witnessed such scenes daily but this particular event stood out clearly.<sup>45</sup>

Janina spoke of a young orphan girl, a friend, who had been 'seduced', a euphemism for assault or rape, and bore a child. The orphan's child cried from hunger all the time and the young mother, who could not support them both, went to ask the head of the collective farm for some of the bran that they gave to the pigs so that she could feed her child. The head of the collective said that his pigs were more important than her child. In anguish at the child's constant cries for food, the mother strangled her hungry child. Janina cried whilst sharing this story with the interviewer. She was shocked at the harsh treatment the young mother received and the desperate act she was forced to commit, and said:

*When my children are not well I always think about this memory.*<sup>46</sup>

In their interviews, the survivors shared memories that involved dispossession, caches of seeds, hidden religious icons, siblings left to fend for themselves, illegal border crossings for food, secret food consumption, parents taken for interrogation never to return, unexpected kindnesses in the midst of horror, witnessing death and being close to death themselves, acts of theft, being orphaned, early marriage, cannibalism, and rape.<sup>47</sup> The interviewees said these were memories they would never forget, visions that they remembered and rekindled every day. These recollections are so vivid that they can only be labeled technicolour memories.

Recurrent dreams are said to awaken people because something in the dream has startled or frightened the dreamer. That is why such dreams are remembered. The trace of that dream is strengthened by awakening, making it more likely to recur.<sup>48</sup> As many of those interviewed spoke of reliving their

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

traumatic experiences in dreams, this could explain why these specific or technicolour memories have been retained so clearly. In moments of quiet and solitude these memories come flooding back, in Bohdan's words:

*Yes. It's hard, hard. Hard. We think and suffer. Often at night ... With the collective farm and Siberia, often going around and around in my head.*<sup>49</sup>

## LOSS OF IDENTITY

### *Identity as Ukrainians*

Western Australian Ukrainian migrants have rarely been validated as Ukrainian. Various labels were assigned to them, but never their true Ukrainian identity. They were classified as 'auslander' or 'ostarbeiters' (eastern workers) in Germany and as Russians in the European DP camps after the war. The Ukrainian survivors were still classed as Russian when they migrated to Australia and in Australian census documents for some years.

Papers from DP camps in Europe often labeled Ukrainians as Russian and it was under this nationality that they migrated to Western Australia. As Halina had been an 'ostarbeiter', she was told by a police officer to go to where the Russians were being rounded up. Halina objected profusely and told him she was Ukrainian, but he insisted that she was Russian and she found herself classified in that way for years to come.<sup>50</sup>

According to the Yalta agreement 'everyone who had been within the borders of the USSR on 1 September 1939 was a Soviet citizen' and had to be

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*Next Page, clockwise from left:* Official correspondence regarding Australian citizenship.

Citizenship ceremony in Western Australia, early 1950s.

Erica Klimak (Rosowski), 18 months in the Northam Camp, Northam, Western Australia.

Official correspondence regarding Australian citizenship.

New Australian citizens, Eva and Wolodymyr Budz, 1958.



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

OFFICE OF THE  
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION,  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE,  
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

17th October, 1956.

Dear Sir,

It gives me pleasure to tell you that I have approved of your application to be naturalized as an Australian citizen.

I have granted you a Certificate of Naturalization. This is the legal document which shows that you have been accepted as a full member of the Australian community and as a British subject.

You will be invited as soon as possible to attend a ceremony in your local Town Hall or other civic building. At the ceremony, you will be asked to take the Oath of Allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second and you will be given your Certificate of Naturalization.

From that moment, you will enjoy exactly the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as native-born Australians.

On behalf of the Government and people of Australia I congratulate you on the step you have taken and wish you happiness and prosperity for the future.

Yours sincerely,

(Harold Holt)  
Minister for Immigration.

Mr. Mychajlo KLIMAK,  
12 Charles Street,  
NORTHAM  
Western Australia.



RD:JW

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
STATE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of Immigration,  
862 Hay Street,  
PERTH.

REGISTERED

Date: <sup>19</sup>12th April, 1951.

File: 51/62/2339

Dear Sir,

I have pleasure in advising you that your application for release from period of exemption from the Immigration Act 1901-1949 has been approved.

Please find enclosed Certificate of Authority to remain in Australia No. 12724 issued on your behalf.

Your attention is directed to the instructions printed on the back of the Authority.

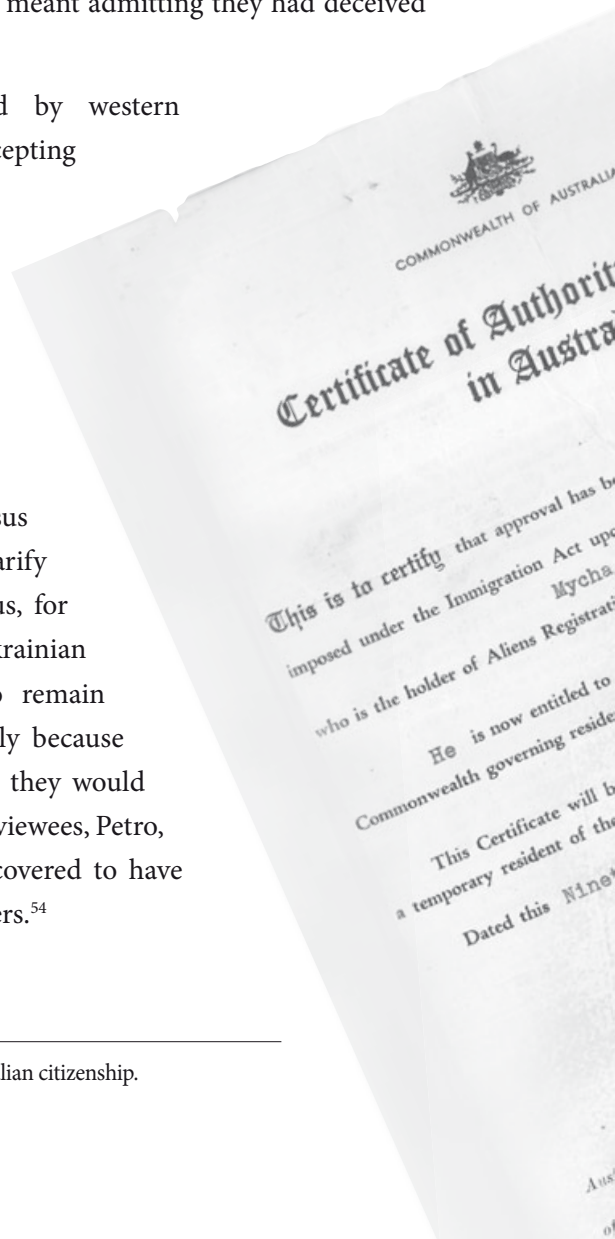
Yours faithfully,

*M.A. Brown*  
M.A. BROWN  
MIGRATION OFFICER

repatriated at the end of World War II.<sup>51</sup> As repatriation could lead to execution or imprisonment, many Ukrainian DPs falsified their papers to avoid being classified as citizens of the USSR. They lied to the authorities and for some this lie caused great anguish for many years to come. They lived with the fear of being discovered, losing their Australian citizenship, and being deported. Their deception enforced their silence about the famine years, for if they admitted to surviving the Holodomor, it meant admitting they had deceived the Soviet authorities.<sup>52</sup>

Luciuk notes the difficulty faced by western governments, including Australia, in accepting DP migrants as Ukrainian as, according to them, there was no nation called Ukraine. Classifying the migrants as Ukrainian would require them to officially recognise the existence of Ukraine and at the time, that would have put them at odds with the Soviet.<sup>53</sup>

It was only in the 2006 Australian census that Ukrainians were encouraged to clarify their personal ethnic and religious status, for example, as Ukrainian Catholics or Ukrainian Orthodox. Some Ukrainians chose to remain under the Russian classification, possibly because it was another bureaucratic change that they would have needed to make, but one of the interviewees, Petro, linked this to his old fear of being discovered to have falsified his migration or citizenship papers.<sup>54</sup>



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*From right:* Official correspondence regarding Australian citizenship.



Municipality



of Northham

Town Clerk's Office,  
Northham.

7th November, 1956.

In Reply To Yours  
In Reply To Mine Please Quote  
It is requested that Letters be  
Addressed to the Town Clerk  
and that each letter deal with  
one subject only.

83/1

WJDR:DH

Mr. M. Klimak,  
12 Charles Street,  
NORTHAM.

Dear Sir,

Naturalisation Ceremony

I have pleasure in advising that I have received your Certificate of Naturalisation as an Australian Citizen, and request that you attend the ceremony which will be held on Friday, 14th December, 1956, at 8 p.m.

Please confirm immediately that you will attend and also advise me whether you wish to receive an English Version of the Bible or a Catholic Testament.

Yours faithfully,

*J. D. Ridgway*  
J. D. Ridgway  
TOWN CLERK

No 12724

to Remain

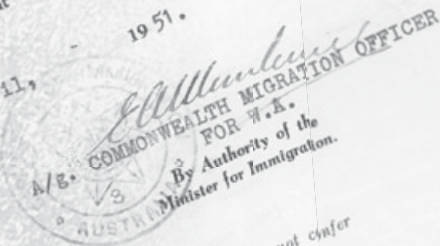
been given for the removal of the limitation  
on the stay in Australia of

M. KLIMAK  
on Certificate No 60052.

remain here indefinitely subject to the laws of the  
Commonwealth.

no sufficient evidence that he is no longer regarded as  
a citizen of the Commonwealth.

fourteenth day of April, 1951.



This document is not a Certificate of Naturalisation and does not confer  
Australian citizenship or British nationality.  
Information relating to the future obligation under the Aliens Act, 1947  
the grantee of this Certificate and details of the procedure for the acquisition  
of Australian citizenship and British nationality appear on the reverse side of  
this document.  
The grantee of this Certificate desire to leave Australia temporarily  
as an Australian citizen, return here would be facilitated by  
submit before leaving.

The survivors' sense of identity as Ukrainians may also have been affected by their inability to reconnect with lost family members and by the repopulation of their villages in Ukraine by strangers. Many of the survivors interviewed, when financially able, returned to their villages or towns to search for family and property. Some were able to find surviving relatives; others found their homes destroyed and only strangers in the communities they had lived in. Others continued to search in DP camps and elsewhere in Europe for some years, in the hope that missing family members might be found alive. The outcome was often disappointment.<sup>55</sup> Of her old village, Olena said:

*A lot of new people came to uninhabited houses from somewhere. Maybe they were Russians. God knows. They came and took over the houses and settled in, in our Ukraine.*<sup>56</sup>

Knowing that their homes or those of their neighbours had been taken by strangers was difficult for the Ukrainian migrants. This may have contributed to their desire not to challenge the status quo either in Australia or Ukraine, concerning the validation of their identity as Ukrainians. Knowing their places were taken or their villages no longer Ukrainian, gave them a feeling of disconnection from their Ukrainian past and identity.

### *Personal identity*

Tonia, a survivor, said:

*Stalin knew what he was doing, look at what is happening now [referring to the political situation in Ukraine]. He mixed them [the people] up like porridge, like soup, exactly like a soup. That is it. Now I don't know who I am.*<sup>57</sup>

The Holodomor survivors kept to the Ukrainian community in Western Australia. Although they developed friendships with other Australians, their close ties were mostly with other Ukrainians. They believed only their own

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

kind, people of the same nationality, would offer them understanding, safety and trust in their new lives as migrants. A survivor, Lesia, spoke in a resigned voice of her life during the Holodomor and ended with: 'What do these Australians know? They know nothing, they don't have a clue'.<sup>58</sup>

In their new country, the survivors were Russian on paper, but socially were classified as wogs, enemy aliens, Balts, or New Australians.<sup>59</sup> This did not engender them with a sense of well-being or trust in their new homeland or its people. Some migrants anglicised their names in order to assimilate better. One survivor, who is referred to in this study by the pseudonym 'Petro', said:

*My real name is in no way connected with [name withheld]. It's a real Ukrainian name, and this is fully an English one.*<sup>60</sup>

Some of the survivors were well aware that it could be necessary to take on a new identity to aid survival. Zoya stated that she knew many people who had had their land confiscated and who had hid near coal mining centers such as Donetsk, in the Donbas region. In these places the conditions were so terrible that no questions were asked if you were willing to work there. Ukrainians were able to find work in places like this under different names, albeit in horrific conditions in underground mines.<sup>61</sup>

Williams notes the continuing burden of loss that the Holocaust survivors felt for their parents, family, friends and themselves. She raises the notion that losing parents in early life means 'a loss of the very nucleus of one's own identity'.<sup>62</sup> In some cases survivors purposefully lost their identity in order to survive.

In recent years, those who lived through the Holodomor have acquired the title of 'survivor'. Porter defines a survivor as 'someone who has survived an immediate and traumatic life-threatening experience'.<sup>63</sup> Survivors' memories have become part of a collection of testimonies forming an historical memory about the Holodomor. However, as Waxman states in *Writing the Holocaust*, by being labeled a survivor, their diverse experiences are somewhat concealed.<sup>64</sup> As with the Holocaust survivors, there is no universal experience for Holodomor

survivors. While common themes emerged from the interviews with survivors, each experience was nonetheless unique.

Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, in his interview with Marco Vigevani regarding his book *If this is a Man*, spoke of his feelings of unease and guilt that so many perished ‘who were at least as worthy as us, if not more so’, of living. He ‘preserved a visual and acoustic memory of [his] experiences’, and his stated position was ‘to remember and to hope’, for a more humane future. He spoke of feeling guilty for not ‘putting up more resistance’, but reconciled this within himself by recognising that he was a witness, rather than a hero or survivor, and finding peace with that.<sup>65</sup> The code of silence surrounding their experiences meant that Holodomor survivors did not see their survival as a victory over Stalin. Perhaps accepting the identity of ‘witness’ would assist them, as it did Levi, in putting aside guilt and shame.

## MISUNDERSTOOD

Williams states that as disease and ill health took on a great significance for Holocaust victims in the camps, becoming a further death sentence. For Holocaust survivors, it became a matter of great concern to develop any illness or need to be hospitalised. Williams discusses the notion that, as old age has brought Holocaust survivors into contact with services from hospitals and aged institutions, there have been specific issues raised for the group, including an acute fear of dying within such institutions. Williams suggests that such organisations should be aware of this past trauma and adjust their care and treatment of survivors accordingly.<sup>66</sup>

Danieli warns that the literature on aging Holocaust survivors shows that memories of the loss of loved ones could resurface along with feelings of abandonment often returning in old age. These emotions need to be understood by health care professionals caring for survivors. For survivors, the memory of being taken from their home and placed in an orphanage, or of being abandoned, may return if they need to be placed in institutionalised

## Long term effects of the Holodomor

care.<sup>67</sup> Such an understanding would also be valuable for family members who are faced with the prospect of placing parents in care facilities.

Danieli describes the delusions that arise with hospitalisation. They relate to experiences of starvation, trauma, camp life, and being under institutional control again. Hirschfield, in Malach, notes the comment of a survivor who accused the nurses and doctors of experimenting on him, when he needed to undergo medical tests.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly to Holocaust survivors, some Ukrainian Holodomor survivors speak of their fear of being hospitalised or placed in nursing homes.<sup>69</sup> Their belief is that once placed within such institutions, they would not reemerge alive. Any form of institution or government control over their lives is unsettling to this group, as the memories it invokes leave them nervous and fearful.

## FAMILY LIFE

Without relatives to provide the relationships found in extended family, friends in the Ukrainian community in Western Australia became pseudo aunts and uncles. Godparents assumed a much larger role and the kum (godfather) and kuma (godmother) became as important in the new land as they were in the homeland left behind. These people were generally of Ukrainian background and this was one way of ensuring continuation of Ukrainian identity, traditions, and culture.

Children of survivors have also been given Ukrainian names, including those of patriotic literary figures, saints, and past heroes of Ukraine. My own name is that of a well-known poet in Ukraine with the pseudonym of Lesya Ukrainka. This practice ensured some continuation of the culture and history of the homeland in the diaspora.

Many of the Holodomor survivors interviewed mentioned not wanting to burden their children, or in some cases even their spouse, with the distressing memories of their early lives. Without these vital pieces of knowledge, what

possibility was there that partners, children, or grandchildren could understand the reasons for certain behaviours, or resolve the conflicts and misunderstandings that arose? Even for those who shared some of their stories with family members, past traumatic experiences still impacted upon family life.

Holodomor survivors considered children to be precious, a gift from God, and a symbol of their hope for a better future. Despite this belief, it was common for survivors to respond badly to their children. From the interviews, it became apparent that survivors' parenting techniques ranged from overly rigid, to overprotective, or ineffectual. Their memories of the past, although in most cases never spoken of, could become a burden for these children. The survivors had high expectations of their children and their own focus was on providing security for their family, rather than meeting emotional needs. Neither time nor money was to be wasted.

Williams states that for Holocaust survivors, past parenting behaviour that involved a nature of sharing, generosity, and lightness of spirit was replaced after the Holocaust by parenting that alerted children to the dangers and evil within the world and the need to guard that which was theirs.<sup>70</sup> This is a trait shared by many Holodomor survivors in Western Australia. They had been born into a life where:

*Families lived together. It was a family based life where they cared for each other. It was devastating to lose any family members. Children had great respect for parents and grandparents.<sup>71</sup>*

However, with their own children they were ever vigilant, even within the Ukrainian community. According to one survivor, Stephania, 'Don't disclose too much of yourself', was a warning often given.<sup>72</sup> Children were sometimes told not to speak of being Ukrainian or to disclose family information to strangers. The Holodomor and the subsequent traumas they endured had altered the survivors' lives and mindsets.

Williams outlined that for Holocaust survivors, a mother's love was

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displayed by her constant intrusion into every aspect of her children's lives.<sup>73</sup> This behaviour was also apparent in the Holodomor survivors. Parents displayed their love by willingness to sacrifice everything, including their lives, for their children but this came at a cost where these children were constantly reminded of this and praise was often withheld.

One survivor, Fania, gave a very detailed overview of her children's lives. She and her husband had provided her two children with homes and Fania spoke of how hard she had worked to ensure that her children did not have to pay rent. However, later in her life, having almost lost influence with her own children, Fania came to focus her attention on her grandchildren. Her anxiety at the thought of her family being unable to live comfortably resurfaced with this next generation.<sup>74</sup>

Another survivor, Hanka, spoke of her family:

*Look, even now, I help a lot. I don't have anything special in my house but if I know that my family wants to eat and needs it ...<sup>75</sup>*

While this is a mindset shared by many parents, for the survivors, involvement in their children's lives went beyond the usual level of support. They had a strong desire to ensure that there was stability for their families and were always willing to offer assistance, often financially. Several survivors spoke of providing their children and grandchildren with a home of their own. The security of home ownership and employment for both themselves and their children was of paramount importance to many survivors. A home owned outright could not be taken away and survivors did not want their children to take out loans or be beholden to any authority. A survivor, Stefka spoke of how she and her husband provided for their children:

*We built [the son] one house, the daughter sold hers and bought another. My husband and I built the houses. I am the kind of person who likes to be generous, not selfish. I might not have much but I will give it. I will give the last thing.<sup>76</sup>*

It was generally accepted behaviour within the Ukrainian ethnic group that parents would assist their children financially when they married. As well as many homes being financed, other gifts were provided to ensure that children had a financially sound start to married life. This sort of financial support continued for many years and became even more important when grandchildren were born. Although such behaviour is common within many migrant groups, for the Ukrainian migrants it reflects a need to emulate what even the poorest peasant could do for their children in Ukraine.

This strong commitment to family is particularly illustrated by the case of one couple interviewed, who had emigrated from Ukraine in their early 70s. Luba and Fedor's only child, a daughter, had emigrated some years before and married an Australian man. Her marriage had subsequently broken down and the elderly couple came to Western Australia in order to provide her with support.

Such a move is extremely difficult, more so at their time of life. Rather than remaining in their comfortable lifestyle in Ukraine, in order to help their family, Luba and Fedor chose to face much that was unfamiliar and complicated, from learning a new language to dealing with the infrastructure of life in another country.<sup>77</sup>

The situation was difficult, but their daughter and granddaughter were their only remaining family and they felt that their place was to be there to support her. In Western Australia, they were quite isolated, even from Ukrainians, as they had no means of transport other than public transport. With limited English, they relied upon their grandchild to read their mail and help with any issues that arose. They cared for their grandchild every day after school until their daughter finished work and collected the child. They did not consider caring for their grandchild to be a sacrifice, rather they were glad to be able to assist their daughter and believed they were increasingly her wellbeing and that of their granddaughter.



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Many survivors seemed to draw strength from their families and from maintaining a family life reminiscent of an idealised version of life in Ukraine before the Holodomor. Traditions were upheld, the language was taught, and families attended church on Sunday. Survivors seemed determined that dislocation and anxiety about the future would not be part of life in Australia. Their children would not suffer as the migrant refugees did, even if this meant concealing their backgrounds to their families.

Figes writes of a mother living in Leningrad after Stalin's Soviet repressions, who had taken on an assumed name. She wished to protect her fourteen year old daughter from any discrimination or trouble as she would soon be required to apply for university. As an illegal resident she was frightened of arrest and exile as a former member of a kulak family. She had a false passport with false stamps and signatures and an expired right of residence in Leningrad. This mother, Antonina, had married and become a member of the Party in order to divert suspicion from herself. She was worried for her daughter:

*I did not want her to find out about my past. I wanted her to feel that she had a normal mother, just like the mother of every other girl at her [elite] school, where all the parents, or at least the fathers, were members of the Party.<sup>78</sup>*

Antonina was to discover many years later that her husband, who had divorced her in 1968, had been nursing a similar secret. He was the son of a rear-admiral in the Imperial Navy who had been dedicated to the Tsar. He had endured Soviet labour camps and had made up a new identity to protect himself.

My mother was an eighty year old woman before she was finally able to satisfy herself as to the fate of her second child, born at a DP hospital in Salzburg. An Austrian genealogical researcher helped to unravel the mystery, revealing that the baby girl had died of jaundice in the DP hospital within the camp. This finally gave my mother peace of mind, as she had believed that

her husband had given their baby away or perhaps disposed of her, to avoid the difficulty of raising a second child in a DP camp. My mother had lived for many years with this mistrust and fear of the man she married at a very young age. She did not know my father's family or background when they married and she was unsure of his character in such difficult times. Unfortunately, he had passed away by the time she learned the truth.

Stories such as these form the history of the people who lived through such times. It explains their unwillingness to disclose the memories even to their own families and their desire that their families experience a better, more secure life away from the terrors and memories of their past.

Williams states that when Holocaust survivors entered their old age, they had 'no models for aging', as most had not seen their own parents reach old age.<sup>79</sup> Their understanding of the role of a parent and later a grandparent within the family structure was affected by this lack of modeling, and those who had been overly intrusive or controlling in their children's lives might continue

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*Right, clockwise from top:* Opening of the Ukrainian Community Hall, Northam, 1958.

The Honourable Albert Hawke, Premier of Western Australia, and Mr Jaroslaw Myktiuk (right), opening of the Ukrainian Community Hall, Northam, 1958.

Blessing of the new Ukrainian Community Hall by Metropolitan Maksym Hermaniuk, 1958.

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*Next spread, clockwise from top left:* Ukrainian Catholic Church welcomes senior clergy and Cardinals to Perth.

First Holy Communion, Perth, c. 1957. Author far right front, aged 3.

Perth Kashtany Trio — Bohdan Warchomij, Wolodymyr Sluzarczuk and Mirko Gutej.

Cory and Sharon Johnson, Ukrainian dancers, 1970s.

CYM Youth Orchestra, 1970s.

Ukrainian priest Father Mowtschan and parishioners of the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church.



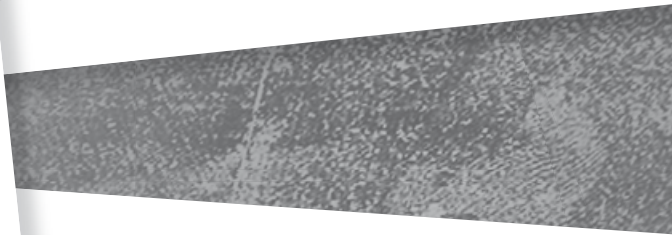
## Long term effects of the Holodomor

to behave in this manner toward any grandchildren. So, as the survivors had struggled to care for their children, Cohen suggests that their children find it similarly difficult to care for their parents.<sup>80</sup> From the comments of Holodomor survivors, it is clear that this difficulty is shared by their adult children.

However, I agree with Cohen's assertion that it is equally possible that where children of trauma survivors are aware of their parents' history, they come to feel such empathy and regret for their parents' suffering that they ensure their parents receive the best possible care.<sup>81</sup> This increased standard of







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care may also become a mandate from the rest of the community if it becomes known that a person is a survivor of the Holodomor, as was the case in the as yet unpublished Waters study, which indicated that the Ukrainian community, upon learning that some of their number were survivors, banded together to ‘look out for’ them.<sup>82</sup>



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### A REVERENT ATTITUDE TO FOOD

The survivors seem to place a great significance on food, from growing it in their own gardens, to cooking for their families, and offering hospitality to guests. Their attitude toward food borders on reverence and in some cases the acts of growing and preparing food seem to have small powers of healing, while any wastefulness or disrespect toward food is not tolerated.

When interviewed, most of the survivors lived in houses which had large vegetable gardens as well as the obligatory chickens for eggs and meat. The properties were considerable land holdings which might be considered unusual for such elderly people. On the insistence of their children, a few of those interviewed had downsized from their original homes and large blocks, but most lived on at least a quarter or half acre plot. This looked to be reminiscent of life as they had known it as children with their families in Ukraine. The land was their prosperity and appeared to have great significance for them. Survivors who maintained large vegetable gardens took pride in taking me out to view the abundant growth. It was a sign of family prosperity that they had such a holding and that the plot was able to sustain them and their extended family.

The vegetable plots were a focus for family life. Children joined their parents at different times of the year to plant or clear the family plot, as I did as a child.

Those Ukrainians working their gardens could have stepped out of the photographs of the collective farms. Their attire was reminiscent of the early



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*Left. clockwise from top:* Messrs Menczinsky, Gutej and Staciw. Menczinsky and Gutej are both past presidents of the Ukrainian Association in Perth.

Kyiv Soccer Team, Ukrainian migrants in Perth.

St Nicholas Ceremony, Ukrainian School, Perth.

1930s and they had old farming implements that must have been used since they began working on their personal properties. It was like stepping back in time. They seemed to have maintained the traditional ways of working the land that they had known as children. There were no modern implements to make the toil easier and their bodies were bent with years of such work.

The women, although elderly, still felt the need to cook excessively large quantities when it came to family gatherings. Often the produce was from their own land and labour. The survivors' pride in providing food from their own gardens was especially evident when there were guests. The ubiquitous potato still features widely in the Western Australian Ukrainian diet, in the form of *platske* (potato cakes) and *varenyky* (stuffed dumpling), and potatoes were usually the first crop planted.

Food, both home grown and purchased, was always generously shared. Prior to the Holodomor, visitors would always be welcome to join the family at the table to share the simple but plentiful food. Now settled in Western Australia, this tradition continued and it became part of the interview visits. Even when visiting very elderly people who could barely stand up unaided, custom and pride did not permit them to allow assistance. The simplest tea and cake, presented with apologies for it being bought rather than home baked, was a necessary offering. Often a more substantial meal was presented, with one survivor actually cooking throughout her interview. At the end of that interview, Fania and I shared a meal of traditional *platske*.<sup>83</sup>

Most children born to migrant parents are able to discuss the embarrassment of the 'smelly' school lunches that were so lovingly prepared by well-meaning mothers. Most would have been more than happy with a simple Aussie vegemite sandwich, to enable them to assimilate and avoid the 'wog' tag that came in Western Australia to the children of migrants. The survivors, however, found it stabilising to continue the traditional ways. It seemed that cooking was a way to ease the pain of the past, by providing their own family with what their parents might have prepared, had they not been faced with the



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Holodomor. For them, food was the most valuable thing they could provide for their children.

Sanders remembers visiting a Ukrainian friend's house after school as a child and being offered fresh biscuits and bread. She remarked that the only time she heard this 'Baba', grandmother, raise her voice was when she took one bite out of the large piece of bread and threw the rest away. At the time she wondered what the big deal was but went on to say that 'for anyone who's wondered about their friend's quiet Baba who loves to cook and hates to waste, it's a big deal'.<sup>84</sup>

Nykytiuk states that 'A reverent attitude toward bread is a tribute to all those callused hands growing wheat and rye; it is our genetic memory of the millions of men, women, and children that died because they were denied their daily bread'.<sup>85</sup> A survivor, Irka, said, 'No one in our family threw out bread'.<sup>86</sup> Memories of collecting bread in various stages of deterioration are vivid for survivors of the Holodomor and it is a legacy of that time that has seen bread take on such importance. White bread in particular, which was for the wealthier class, was especially revered above the heavy rye bread that was produced by the peasant farming class and if available, distributed during this time of the Holodomor. After the Holodomor, Irka's grandmother couldn't stop kissing the white bread and always hid it 'just in case'.<sup>87</sup> I remember being chided as a child, by my very frugal mother, for throwing away left over bread. Although in Western Australia food was plentiful, for survivors it was still a sin to waste food and to waste bread seemed to elicit the worst anger.

Irka spoke of working in a hospital in Western Australia and being given the job of feeding the patients. If patients left part of their meal, the nursing sister would dispose of it. Irka was horrified at the waste and began to take the left overs home to feed her chickens. She could not bear to see food being thrown out. 'I'll give it to the chooks somewhere or whatever, but I can't bear to put it down the toilet or in the rubbish. No I couldn't do that'.<sup>88</sup>

## BURDEN OF LOSS

Janina, a very elderly survivor who had been married and had two children at the time of the Holodomor, survived with the assistance of her aged parents. She spoke of her husband being exiled as a kulak and being left with two young children. When the Germans began transporting people for labour, her father encouraged her to go and to take one child with her.

*When the Germans drove people away, my father told me, 'Go, daughter, maybe you'll be saved, otherwise they will shoot you in front of my eyes.' I took Valik and left, and left my daughter behind.<sup>89</sup>*

The daughter was not permitted to leave Ukraine and remains there to this day as 'the Soviets would never, never let her out'. Janina had hoped for a better life for herself and her son but laments having left her daughter in Ukraine.<sup>90</sup>

Children such as this daughter, who was left behind by her only surviving parent, must have felt forsaken by their family. Interestingly, alongside such protracted traumatic events in their lives, the migrant survivors in Western Australia sustained the hope of reuniting with any member of their family who might have survived the Holodomor and its aftermath.<sup>91</sup>

Anywhere the survivors were moved required a completely new beginning with little or no support structure and certainly no money. The issues faced, in order to begin a new life were always challenging. The difference in settling in Western Australia meant an opportunity to improve their quality of life, in what was perceived to be a more stable political and democratic environment.

## STOLEN CHILDHOODS

Literature regarding the Holocaust's effects on the lives of child survivors was useful in providing some understanding and a reference point in considering the effects experienced by the Ukrainian survivors who were children during the 1932–1933 Holodomor. As children, lacking the coping mechanisms that develop with age and life experience, they lived in a hostile environment,

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facing the constant threat of death and being witness to traumatic events. As the Holocaust did, the Holodomor destroyed the childhoods, innocence, and trust of those young people who lived through it.<sup>92</sup> This loss of childhood can be echoed in the next generation who faced parents wary of others and fearful of some major calamity befalling their children.

Anna Pylypiuk, a Holodomor survivor, speaks in her memoir of the childhood that she was forced to endure and the constant persecution she faced in her own home and her own land. She speaks of her 'stolen childhood' and remaining emotionally crippled for life.<sup>93</sup>

*In 1932, when I was not yet 12 years old, I witnessed the weary faces of people tortured not only by hunger but also by terror, many of which were buried alive. Those who starved remained emotionally crippled for life. It's very hard to endure constant humiliation, to feel constantly persecuted, particularly in one's own home. Let this memoir of my stolen childhood help you retain the memory of those who are no longer with us.*<sup>94</sup>

Lidia Kovalenko states that because of the Holodomor, a 'generation of people with shattered lives' came into being.<sup>95</sup> We cannot imagine the terror faced by Kovalenko as an orphaned seven year old child who, in pulling out two tiny beets to feed herself and her four year old sister who was swollen with hunger, faced being placed against a wall, with a rifle aimed at her. Both children were then beaten with a rope by Communist Party activists.<sup>96</sup>

Children who lived through the Holodomor endured depravity before they had developed basic coping mechanisms. Their development was not complete and their personalities were not fully formed when they found themselves in a very hostile environment.

Many survivors spoke of losing family members, either to death or through separation. One survivor interviewed, Bohdan, spoke of not knowing whether his sister had survived Holodomor years.<sup>97</sup> They had been separated. Similarly, Darka told of her sister, who was given to an aunt who did not have children.

Darka found the separation very difficult, she missed her sibling.<sup>98</sup> As this group of Western Australian survivors, due to their age and the time passed since the Holodomor, necessarily give accounts from their perspective as children at the time, the difficulty faced by parents in making the decision to relinquish one child in order to save others in the family can only be imagined. How does one choose which child?

Children lost parents and faced having to accept a substitute for the parent who had died.<sup>99</sup> Worse still was losing both. Fania lost her parents to prison as kulaks. Her mother came back but her father was killed and not seen him again. Fania was then transported as forced labour to Germany, losing her mother once again.<sup>100</sup>

In discussing what she saw in her village, Hanka spoke of a family whose parents were the first to die from starvation. The children were taken to an orphanage, where they had a basic daily allowance of black bread, watery soup, and water. She bitterly stated that 'you could make a Communist from a young person'.<sup>101</sup> The implication was that children were indoctrinated into communism in these institutions. They were a captive audience.

Children experienced the daily loss of their playmates and schoolmates. Nina and Ella spoke of such loss when their neighbours died and the children were taken away. There were no goodbyes, no provision of goods to help them, no familiar things of their lives kept for them — all was lost to such children. This sense of loss was also felt by their young friends left behind, possibly wondering when it might be their turn.<sup>102</sup>

A survivor, Zoya, spoke of children in these circumstances being sent to what she referred to as 'asylums'.<sup>103</sup> Conquest makes reference to this happening when there was nowhere else to send children.<sup>104</sup> In some situations, relatives tried to support orphaned children but if they already had mouths to feed the children would often be abandoned again. For a culture in which family was the core of their world, and the extended family the most valued and important support in raising children and educating them to adulthood, such situations

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would have been extremely challenging. Children lost their identity with such upheaval and lack of family stability.<sup>105</sup>

In her interview, Katerina spoke of this fundamental loss of childhood:

*People like me who had gone through hardships, such things that one can't describe and can't speak about; such trauma that we had, our youth ... we didn't have any youth.*<sup>106</sup>

## ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTHORITY

### *Fear of authority*

For survivors, some degree of fear and paranoia about authority is a continuing effect of their experiences during the Holodomor and the years of Soviet repression that followed. People who experienced Stalin's repressive policies had what Figes stated 'a special reason to forget the past'. The thaw of Khrushchev during the early 1960s was soon replaced by tightened censorship with Brezhnev, with any discussion of Stalin's crimes being seen as dissident behaviour, liable for persecution. Thus the silence of the past recurred and people conformed to what Figes calls 'the silent Soviet majority'. The threat of arrest and the KGB's powers of surveillance were enough to instill fear in everyone with anti-Soviet sentiments.<sup>107</sup>

Figes includes statements from Soviet citizens such as Maria Vitkevich who, having experienced arrest and a labour camp in Norilsk, could not shake off the fear experienced during that time of repression:

*I have felt it all my adult life, I feel it now [in 2004], and I will feel it on the day I die. Even now, I am afraid that there are people following me. I was rehabilitated fifty years ago. I have nothing to be ashamed of. The constitution says that they can't interfere in my private life. But I am still afraid. I know they have enough information to send me away again.*<sup>108</sup>

*I was never able to shake off my fear of being arrested ... As time passed I learned to live with these fears. They became integrated into my personality. I considered them the price I had to pay for my education and professional position.<sup>109</sup>*

The Holodomor, in establishing such fear in the psyche of the Ukrainian people, when mercy and dignity were simply not synonymous with survival, led to many maintaining a deep seated fear of authority.

Figes asserts that 'genetic fear' affects the children of Stalin's victims in every facet of their lives, as it did their parents, affecting everything from the friends they make to the careers they choose. He details the stories of people who inherited lifelong fears of Soviet authorities from their parents and subsequently passed these fears down to their own children. One such story was of Anna, whose parents did not discuss family history or whether any extended family was living, until the glasnost period in order to protect their daughter. Anna recognised within herself a deep-seated fear, a lack of confidence and social inhibition which she believed were a result of her mother's upbringing.

*It is hard to say what the fear is, because I have felt it since I was a child. I am afraid of any sort of contact with bureaucracy ... It is a fear of being humiliated ... This was something I was taught when I was young, to retreat from any situation where my conduct could be criticized by the authorities ... From my teenage years I was open among friends, but withdrawn socially ... I was afraid to be with strangers and always tried not to stand out.<sup>110</sup>*

The above could indicate that a further study involving the children of Holodomor survivors is worth future consideration.

The fear of reprisal for speaking out was palpable and deep among the Western Australian Ukrainian survivors. One of the interviewees, Janina, feared that she would be accosted by Ukrainian authorities for speaking of her experiences during the Holodomor. She said that the interview was hard for her

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and withheld any names, speaking only of circumstances. She still had family living in Ukraine and said she 'understood well how it was with the family in Ukraine possibly facing some sort of retribution for her having spoken out'.<sup>111</sup>

Survivors spoke of people's lives being threatened for speaking out and said that the events of the Holodomor had made them very cautious. Many survivors would not return to Ukraine for this reason. Ukrainians who were living outside of Ukraine might have been kulaks who escaped deportation and the repression of the Soviet regime. Some survivors believed that if knowledge of their whereabouts or existence came to the attention of the authorities, their families in Ukraine would be taken to court and could face severe repercussions. Some survivors were desperate to locate their family but were prevented from doing so by their fear of repercussions, which remained even many years later.

Communist Party members within their families also caused great ongoing concern.<sup>112</sup>

This fear of authority has remained with some survivors throughout their lives. Two survivors did not wish to sign the consent form to allow me to use the material from their interviews. They had consented to being interviewed but did not wish to sign their names to any document. They were perfectly willing, however, to consent verbally to the use of the interviews on the audio recording. It was not a question of illiteracy, as the survivors were told that they could sign with any mark they could, they simply did not wish to put pen to paper.

The above situation could be attributed to survivors witnessing as children, those events associated with dekulakisation, collectivisation and the Great Terror. Those events saw people, parents, family members, being arrested and having to sign confessions for trumped up crimes, or signing up under duress to ensure foodstuffs were allowed for families to survive.

One interviewee, Mykola, believed that even today every detail concerning the Ukrainians has been recorded by the government. He was followed from

the time that he left home and was taken into the army and feels that this has continued until the present day. He states that they have never found that he has ever done anything against Communism.<sup>113</sup>

Conquest believes that to face the truth about the Holodomor, this fear of authority must be overcome.<sup>114</sup> I completely agree with this statement and believe that it must also apply to researchers who may not agree with the work of those who have taken a different perspective. It is important that everyone who is investigating the historiography and the lives of the Australian Ukrainian migrant refugees must be open to interpretations and listen to the survivors stories in order for there to be a better understanding of the events of the past. The history is an emotional one and that in itself will pose problems for some but strengthen the arguments for others. Without a complete picture for understanding we have nothing, only arguments amongst those wishing to be ‘right’.

### *Hatred of Communism*

One of the most common effects of the Holodomor on the survivors is a lasting hatred of communism and Communists, who they believe were totally responsible for their suffering. It was evident from the interviews that these feelings have remained with the survivors to this day.

A survivor, Mykola, said it was ‘absolutely horrible and abominable what the Communists did.’<sup>115</sup> Parents and family were afraid of their own relatives and of each other.<sup>116</sup> The hunger that consumed everyone saw people informing on others in the hope that their own standing and conditions might be elevated and improved. The atmosphere of suspicion was all pervasive and even as young children, the survivors were not exempt, as Mila said:

*A child would be sitting, a pen in his hand, drawing weapons or something, and they arrest his father and say that he has weapons in his house. How would the child know what they look like? It was scary.<sup>117</sup>*

Some survivors proudly declared that their family never joined the hated



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Communist Party, despite pressure and possible repercussions. One such, Stefka, spoke of her worst memory being the night when her parents were arrested for keeping religious icons. Her father had been expecting a knock on the door, because he was not a Communist. Stefka believed that her father was arrested because he was educated. She said that the Communists feared that people like her father were a threat to Stalin's regime, as they could be responsible for an increase in Ukrainian nationalism. Such people were sentenced to five or ten years in Siberia.<sup>118</sup>

As described earlier, artist Ivan Bahryany, whose testimony was published in the early fifties, gives great insight into the effects of the Holodomor on those who survived. He had dared to protest 'in the form of a fable'. As a result, half of his adult life was spent at hard labour in 'the prisons and concentration camps of the Bolsheviks'. He stated that his 'youth lies buried there'.<sup>119</sup> He wrote that the conditions during this era resulted in a type of human being, still prevalent in countries that were part of the USSR, who was 'intimidated, suspicious, silent and fatalistic'. Even though there have been pardons since those years of repression, people still carry the burden of memory.<sup>120</sup>

Those four words, intimidated, suspicious, silent, and fatalistic, apply to the Ukrainian migrant refugees interviewed for this study. Ukrainians have since not felt safe, even beyond the borders of Ukraine, as evidenced by years of silence. They remember a Soviet theory, as quoted by a survivor, Evhan:

*If you have one hundred people and one of them is dangerous for the Soviet power and you can't find which one, kill all of them.*<sup>121</sup>

The International Memorial Society, the Human Rights in Ukraine organisation and Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group wrote that there was a 'sense of worthlessness of human life and freedom before the giant regime'. They spoke of the wolf pack morality of 'you'll die today and I tomorrow', the loss of traditional family values and the 'catastrophic lack of connection between people' following the great terror. Such are the effects of the communist regime on the Ukrainian people.<sup>122</sup>

After experiencing the cruelty of Stalin's prisons and concentration camps

many Ukrainians faced Hitler's regime and some passed through the SS camps of Dachau, Birkenau and Belsen to add to their traumatic experiences. They were sent there because they 'believed in a free Ukraine'.<sup>123</sup> Ukrainians interviewed for this study finally found their freedom in Australia, albeit with a people whom they felt would not understand the trauma that they had endured, and kept their silence from the time of migration. It was poignant to read the following words in Australia's national newspaper in 2007: 'It is astounding how thoroughly Australian popular culture has forgotten communism'.<sup>124</sup> Were the Ukrainian migrants correct in assuming that no one in Australia wished to hear about the Communists and the events of the Holodomor?<sup>125</sup>

Survivors spoke in very derisive terms of Communism and believed that all the ills of Ukraine, both in the past and today, could be blamed on Communism. In fact, they believed that the reason that Ukraine had not been able to embrace democracy for so many years was a direct result of people who were in power during the Soviet era still wielding power today and making the lives of Ukrainians a misery.

### GOD'S WILL

For many Ukrainian interviewees the words 'God's will' or 'my fate' were used to explain their life's journey. There was a resignation that everything that happened was meant to be and that it was all beyond their control. As religious people, they held to their faith and the belief that for each person there was a path ordained by God. They concluded that they lived, they survived, and it was God's will they endured such suffering. Petro said:

*When I recall all that experience — it is all sad, very sad, it drives me to tears. But on the one hand I think that God let [me] go through all of that for a reason. God gave me health to overcome it with patience and, God saved me from something else.<sup>126</sup>*

Another survivor, Sofi, when speaking of her life, simply said: 'it was a long hard road'. Sofi migrated to Australia after six years in a European DP camp. She married an Australian man, but after seventeen years of marriage, during

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which there were difficulties, her husband left her. With no relatives in Western Australia, she was alone once again. 'It was one of those things' she said, 'what can you do?' Of surviving the Holodomor, she said:

*You can never explain to anybody what you have been through and how you survived. Only God knows. I think a strong belief helps you be positive. If you are negative you cave in.*<sup>127</sup>

One of the most elderly of the survivors, Janina constantly crossed herself during her interview and asked for God's forgiveness as she recounted her experiences.<sup>128</sup> She believed that Ukrainian people must have sinned badly to have had to face such a fate.

## CONCLUSION

The survivors interviewed for this study never underwent emotional rehabilitation and this, along with the international silence and lack of recognition of the Holodomor, would have contributed to the pain of their memories and the effects of their experiences. In this situation, many found solace in retreating from the past and focusing on their family and their new life in Western Australia. With the era of openness and acknowledgement spearheaded by the Ukrainian Yushchenko government, the survivors felt able to publicly discuss the event of that time in history and name and commemorate their loss in a more global manner. However, of recent times, this is no longer so, as the current Yanukovich government has returned to a stance denying that the Holodomor affected such a large number of Soviet Ukrainians.

Commemorative acts might lessen the burden of the Holodomor for survivors and Ukraine as a whole. By providing people with an opportunity to face and work through such memories, Ukrainians who face the conflict of memory with the struggle of remembering, versus the struggle of forgetting, may overcome ongoing conflict and find peace and healing within themselves. Levi, in his interviews regarding Holocaust survivors, speaks of the unease that people feel by becoming a survivor of such a trauma. This feeling of being

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alive ‘in someone else’s stead ... of having survived by chance’, could perhaps be lessened in its intensity.<sup>129</sup>

Interestingly, although there was a palpable lament over the loss of what could have been, and who they could have become, the Ukrainian interviewees did not see themselves lacking or hindered in function as human beings.

As the history of the Holodomor moves on in time it becomes more important to vigorously remember it, as it fades from living memory. Although there is now an active program of collecting witness testimony and further



## Long term effects of the Holodomor

documentation, this period in Ukraine's history may remain a dark period of history that is never fully comprehended or explored.<sup>130</sup>

Due to the constant effort, publicity and work by prominent political geographer Professor Lubomyr Luciuk in Canada, scholars and researchers based in Ukraine and throughout the world are continually researching the history regarding the Holodomor. Many Ukrainians in the diaspora grew up with the stories of this period of life but were not aware of the magnitude of the events until research evidence and thus an accumulation of transcripts began to emerge.

Luciuk, a professor of Political Geography at the Military College of Canada at the time, spoke of his own feelings as the son of Ukrainian DP immigrants to Canada and of listening to the stories of his parents about the horror of the Holodomor. His parents' Ukrainian friends, he wrote, came from different regions, political and religious backgrounds, but all recounted similar stories of

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*Left from top:* 'Vesna' Ukrainian Choir Perth. Director Suzanna Prushynsky far left.

Teresa Parasczyn (left) and Helen Doschak (centre).

First Holy Communion, Ukrainian Catholic Church of St John the Baptist, c. 1993.

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*Below:* Mykola Mowczan, Head of the Ukrainian Association Perth (as at 2011) attending an ANZAC Day Ceremony.



that period of Ukraine's history. He could not understand why such stories were omitted from local histories.<sup>131</sup> His publication, *Searching for Place* documents the migration of postwar Ukrainian migrants to Canada and the efforts to resettle them. They were what he called the 'third wave' of immigrants to Canada.<sup>132</sup>

Luciuk noted that the post-World-War-Two Ukrainian immigrant community was different to the pre-World-War-One period immigrants in that for the later arrivals there was a country called the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and they were involuntary migrants from an occupied homeland, involvement in a world war and from the Displaced Persons (DP) refugee camps of Europe. These DP migrants still retell the stories of their homeland that they pined for but could not, as Luciuk said, 'get to re-place themselves.'<sup>133</sup>

## CHAPTER FIVE

# MANMADE FAMINE AS GENOCIDE

To me, based on information gathered through interviews with Holodomor survivors and from the work of others in this field, it is clear that the Ukrainian famine was an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people carried out by the Soviet regime. There are those who deny the claim of genocide, either by denying the famine itself or by obfuscating its causes or blaming nature or the peasantry themselves. These denialists need to be refuted, and this task has become increasingly simple as new sources of information have become available in recent years. In particular, strong evidence has been found within the declassified and released documents from previously closed government archives. This documentary evidence is given further breadth by the continuing trickle of first-hand testimonies given by survivors, who, despite their age, continue to come forward to speak out about their experiences during the famine years.

### WHAT IS GENOCIDE?

The concept of genocide was first articulated in 1921 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish jurist, in an attempt to have nations recognise and outlaw such behaviour. Lemkin described genocide as ‘the coordinated and planned annihilation of a national, religious or racial group by a variety of actions aimed at undermining the foundations essential to the survival of the group as a group.’<sup>1</sup> It was not until after World War II, when the events of the Holocaust were revealed, that the United Nations finally recognised genocide as a crime and ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on 9 December 1948.

The Convention defines genocide as any of a number of acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group:

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Killing members of the group.

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Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.

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Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

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Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

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Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>2</sup>

Lemkin is known to have voiced his concern about criminal mistreatment of social groups, but the United Nations backed away from including ‘political and other groups’ in the list of potential victims of genocide.<sup>3</sup>

Some sociologists and historians argue that the UN definition of genocide is too limited. In particular, the reference to ‘intent’ creates difficulty, as the burden of proving intent is much higher than that of showing the perpetrators’ motive or motives for the crimes.<sup>4</sup> Another limitation sees some cases of mass murder and atrocity unable to be defined or prosecuted as genocide on the basis that the victims do not fall within one of the groups protected by the convention. Some scholars disagree with the definition given by the UN Convention because it excludes political and social groups. They criticise the international acceptance of the UN definition which they believe implies a continuation of silence on different victimised social groups in the past, including the ‘15 to 20 million Soviet civilians liquidated as ‘class enemies’ and ‘enemies of the people’ between 1920 and 1939’<sup>5</sup> As a result of these limitations, some social scientists and historians prefer to use a broader definition of genocide to that provided by the UN Convention, to allow them to examine the ‘the history of mass killings ... identifying any underlying patterns and common elements’<sup>6</sup>



## Manmade famine as genocide

Today, daily media regularly feature stories of genocide or mass violence. This trend has helped promote research by scholars on past and ongoing cases of genocide. New evidence about past atrocities, such as that emerging from the formerly secret Soviet archives, has brought many events to public attention. The concern regarding recent genocides and denial of earlier ones, has led to the creation of centres for Holocaust and genocide studies and University courses on genocide. Dietsch mentions that the ‘introduction of the Holocaust into the history courses and Ukrainian historical culture has competed with the introduction of the Holodomor’.<sup>7</sup>

### DEATHS AS A RESULT OF GENOCIDE:

#### *International incidences of genocide*<sup>8</sup>

<i>Date</i>	<i>Nationality of victims</i>	<i>Number of dead</i>
1915–1925	Armenians	1.5 million
1932–1933	Ukrainians	10 million
1939–1945	Jews	6 million
1965–1973	Hutu	160,000
1972	Burundis	100,000 to 200,000
1975–1979	Cambodians	1.5 to 3 million
1987–1988	Iraq (Kurds)	100,000
1983–	Sudanese	2 million (ongoing)
1975–1999	East Timorese	150,000
1992–1994	Bosnian Muslims	150,000
1994	Tutsi	1 million
1999	Kosovar Albanians	c. 6,000
2000	Congolese	3.5 million (ongoing)

## THE UKRAINIAN FAMINE: GENOCIDE

Based on the evidence of both the scholarly and political debate from past and present research, and the interview data from the Western Australia Ukrainian migrant refugees who experienced the event in Ukraine's Soviet era history, it is clear that the Holodomor was an act of genocide. Few scholars dispute that the Soviet policies of dekulakisation and collectivisation, alongside the requisitioning of any and all foodstuffs, resulted in an artificial famine created with the intent to crush the resistance of the Ukrainian peasantry. Survivors tell harrowing tales of their experiences, and when these testimonies are placed alongside the policies of the Soviet Union, archival information on the period, the research of historians and scholars, and the findings of the United States Senate Commission into Ukraine, this evidence clearly indicates that the Holodomor was a deliberate act of genocide, committed against the Ukrainian people by the Soviet regime.

Lemkin himself, who coined the term genocide, stated that 'the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment [was] the destruction of the Ukrainian nation.'<sup>9</sup> He stated that the first blow was aimed at the intelligentsia, whom he called the 'national brain'. These were the Ukrainian teachers, writers, artists, thinkers, and political leaders, 51,713 of whom were sent to Siberia in 1931. The 'soul of Ukraine' was attacked when the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church was liquidated, its Metropolitan Lypkivsky and 10,000 members of the clergy targeted. The 'national spirit' embodied by the independent peasants, a repository of Ukrainian tradition, folklore, music, literature, and language, was destroyed through starvation. Lemkin states that the final step in the genocide against Ukraine and the destruction of Ukrainian nationalism, was the 'fragmentation of the Ukrainian people' by dispersing them to other parts of Eastern Europe and resettling 'foreign people' in their place.<sup>10</sup> Serbyn strongly believes that Lemkin's perception of the Ukrainian

## Manmade famine as genocide

genocide is a solid recommendation to the UN Assembly to recognise the Holodomor as genocide.<sup>11</sup>

However, the events of the Holodomor have been subject to academic, political, and popular debate for many years, a debate no doubt fuelled by the continuing refusal of the Soviet Union and later Russia to take responsibility for the deaths of millions of Ukrainians. While, unfortunately, even today there are those who deny that the Holodomor was an incidence of genocide, these voices are increasingly in the minority. Kasianov, at a conference commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, stated:

*A canonical narrative about the Holodomor has formed in contemporary times both in Ukraine and in the diaspora. The narrative has proceeded from denial to recognition of the event, then to recognition of the manmade nature of the event, its anti-Ukrainian motivation, and finally to acknowledgement of the Famine as genocide.<sup>12</sup>*

### *Soviet policies*

One of the strongest cases for the Holodomor being classed as genocide stems from the Soviet policies relating to Ukraine during the famine years. It is clear that rather than attempting to alleviate the effects of starvation, the Soviet policies were intended to create famine and suffering, by stripping the peasants of food and belongings, inflicting draconian punishments upon those who stole or hid food, and preventing their escape from the famine stricken regions. These policies do not indicate mismanagement, they indicate an intent to create and maintain the state of extreme famine which left so many million Ukrainians dead.

The Soviet regime had a passport system in place to control the movement of people into and out of Soviet Ukraine. Early in the famine years, this did not prevent some Ukrainians from travelling to Belarus and Russia to bring food

back to their villages. However, Stalin's directive of 22 January 1933 prevented the sale of railway tickets to Ukrainian peasants, blocking off this route to attain sustenance. Serbyn believes this decree, which saw the closing of all border crossings between Ukraine, the north Caucasus, and the rest of the USSR, is some of the best available evidence of the dictator's genocidal intent against Ukrainians.<sup>13</sup> As a result of this directive, people could be arrested, imprisoned, or even executed, for attempting to leave Ukraine or even their own village without permission, preventing their escape from starvation.

Serbyn also notes earlier decrees, including the Five Ears of Corn Law, which detailed severe punishments for stealing collective farm grain; the November-December enforcement of grain deliveries by Kaganovich and Molotov, and Stalin's 1 January 1933 decree that all hidden or 'stolen grain' be surrendered. As the survivor testimonies from this and other studies reveal, these policies led to abject starvation, terrifying searches, extreme punishments, and many millions of deaths from starvation and related illnesses.

Further to these policies, on 14 December 1933 Stalin and Molotov signed a decree which continued the attack on Ukrainians. Use of the Ukrainian language was now 'forbidden in all organisations, local administration, the press and schools in the Northern Caucasus Territory', with the rest of the Soviet Union included in a decree issued the next day. This policy indicates the continuing intent of the Soviet regime to crush Ukrainian nationalism, which began in the pre-famine years with the mass arrests, exiles, and executions of Ukrainian intellectuals and religious officials.

Serbyn notes the assessment of the Holodomor by Prokopenko, a member of the Communist Party, who stated to a group of collective farmers that 'starvation in Ukraine was brought about in order to reduce the number of Ukrainians, resettle in their place people from another part of Russia, and in this way kill all thought of independence'. Serbyn states that Prokopenko's

## Manmade famine as genocide

assessment reflects the definition of the crime of genocide in the UN Convention, which requires that the perpetrator, in this case Stalin and the Communist Soviet regime, must display intent.<sup>14</sup>

The artificial famine in Ukraine falls within the UN definition of genocide, as the Soviet policies were clearly intended to inflict upon the Ukrainian people 'conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'.<sup>15</sup> Graziosi states that hunger broke the resistance of the Ukrainian peasantry.<sup>16</sup> By using hunger and famine as a tool, Stalin defeated those who agitated for Ukrainian nationalism and resisted the move to communal ownership, thus securing his hold over the fertile farmland of Ukraine and allowing him access to this wealth to fund the industrialisation of the Soviet Union.

### UNITED STATES SENATE COMMISSION INTO UKRAINE

In documents discovered in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Soviet history, the Consul Gradenigo, stationed in the Soviet Ukrainian capital of Kharkiv, wrote in a dispatch dated 31 May 1933 that there was 'no doubt that the famine was artificial, designed to change the ethnic material in Ukraine, and intended to solve [what Stalin referred to as] the 'Ukrainian problem' once and for all'.<sup>17</sup>

Mace attached this and similar documents as an appendix to his 1986 report to a United States Senate Commission on the Ukraine Famine. The Congressional commission eventually published six volumes of documentation on the Ukrainian Famine and produced a final report that was submitted to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and to the United Nations Office in Geneva in May 1990.<sup>18</sup> This should have drawn international attention to the events of the Holodomor but, according to the President of the Commission, the release of this report was overshadowed by the vandalising of Jewish cemeteries in France, an incident that captured international interest.<sup>19</sup>

Gregorovich states that the three key findings of the Report were:

- 
1. There is no doubt that large numbers of inhabitants of the Ukrainian SSR and the North Caucasus Territory starved to death in a manmade famine in 1932–1933 caused by the seizure of the 1932 crop by Soviet authorities.

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  2. The victims of the Ukrainian famine numbered in the millions.

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  3. Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians.

Mazurkevich in her closing statement of the US Commission on the Ukrainian Famine noted that although millions of lives had been lost:

*We can in some small way ensure the small measure of justice, justice that derives from setting the record straight, by seeing to it that this story becomes part of the consciousness of future generations.<sup>20</sup>*

### *Archival sources*

Various newly discovered or declassified archival sources grant scholars access to further information on the causes, chronological sequence, and consequences of the Holodomor.

The Central State Archive of Public Organisations of Ukraine in Kyiv holds documents dated 1932–1933 that relate to the activities of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of Ukraine, and the Departments of the Central Committee of Ukraine. These documents ‘contain resolutions, directive letters, and telegrams from the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party, the Soviet of People’s Commissars and corresponding organisations in Ukraine; correspondence from local Party committees and executive committees of local Soviets; official and private appeals of oblast (regional) Party committees to

## Manmade famine as genocide

higher Party authorities; memoranda and information reports from branches of state security, justice and prosecutor's office, letters from private persons' and so on.<sup>21</sup> These documents are organised into four sections:

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1. Grain procurement policies in Ukraine.

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  2. Escalation of food shortages, large-scale starvation and mortality among the peasantry.

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  3. Political attitudes and political unrest among the peasants and some members of grassroots Party organisations. Incidents of mass withdrawal from collective farms.

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  4. Measures taken (unfortunately late) by the Central Committee and the People's Commissariat to constrain the scale of the disaster.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1920s and the 1930s Graziosi notes that 70,000–80,000 foreign workers and engineers were residing in the Soviet Union. They wrote of dispossessed kulaks, starving women and children waiting at railway stations, deportation of peasants, shantytowns, abandoned children begging for bread, widespread disease, and militia trucks carrying away corpses. Many foreign workers indicated that in the 1930s the USSR seemed like a country at war. Photos taken by an Austrian specialist who worked in Russian industry until 1934 in Kharkiv and those of Dr Dittlof a German company director in the north Caucasus served to substantiate those reports of the Holodomor.<sup>23</sup>

Shapoval notes that in a letter written by Stalin to Kaganovich, Stalin's main concern was losing Ukraine and the need to quickly change the situation and to establish Ukraine as 'a real fortress of the USSR'.<sup>24</sup> Shapoval states that the newly discovered archival documents clearly indicate that 'it was the meticulous organisation of the execution of Ukrainian peasants that invested the Holodomor, ie forced starvation, in Ukraine with a character of genocide'.

The three main people responsible for implementing Stalin's severe repressive measures were Molotov, Kaganovych, and Postyshev.

Shapoval includes details from 1932–1933 reports from the Japanese Consul in Odessa and the Polish Consul General who noted that the Ukrainian peasants specifically were in a pitiful state, living in a state of desolation, emaciated, and begging for bread. The Polish Consul General's report noted that this was not the case in neighbouring Russian regions. The reports of these foreign observers refute the thesis of a Soviet-wide famine. The famine remained in Ukraine and several regions which held high populations of ethnic Ukrainians. A famine constrained by manmade borders must be artificial in nature, as the natural causes of famine, such as weather patterns or pest plagues, cannot be constrained by lines on a map.

The SBU, Ukraine's national intelligence agency, formerly the GPU of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, opened secret state archives on the famine of the Soviet era in August 2006. Official state documents were made available concerning the mass starvations.<sup>25</sup> The head of the state archive, Bohunov, stated that one hundred and thirty documents had been declassified. Resolutions, directives, instructions, witness statements and criminal files making up five thousand pages of documents were declassified and made available to the public.<sup>26</sup> Among these documents there are photographs that form a damning confirmation of the Holodomor.<sup>27</sup>

At a roundtable debate on the Holodomor in 2009, which included discussion of the recently released SBU archive documents, the head of the SBU, Nalyvaichenko, stated that there should be no secrets, cover-ups or distortions regarding information from the Holodomor years. He invited researchers and historians to co-operate and work together in uncovering the details relating to the famine. Nalyvaichenko asserted that the recently declassified and released documents confirm that there can be no doubt that the Holodomor was an act of genocide, conceived, planned, and perpetrated by the Soviet regime against



## Manmade famine as genocide

the Ukrainian people. Nalyvaichenko said his task was 'to map out a strategy for reviving the Ukrainian people's national memory' with the assistance of the hoped for Institute of National Memory, to be built in Kyiv.<sup>28</sup>

Serbyn provides a clear overview of the regions which were the prime targets of Stalin's directives. He states that the majority of deaths from famine were Ukrainians living in Soviet Ukraine and Ukrainians living in neighbouring regions of Russia. Serbyn states that 'the correlation between the ethnic and social identities of the group forming the vast majority of famine victims is inescapable.'<sup>29</sup> The peasants had been the main proponents of Ukrainian national revival, the Ukrainian cultural elites were almost entirely annihilated, and it is said that by 1933 any hint of Ukrainianisation was being replaced by new policies to enforce Russification. Serbyn asserts that it is clear within Soviet records that Stalin's repression was being aimed specifically at Ukrainians.<sup>30</sup> He notes a GPU report by 'a Communist functionary' who, when speaking to a group of collective farmers in the Kharkiv oblast, stated that:

*The famine in Ukraine was brought about in order to reduce the number of Ukrainians, resettle in their place people from other parts of the USSR and, in this way, crush all thought of independence.*<sup>31</sup>

As previously noted, one of the hurdles faced by those attempting to make a case for the Holodomor to be classed as genocide, is the United Nation's requirement for specific proof of intent. Mace states that this requirement can be met by using documents uncovered in archives, such as the Moscow Politburo decree signed by Stalin and Molotov in December 1932 and a document outlining the direct roles of Molotov and Kaganovich in overseeing grain procurements in Ukraine and the Kuban in October 1933. Mace notes that there are enough eyewitness accounts and memoirs to supplement these archival documents and provide additional evidence of the invasiveness of the Soviet regime's interventions in Ukraine during the early 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Documents contained in Soviet and international archives provide a firm basis for the argument to classify the Holodomor as an act of genocide perpetrated by the Soviet Regime.

## SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

Borisenko, who attended the previously mentioned roundtable debate with the head of the SBU, spoke of the importance of oral testimonies in Holodomor studies.<sup>33</sup> She notes especially the testimonies of people who were children at the time, as children ‘can memorise even the minutest details’. The technicolour memories shared by participants in this study (see Chapter 4) attest to this aspect of memory among the Western Australian survivors. While documentary evidence provides important facts, figures, and dates, these records give little understanding of the true human impact. It is this lack that survivor testimonies address. First-hand accounts provide researchers and the public with an understanding of the human impact of the policies recorded in archives and promote empathy and greater understanding.

As excerpts from interviews included in earlier chapters have shown, the participants of this study consistently reported crimes against humanity in discussing the events that they had witnessed and experienced during the Holodomor years. Survivors spoke of the kindergartens, where children received a small ration of food throughout the Holodomor, which had not been received before. This in itself is an admission by the Soviet authorities of the existence of the famine and perhaps also an indication that the regime believed the Ukrainian children at least could be moulded into good Communists so a small effort was made to aid their survival. Sixteen of the interviewees remembered the Communist activists conducting terrifying house searches, confiscating food and items that could be traded for food (see Chapter 1 for more detail). In addition to their testimonies of hardship and horror, some survivors made specific mention of there being a ‘really good harvest’ the year of the famine and others spoke of the stockpiles of grain that starving children attempted to steal from and the dire consequences faced by those who were caught in the act.<sup>34</sup> Such reports of good harvests and grain stockpiles contradict any claim that the famine was a natural occurrence. The confiscation of food and the authorities’ refusal to release the available grain

to the starving populous, is strong evidence of a deliberate attempt to starve a large portion of the Ukrainian population, rather than mismanagement, as some have claimed.

The testimonies of the Western Australian survivors, when viewed in context with the information retrieved from previously sealed archives and the research carried out by other scholars, indicate that genocide occurred in Ukraine in 1932–33.

Charny asserts that the reality of the subject is no longer experienced emotionally by scholars in this debate. He states that ‘the real enormity of the subject no longer guides or impacts on the deliberations’, noting that the discussions are ‘often emotionless, argumentative, and superrational’ with the motivations and meta-meanings of the discussion often based on ‘intellectual competition and the claim to scholarly fame of the speakers, rather than genuine concern for the victims.’<sup>35</sup> By gathering and making use of survivor testimonies the true nature of this atrocity can be kept at the forefront of the debate.

## THE NUMBER OF DEAD

Physical evidence of the mass killings associated with the Holodomor provided some of the first tangible evidence of the atrocities committed by the Soviet regime under Stalin. During the 1970s, mass graves were uncovered during earthworks on the ninth kilometer of the Dnipropetrovs’k–Zaporizhzhia highway. This mass grave has been identified as a burial site for people killed by Stalin’s regime during the Holodomor of 1932–1933.<sup>36</sup>

Archaeologists and amateur historians have been uncovering mass graves since the late 1980s. Merridale notes that attempts were made to conceal these sites, in particular ‘the secret police often concealed them by planting trees over them.’<sup>37</sup> The majority of burial sites for famine victims or victims of repression have been discovered by private groups or organisations such as Memorial.<sup>38</sup>

Human rights campaigners have viewed some archival documents of the

former KGB but are said to be reluctant to divulge any information. In some cases:

*We cannot show them to the families ... because if they could read about the killing, they would also know what happened to the prisoners before they were shot. Let them think their parents were only killed.*<sup>39</sup>

After Stalin's death in 1953, Russians began to mention the Soviet Ukrainian famine.<sup>40</sup> Mace noted that it was the Soviet elite who finally discussed the famine and circulated the figure of 10 million as the number of deaths resulting from the famine in Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s. Mace states that the Soviet census was not distributed or disclosed in 1937, and those involved with collecting the figures and calculating the number of deaths were 'repressed' for disclosing this information.<sup>41</sup>

In 2011, there is still no definite calculation of the number of deaths from famine in Ukraine during 1932–1933. In fact, this is one area of controversy between scholars, with estimates ranging from 7 million to up to 10 million. Hryshko states, in a 1935 study, that at the peak of the famine in March 1933, Ukrainians were dying at a rate of 17 per minute, 1,000 per hour, and 25,000 per day. He asserts that the greatest number of deaths occurred in 1933.<sup>42</sup>

Mace's comparison of the 1926 and 1939 population figures for USSR, Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine in the following table, gives an idea of the magnitude of population losses in Ukraine.<sup>43</sup>

*Rates of population growth in the Soviet Union*

<i>Country</i>	<i>1926 Population</i>	<i>1939 Population</i>	<i>% Change</i>
USSR	147,027,900	170,557,100	+15.7%
Russia	77,781,100	99,591,500	+28.0%
Belorussia	4,738,900	5,275,400	+11.3%
Ukraine	31,195,000	28,111,000	-9.9%

## Manmade famine as genocide

Conquest estimates that Ukrainian deaths in the Holodomor years reached 14.5 million, with a figure of 'seven million plus' for deaths resulting from dekulakisation and another 'seven million plus' deaths due to the famine.<sup>44</sup> Conquest used firsthand and often unofficial sources to generate these estimates, which, at the time he was preparing these figures, before glasnost, was the only method available to scholars.

The debate on estimates of repression deaths as opposed to those specifically resulting from famine is ongoing. Estimates based on the evidence of witnesses are difficult to verify and the accounts available from archival data are not definitive. Keep states that historians face an accounting system that is at best chaotic and at worst misleading. Keep also states that scholars of this field should not leap to conclusions but be 'humble about the extent of current knowledge but ambitious in setting future goals'.<sup>45</sup>

Andrij Semotiuk, a Canadian and former UN correspondent and Human Rights Commission tribunal panel member, notes Stalin's own figure. In 1942, when asked by Winston Churchill about the stresses of carrying out the policy of collectivisation, Stalin replied that 'the Collective Farm policy was a terrible struggle ... 10 million [dead]'.<sup>46</sup> William Strang, a diplomat with the British Embassy in Moscow, writes of a conversation with the Soviet apologist and famine denier Walter Duranty, who said he believed 'as many as 10 million may have died directly or indirectly from the lack of food' in the USSR during 1933.<sup>47</sup>

Cheryl Madden, writing in the *Canadian American Slavic Studies* in 2003, notes the details of Dr W Horsley Gantt who, as a visiting scientist during 1933, was permitted to work outside Moscow and Leningrad. Gantt wrote in *The British Medical Journal* that he had received information from doctors in the regions of estimates of famine deaths at ten million. Privately from Soviet authorities at the time, he was informed of a maximal figure of fifteen million.<sup>48</sup>

While a figure of between 7 and 10 million is a generally accepted estimate at this time of the number who died as a result of the Holodomor, this figure

is not definitive and will need to be reevaluated with the advent of new data. Regardless of the precise figures of mortality, it is clear that the Holodomor was a disaster on a vast scale.

Keep makes a profound statement when he asserts that historians should not 'be mesmerised by statistics'.<sup>49</sup> Critical attention should focus on the integration of the vast accumulation of material and the knowledge and understanding in order to place the knowledge in perspective. As Keep states, scholars should be 'governed by humanistic values and respect for judicial norms, one from which moral considerations cannot be entirely excluded'.<sup>50</sup> It should be an integration of converging information from all sources that provides historians with a reasonably clear picture of the famine years of 1932–1933 in Soviet Ukraine. The children of those years are the final witnesses and their numbers are dwindling fast.

## UKRAINE'S GENOCIDE BILL

Ukraine's Parliament adopted a Bill on 28 November 2006 that labelled the Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people, resulting in 10 million Ukrainian deaths. They attributed responsibility for the genocide to Stalin and the Soviet regime of the time.<sup>51</sup>

Ukrainian lawmaker Bespaliy stated that the Bill was 'a belated move but our obligation to remember' and also said that 'those who do not remember do not have a future'.<sup>52</sup> 'How can it be called anything but genocide?' asked seventy-eight year old survivor Kateryna Kryvenko who attended the commemoration in Kyiv in November 2006. Kateryna recalled crying at the feet of Soviet officials as they ransacked her family's village home, carting off what little food her family had managed to hide under a floorboard. She said authorities took everything, and her father and three brothers and sisters died.<sup>53</sup>

The then President Yuschenko of Ukraine made the following statement in a speech to his nation:

## Manmade famine as genocide

*I address you on behalf of a nation that lost about ten million people as a result of the Holodomor genocide ... we insist that the world learn the truth about all crimes against humanity. This is the only way we can be sure that criminals will no longer be emboldened by indifference.*<sup>54</sup>

History has failed to condemn the perpetrators and, unlike Germany and Japan who must atone for their wartime crimes, the Russians have long resisted the call at the United Nations to label the Holodomor genocide and honour the victims.<sup>55</sup> In response to such denials the call has only grown stronger. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches petitioned to declare the Holodomor an 'act of genocide'. The council included Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim leaders and the council's petition was presented to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2003.<sup>56</sup>

## DENIAL

*My friend Hnatek and I were going to school. Spring was starting, it was wet, snow melting wet. We were walking and after an hour Hnatek fell like horse. He fell in the mud. I went to him and saw blood coming out of his nose. Poor thing, he was so hungry and weak that he couldn't even walk. Well, we heard that people were dying. In our village there was one poor family they had five children. They all died. Father and mother went together, one was left, but then all died. They took them on the carts because there was nothing with which to make coffins. They buried them. Later people died in the fields. Someone died here another there and then I heard that there was cannibalism.*<sup>57</sup>

Despite survivors' experiences and testimonies, such as the one above, there have been and still are deniers of the genocide that occurred in Ukraine in 1932–33. From 1932 until 1991 the Soviet regime denied that any famine occurred in Ukraine. As previously stated, Soviet citizens were even forbidden to use the word 'famine' in references to the events in Ukraine.<sup>58</sup> Those in the West who knew and spoke out were either not believed or ignored.<sup>59</sup> Historians

such as Ellman and Mace, among many others, believe that the silence initially surrounding the famine was not accidental, but formed part of an intentional policy and act of genocide. Since the end of the USSR, Russia has been careful to avoid any actions that could subject it to compensation claims from victims of Soviet-era wrongs.<sup>60</sup> German diplomats now honour the victims of the Holocaust, but Russia has long resisted the same call regarding the Holodomor at the United Nations.<sup>61</sup> In response to this denialism the call has only grown stronger.

Genocide denial is also voiced by some scholars. In a public forum at the University of Melbourne in March 2009, a debate took place between Emeritus Professor Serbyn and Professor Kulchytsky speaking from the Ukrainian position, against Professor Wheatcroft and Professor Kondrashin speaking from a Russian perspective. The topic was ‘Holodomor — genocide or not?’ The debate deteriorated after an outburst by Professor Wheatcroft, who waved a booklet prepared by scholars from Ukraine, USA, and Canada, published to inform the world about the Holodomor, and declared that it was ‘propaganda.’ He was referring to the statement noting 7 to 10 million deaths resulting from the Holodomor. Wheatcroft did not clarify to the audience that this so-called propaganda was in fact a joint statement by 65 UN member states that was adopted by the 58th UN General Assembly on 7 November 2003.<sup>62</sup>

Three questions were posed to Professors Wheatcroft and Kondrashin:

- 
1. Why would Stalin send 51,713 Ukrainian intellectuals to Siberia in 1932?

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  2. Why would Stalin send a secret directive on 22 January 1933 that ordered the closure of all border crossings between Ukraine, the North Caucasus and the rest of the USSR to Ukrainian peasants?

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  3. In Lemkin’s address about genocide, why did he say that the classic example of a Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment, was the destruction of the Ukrainian nation?



## Manmade famine as genocide

After some consultation with his fellow, Professor Kondrashin offered a reply to the second question. He suggested that Ukraine's borders were closed to prevent disease spreading. No response was offered to the other questions.

I believe that the three issues raised with the two professors, the exile of large numbers of Ukrainian intellectuals, the border closures, and Lemkin's own arguments, point to genocide.

Historians based in North America who were involved in Russian and Soviet studies during the Cold War era 'were often trained by Russian émigré scholars' and it has since been argued, gave Ukraine's history of famine scant attention nor credence. Kyivan cultural writer Bilotserkivets noted in 1995 that the USSR's Ambassador to Canada, Alexander Yakovlev, whom she called 'the ideologue of Perestroika', said that: 'The famine of 1933 was nothing more than an exaggeration of bourgeois nationalists.'<sup>63</sup>

The editor of a Canadian Communist publication in Manitoba, made similar assertions, writing that the Holodomor was a hoax and that no famine ever occurred in Soviet Ukraine. He went so far as to state that the kulaks were armed and financed by Nazi Germany and were conducting a systematic campaign of assassination of Soviet government officials.<sup>64</sup>

Tauger argues that the famine was the outcome of a poor harvest and that this poor harvest resulted from other more complex issues related to natural disasters.<sup>65</sup> Yet, as Shapoval states, 'the Communists themselves admitted during Gorbachev's perestroika era that weather was not the cause of the 1932–1933 famine.'<sup>66</sup>

Wheatcroft's argument points to something in between and that estimates of deaths were 'grossly exaggerated'.<sup>67</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft in their debate with Ellman, agree that Stalin's policies were ruthless but argue that there is no evidence to suggest that he had set up a specific policy to starve the peasants during the famine.<sup>68</sup> Tauger and Wheatcroft believe that the weather was the contributing factor in the reduced yields, harvests and ensuing famine.

Ellman, responding to Davies and Wheatcroft's assertion that there was a

lack of evidence that Stalin's intention was to organise starvation, states that there is now ample documentary evidence to support that notion. Ellman notes that the 7 August 1932 decree indicates torture was used to extract grain, people were stopped from leaving oblasts that were seriously affected by lack of food, deportations and mass deaths were planned, and prison camps were set up for those facing deportation and repression.<sup>69</sup> He notes that Stalin's violence against the peasants during 1932–1933 was well documented and that there are still archives that had not been declassified and that could provide further documentary evidence. He further indicated that archival evidence points to Stalin's role during that era and stated that Stalin was indeed a tyrant in the 1930s. Ellman accuses Davies and Wheatcroft of identifying themselves with the authorities rather than the people whom the famine had affected so acutely. These analysts made what Motyl, at Rutgers University states, a mistake in treating the Holodomor 'as if it were merely an instance of agricultural policy gone awry ... bad farming policy'. Motyl went further to state that such an attitude would be tantamount to treating the Holocaust 'as nothing more than the consequence of bad demographic policy'.<sup>70</sup> Ellman refers to Davies and Wheatcroft's publication *Years of Hunger*, where they propose that the peasants stole the grain, resulting in famine, an assertion which is contrary to both archival data and survivor testimonies.<sup>71</sup>

Stebelsky outlines the steps by Wheatcroft and Tauger to make adjustments to the targeted grain production made by the state planning agency Gosplan, as part of the Statistical Economics Sector. Reports from Ukraine in July 1933 reported very good harvests with excellent harvests from North Caucasus. Stebelsky states that grain amounts made available to the peasantry were grossly over inflated. The 'official' yield figures were ideal ones. He determines that 'the main cause of food shortages and famine was collectivisation and grain requisition' rather than Wheatcroft's argument that the 1929 drought was to blame. Stebelsky also notes that the data compiled by the OGPU (the joint State political directorate) serves as the only source of reliable information about this period with the June 1932 report drawing attention to the famine and that it was a result of the grain procurement program.<sup>72</sup>

## Manmade famine as genocide

Tauger, in reply to Davies and Wheatcroft criticising his estimates on the Soviet grain harvests of 1932–1933, defends his estimates as being derived from reports from collective farms with their measured final harvest figures. He concludes that claims by Conquest and the late James Mace that the famine was manmade could not be upheld as the harvest did produce a small yield and, his estimates had been proven from data from collective farms.<sup>73</sup> Their arguments seem to be based on specific calculations that each were challenging. They also ignored data such as that related to the confiscation of foodstuffs and closure of borders to Ukrainians attempting to search for food for their families. Stebelsky provides evidence that disputes the arguments of Tauger, Davies and Wheatcroft and notes that ‘recent declassified letters and diaries of Soviet leaders appear to confirm this.’<sup>74</sup> Debates such as that of Tauger’s and other Western researchers seem to follow what Shapoval called ‘old school Sovietologists.’<sup>75</sup>

There are scholars who do not deny the artificial nature of the famine, but are skeptical that it will be possible to successfully make a case for genocide, given the limiting nature of the UN Convention’s definition of the act and the very limited number of successful prosecutions. One such is Hiroaki Kuromiya, who began his paper in Luciuk’s publication by stating that there was no doubt that the Soviet famine of 1932–1933 was man-made, but ended the work with the statement that ‘not enough evidence exists, however, to show that Stalin engineered the famine to punish specifically the ethnic Ukrainians.’<sup>76</sup> Donald Rayfield reminds us that ‘international law has, however, been reluctant to convict any nation state, except for Germany and the Serb Republic of Bosnia, on charges of genocide.’ Rayfield states that the lack of international recognition of Ukraine’s genocide is due to often deliberate ignorance of the facts.<sup>77</sup>

Oleh Gerus of the Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies at the University of Manitoba states that Hitler, in witnessing a ‘general indifference to Stalin’s engineered mass starvation of Ukrainians’, was ‘certainly encouraged to launch his planned extermination of the Jewish population.’<sup>78</sup> The ramifications of such a concept are grave indeed.

## RECOGNITION OF THE HOLODOMOR

### *Lack of recognition*

The period since 1945 has been one of growing popular consciousness in the West regarding the horrors of genocide. The Jewish Holocaust, for example is widely regarded as a ‘warning from History’ regarding the threat posed by racism and ethnic supremacism. However, unlike the Holocaust, the events of the Holodomor have not been etched into the global consciousness.

Conquest suggests several possible reasons for this lack of interest, empathy, or understanding, the first being that the word ‘peasant’ is not a common term in the USA, UK, or Australia. The history of the Ukrainian peasant is not aligned with that of the farmer from these countries. The second reason he suggests relates to the nationhood of Ukraine and recognition of the Ukrainian language, independence of the Ukrainian national state has only been internationally recognised since 1991 and the Ukrainian language is similar, although distinct, from Russian. Historically, the country is associated with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and in many circles is still regarded as linked to Russia, despite having a separate language and having been an independent nation for some years. The final factor Conquest views as responsible for the lack of general awareness of the Holodomor, is the concealment of facts practiced by Stalin and the Soviet authorities. This secrecy had a profound effect upon knowledge of the Holodomor both at the time and in subsequent years, and has been the most challenging issue faced by historians and survivors alike. Combined, these factors have ensured that for over fifty years, evidence of the famine and the events surrounding it have remained in the archives, rather than being available for research or public discussion.<sup>79</sup>

Krawchenko and Serbyn, addressing the lack of public awareness in the west at the time of their 1986 publication, believed that this was related to the absence of a critical body of scholarship regarding the Holodomor.<sup>80</sup> They set about organising a conference to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary in 1983. Such conferences have shed light on aspects of the famine and supported

publications from the early 1950s, such as those of Pidhainy and Pigido-Pravoberezhny, early histories and compilations of survivor testimonies.<sup>81</sup>

The Ukrainian Holodomor has been hidden historically, with relevant material remaining buried in Soviet archives for decades. The information and actions have been denied by the perpetrators for many years. Mace stated that it was as if 'Hitler had won the war and people only remembered the model camp of Theresienstadt not Auschwitz or Treblinka'.<sup>82</sup>

### *The International Commission of Inquiry*

Following political changes in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, emerging evidence resulted in moves to classify the Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation. The final report of the International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932–1933 Famine in Ukraine was presented to the United Nations in Geneva during 1991.

The World Congress of Free Ukrainians was responsible for establishing this commission in 1988 and the Commission included well known jurists from the UK, Canada, France, the USA, Sweden, Belgium and Argentina.<sup>83</sup> The report concluded that the famine, or Holodomor, did take place and cost the lives of estimated 7.5 million Ukrainians.<sup>84</sup> The commissioners also asserted that it was estimated then that approximately 5 million deaths in 1933 and 10 million deaths throughout the 1930s were a result of this famine.<sup>85</sup> The findings determined that Joseph Stalin and those in his inner political circle in the Soviet Union committed genocide against Ukrainian People in 1932–1933.<sup>86</sup>

The members of this commission agreed that Stalin and the Soviet government deliberately used the Holodomor to denationalise Ukrainians and that the 'top leadership of the USSR bears responsibility for this.'<sup>87</sup> The chairman dissented from the majority findings.

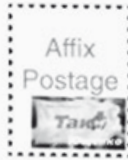
Stalin in writing about the 'peasant question' in the mid-1920s wrote that:

*The peasantry constitutes the main army of the national movement ... there is no powerful national movement without the peasant army.*<sup>88</sup>

Your Excellency:

Many millions of Ukrainians were victims of Soviet oppression between 1917 and 1991.

Please establish an official *Commission of Inquiry into Soviet War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Ukraine* to document the nature and extent of these crimes and bring those responsible to justice.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Postal/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

To: His Excellency Viktor Yushenko  
President of Ukraine  
vul. Bankova, 11  
01220, Kyiv-220  
UKRAINE

Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association in cooperation with the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organizations, Citizens Action Network in Ukraine, Comité pour la Défense de la Démocratie en Ukraine, League of Ukrainian Canadians, Ukrainian American Civil Liberties Association, Ukrainian American Justice Committee, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Ukrainian Civil Liberties Association (Kyiv), Ukrainian National Association, Ukrainian National Federation, and others.

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WORLD LIBERTY ASSOCIATION 2005



*Above:* Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association post-card campaign with other nations' Ukrainian organisations. A plea to Ukrainian President, 2005.

*Increasing recognition in the international community*

Documents such as personal letters from victims and official correspondence sent to British diplomatic officers regarding the famine indicate that there was international awareness of the famine in Ukraine at the time. ‘We are starving’ was the lament made by workers in the Kolguginskii district to the acting counselor of the British Embassy in Moscow, William Strang. This report was written at a time when the Soviets were exporting food to England. ‘Do not forget to communicate this message’ was added to this document and thus has become part of an emerging body of material supporting the notion that this was a man made famine.<sup>89</sup> Such important documents regarding the Holodomor clearly indicate that people could have changed the course of events had those in authority acted upon the emerging information at the time. Unfortunately, although influential people were aware, nothing was done to alleviate the plight of the millions of Ukrainians.

It was not until the former Soviet archives began to release documents that a true appreciation of the horrible effects of the famine became possible. Damning evidence surfaced following Ukraine gaining independence in 1992. ‘The truth [about the 1932–1933 famine] has only become common knowledge for the international public in the years since Ukraine’s independence’, said former Ukrainian President Kuchma in a statement to the memorial service in Kyiv, 22 November 2003.<sup>90</sup>

At the August 2006 meeting regarding the international coordination of the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Holodomor, a team of world leaders of Ukrainian communities chaired by the President of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, Mr Stefan Romaniw, outlined the necessary developments and directions that Ukraine needed to address. The group was presented with a copy of recent extracts of the archival documents regarding the Holodomor by the Deputy Head of Ukraine Security Service SBU, Mr Valentyn Nalyvaichenko.<sup>91</sup>

The meeting raised the issue of using more recent research and more factual information that archives would provide. Clearly there were important

points of entry appearing to the Ukrainian Government and it appeared to be showing strong signs of addressing the different aspects related to this period in its history. The plan to internationalise information resources and commitment to working with SBU officers such as Mr Nalyvajchenko saw a huge shift in national support and cooperation on behalf of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Ministry representative Dotsenko stated at the sixty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2007 that ‘the 1932–1933 Famine organised by Communist totalitarian model of power entailed deaths of 7–10 million innocent men, women and children, which was 25% of the total Ukrainian population that time’. Dotsenko noted that such a step would be an important ‘contribution in prevention from genocide and other crimes against humanity in the future.’<sup>92</sup> Ukraine has already called on members of UNESCO to support a resolution on paying tribute to the memory of the 1932–1933 famine victims.

Kulchytsky’s publication *Chomy vin nas nyschchiv?* [Why did he destroy us?] is being carefully studied in Ukraine. He has agreed that the debate on the Holodomor was instigated by Robert Conquest’s 1986 publication *The Harvest of Sorrow* and in discussing Ukraine’s understanding and validation of the Holodomor, Kulchytsky states that ignorance surrounding this history is Ukraine’s national amnesia about the event. He stated that ‘the genocide against the Ukrainian people should not touch on the Russian’s national feelings or the Russian Federation’s state interests’ but his attempts to have such information published in Russia have failed.<sup>93</sup>

As with Ukraine, Australia and other nations have recognised that this event occurred and, the international community of scholars particularly interested in this horrific event in Ukraine’s history are increasingly involved in researching, writing, holding conferences and seminars both in Ukraine and overseas.<sup>94</sup> The aim is still the same as that of Carynnyk and Isajiw, to disclose the evidence and educate both Ukrainians in Ukraine as well as the world about the crimes by the Stalinist regime.<sup>95</sup>



## Manmade famine as genocide

Hoffman believes that we have only now reached full maturity in dealing with genocide crimes such as the Holocaust and that people are only now able to fully analyse and interpret the personal stories. She states that we can view the history as seen through survivor memories with a more broad prospective and comprehension than the victims themselves may be able to.<sup>96</sup> This of course can also influence the way in which we ensure the memory of the events and of the people who survived them including those of the Ukrainian migrants in Western Australia.

The publication of books has seen the emergence of works such as Kulchytsky's 2007 *The Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine as Genocide: Difficulties in Understanding*. This 1,128 page text, compiled by Ukrainian historian Ruslan Pyrih was published in Ukraine as was a reissue of Mace's collection of Holodomor eye-witness accounts published in 1990 (four volumes).<sup>97</sup> Such publications within Ukraine and the diaspora expose the events that resulted in genocide. With the assistance of Valentyn Nalyvaichenko as the Chairperson for the Security Service of Ukraine in making available archival documentation, further knowledge and information will raise awareness and resolve with governments around the world in recognising the Holodomor as genocide.<sup>98</sup>

In the past decades scholars have bemoaned the paucity of publications, especially in English concerning the Holodomor. Now it can be said that it is difficult to keep up with new publications of secret Soviet documents being uncovered from Russian and Ukrainian archives. Much material available to researchers has yet to be published. Nicolas Werth, a French historian specialising in the history of the Soviet Union and Andrea Graziosi have both worked in the archives. Werth is adamant that on the basis of the documentary analysis of archival data 'it seems legitimate from now on to qualify as genocide the totality of actions carried out by the Stalinist regime to punish by hunger and terror the Ukrainian peasantry'.<sup>99</sup>

Two valuable documents emerged in 2008, indicating an increasing awareness of the Holodomor and strengthening the case for classifying the

famine as an act of genocide. The first was the conclusion reached by the National Commission for the Strengthening of Democracy and the Rule of Law which was adopted on 16 May 2008 in Kyiv. This stated that the Holodomor met the legal requirements of the UN Convention on Genocide of 1948. The Commission was headed by the Ukrainian Minister of Justice, Mykola Onishchuk. The second was the outcome of a presentation made by Judge Bohdan Futey in Washington DC in September 2008. Futey stated that the international trend was now less tolerance of genocidal acts and provided evidence of previous prosecutions to support this assertion, including those related to Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro; Rwanda; Sudan; and the people who suffered under apartheid in South Africa. Futey also stated that there is now sufficient documentary evidence 'to demonstrate Soviet intent under the Genocide Convention; that intent was to destroy a protected group in Ukraine'. The recognition, both internationally and within Ukraine, of the Holodomor is increasing slowly and hopefully with this recognition will come more widespread understanding of the wide-ranging effects of the famine and acknowledgement of its genocidal nature.

### *Restricting access to information*

Although more information is available to scholars today than has been in the past, Moscow's State Archives Director General Sergei Mironenko stated that one quarter of the Joseph Stalin era archives have not yet been declassified. He spoke of the difficulty of declassifying documents of a highly sensitive nature. Mironenko also stated that there are many fake Stalin biographies on sale that 'enhance the myth' but none written by an expert.<sup>100</sup> The more sensitive the documents the more susceptible to intrigue if they are not released, declassified or confiscated.

It is interesting to note that in December 2008 masked men from the Russian general prosecutor's office carried out a raid on the St Petersburg office of Memorial, the Russian-based human rights organisation. The material seized had been used by eminent British historian Orlando Figes in his book detailing

family life in Stalin's Russia, *The Whisperers: Private Lives in Stalin's Russia*.<sup>101</sup> The entire archive of materials, which related to the Soviet Terror which began in 1917 and continued into the 1960s, included interviews, photographs, and names of Gulag victims, was confiscated.<sup>102</sup>

Grabowicz states that 'the Soviet past still remains an unresolved history' and whenever attempts are made to raise the issues there seems to be what he calls 'a programme of simply forgetting, of *not* examining, and *not* writing, *not* rewriting, *not* rethinking the Soviet past'. He believes that this is due to the fact that the old Soviet government hierarchy are still alive and that they do not wish to revisit the legacy that they were so deeply involved in.<sup>103</sup> The current Ukrainian president, Yanukovich, is undoing the work of his predecessor, whose focus was on publishing the truth about the Holodomor and seeing it included in the national curriculum. However, despite such setbacks, I believe that this situation is changing with each new publication and each new detail brought forth from the SBU archives.

Recently, in November 2011, *Holodomor: The Great Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933* and the book series *Poland and Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s* were launched and presented at a function hosted by Professor Marko Pavlyshyn at the Monash European and EU Centre, Mykola Zerov Centre for Ukrainian Studies, Monash University, Victoria.

Professor Yuri Shapoval, currently Head of the I. F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethno-National Research, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and the author, co-author and editor of books and documents related to the crimes of Stalin's regime was joined by Ms Agnieszka Rudzińska, Vice-President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Poland. Ms Rudzinska presented the book series *Poland and Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s* to the University Library. The series is the outcome of an international collaborative research project involving historians and other scholars from Poland and Ukraine. So far there are eight volumes as well as the English-language book *Holodomor: The Great Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933*. The material within the series has drawn upon previously unpublished documents from the National

Archives of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), the State Archives of Poland and Ukraine, the Central Military Archives (CAW) and the Archive of New Acts (AAN). Much of this information has been located in sealed archival depositories and provides scholars with new insights into the past history of these two nations. In fact the work has shown how mutual respect and historically valuable outcomes can be gained from collaborative research in uncovering the past.

## CONCLUSION

The announcement of the Armenian tragedy being recognised as genocide by the United States Congress, provides some hope for validation of the crimes against the Ukrainian people perpetrated by the Soviet regime. With much previously classified information becoming available to researchers in recent years, and further archival information continuing to be released, the case for the Holodomor to be officially recognised as an act of genocide will only strengthen over coming years.

In May 2007 the Permanent Representative of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Yuriy Sergeyev called for the United Nations to ‘contribute to the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Great Famine of 1932–1933 ... by adopting a relevant document’ related to the issue of genocide. He went on further to say that Ukraine did ‘not intend to establish responsibility ... for the acts committed on the territory of Ukraine in 1932–1933’ and emphasised ‘that policies and acts of the then totalitarian regime should be blamed for the manmade famine.’<sup>104</sup>

If we reflect upon Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, we are able to state that yes, members of a national group were killed, millions of them; serious bodily or mental harm was inflicted upon them as evidenced by the repressions, executions, the deliberate creation of appalling living conditions, removal of grain and foodstuffs with ensuing issues such as swollen bodies, disease and suicide;

Шановний пане Президенте,

На засіданні Парламентської асамблеї Ради Європи 27 квітня 2010 р. Ви заявили, що визнати Голодомор 1932-33 рр. як факт геноциду щодо того чи іншого народу є неправильно і несправедливо, цим самим порушивши Закон України "Про Голодомор 1932-33 років в Україні".

Глибоко вболіваючи за відновлення історичної правди про Україну та всіляко поширюючи її в країні мого проживання, я закликаю Вас публічно визнати Голодомор геноцидом українського народу та забезпечити дотримання Закону "Про Голодомор 1932-33 років в Україні", який стверджує факт геноциду.

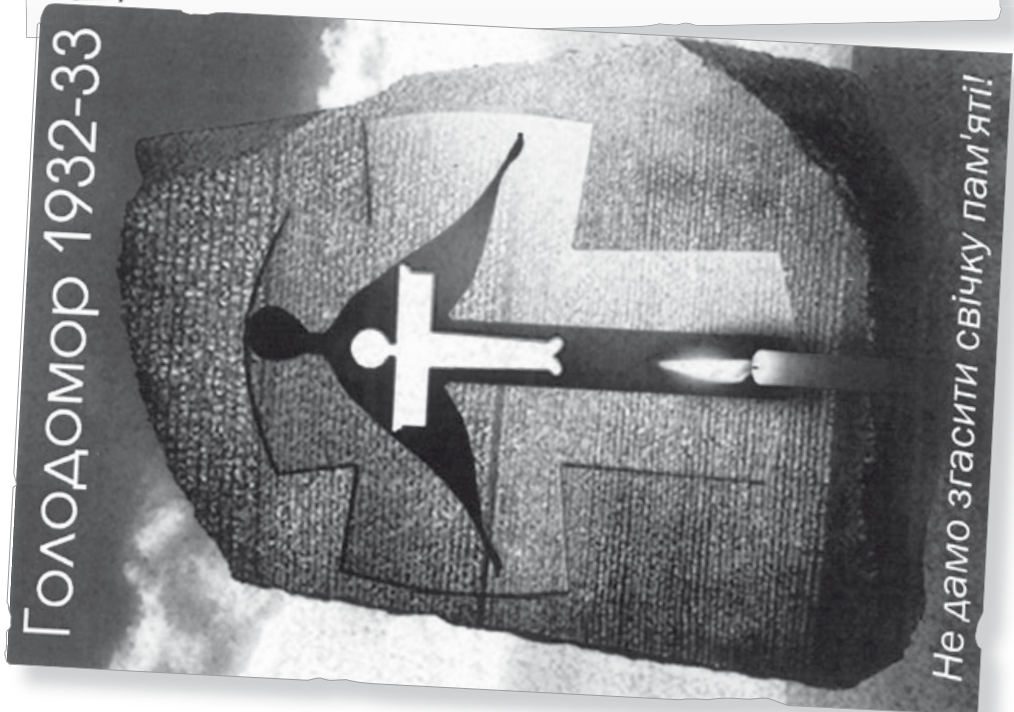
З повагою,

Ім'я і прізвище

Підпис

President of Ukraine  
Victor Yanukovich  
c/o Embassy of Ukraine  
in Australia  
GPO Box 1567  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Australia

*Спонсори: МККомітет Світового Конгресу Українців у справі Голодомору та Союз Українських Організацій Австралії*



*Above:* Genocide–Holodomor post-card campaign to classify the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine as genocide.

deliberate conditions of starvation were inflicted on them, that brought about their physical destruction; the prevention of births took place with the again the deliberate repressions, executions, prevention of food aid, starvation, cannibalism and deaths obliterating a large proportion of possible child bearing Ukrainians. Children became orphans as a result of Stalin's policies. Lemkin noted that 18,000 children were abandoned in the face of the starvation in Kharkiv.<sup>105</sup> They were left without support or transferred to survive with members of another group in orphanages or with other families (Polish or Russian) through adoption or less formally simply being handed over.

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*Right:* Holodomor Commemoration. Fathers Mowtschan and Kalinecki with author placing Holodomor candle, 2010.

# HOLODOMOR PANAKHYDA

*(Requiem/Memorial Service)*

On Sunday 27 November 2011, the Ukrainian Association of Western Australia invited all Ukrainians to attend the Holodomor Commemorative Panakhyda held at the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Panakhyda commenced after the conclusion of the services held by the two local Ukrainian churches, which are in the same street. Following the Panakhyda everyone was invited to the Orthodox Church Hall for a short program and refreshments. Such ecumenical services have become important events in church calendars the world over. During such services in Western Australia the local Vesna choir participate with appropriate hymns, both priests officiate and the two communities join in the remembrance service. It is an important day for the communities, to honour those who perished and pray for those who have survived and are still living.



The Head of the Ukrainian Association, Mr Mykola Mowczan, reminded the Ukrainians of salient points of the Holodomor during a short program following the service and the author, Lesa Melnychuk, was on hand to add to the program with a short excerpt from the manuscript of this book. She highlighted a special icon that had been brought back from Ukraine and presented to the Orthodox Church by one of the survivors of the Holodomor. It was a most valued icon and was in the most traditional fashion of icon development of that era. During the purges this icon had been hidden from the authorities. Mention of the icon accompanies the story as told by 'Stefka' in this publication (*chapters 2 and 3*).

The 2011 service also marked the unveiling of a replica of the Holodomor monument in Kyiv. It was blessed by the clergy and will remain at the Orthodox Church.

The churches and religious worship are most important in the lives of Ukrainians in Western Australia. They are especially important for the migrant refugees who arrived here with so little to begin new lives. Their churches helped provide them with some support, stability and sense of community when all else was so strange. The Holodomor services form a major part in the recovery of the migrants who experienced Stalin's Holodomor of 1932–1933, as well as their families.

The world commemorates Holodomor Remembrance Day on November 26, 2011. The fourth Saturday in November









marking one of most tragic episodes in world history. People are requested to honour the victims and survivors of the Holodomor by placing a lit candle in windows on the date of commemoration and observing a moment of silence from 19:32 to 19:33h (7:32 pm to 7:33 pm). All Ukrainians are urged to remember this period in Ukraine's history and keep the memory of victims eternal. This is how respect is paid to our forefathers who suffered so much at the hand of Stalin and his regime.

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*Previous page, clockwise from top left:* Survivors, family and friends at the Holodomor Commemoration, Perth, 2010.

Memorial Book of Names of those who perished in the Holodomor of 1932–33.

Names of Ukrainians who died of starvation in 1932–1933 in Ukraine.

Monument to the Holodomor, 1932-33, Kyiv, Ukraine.

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*Above from top left:* Visitor's book being signed in the Pecherska Lavra Museum, Kyiv. (Photo Bohdan Warchomij.)

Holodomor Commemoration, Perth, WA, 2010.

## CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

Collecting the testimonies of Ukrainian refugees who migrated to Western Australia has allowed me to examine the events of the Holodomor and the years that followed through their experiences, uncovering in the process some of the famine's ongoing effects upon the lives of this group and their families.

Their memories provide an understanding of how repressions, dekulakisation, and collectivisation affected the Ukrainian peasantry. Their stories continue beyond the end of grain requisitioning through many years coloured by the 'code of silence' instigated by Stalin and the Soviet regime. It is clear why the migrants hold Stalin and his government responsible for their plight during the Holodomor and the events that followed in its aftermath. The interviewees expressed their hatred of Communism and the Communists, holding them accountable for stolen childhoods, missing families, loss of identity, and the suffering endured by the Ukrainian people.

This is the first study to record the memories of Ukrainian famine survivors who migrated to Western Australia. They struggled to reconcile the dual reality of their past trauma with their new lives, but despite living through such trauma, many of the survivors seem to have a deep inner strength. While their early years in Australia were marked by difficulties and hard, physically demanding work, they managed to gain a foothold in this country and build homes here, where their families could live in safety. The drive to protect and provide for their family is very apparent in this group of survivors and from their continuing focus on food, it is clear that memories of the famine are

never far from their minds. Even in old age, they focus on ensuring that their families have enough food to eat. At the age of 86, with arthritic hands, my mother painstakingly prepares age old Ukrainian dishes for her loved ones.

Drawing on my findings and the body of existing research, I have discussed the question of whether the Holodomor constitutes an act of genocide. My own position is clear, as I firmly believe that the famine and the millions of resulting deaths were deliberately engineered by Stalin's regime. However, the debate continues amongst the diaspora, scholars, and governments and hopefully this book will play a part, adding to the available evidence around the issue and informing discussions for institutions such as the United Nations. A lack of knowledge of the Holodomor seems to go hand in hand with denial of its genocidal nature. While there is growing acceptance in the West that the famine was man-made and that innocent people were murdered on a mass scale, there is political reluctance to call the Holodomor genocide.

This book takes its place alongside existing studies of the Holodomor, adding to the available primary sources. Foremost in the consciousness of those who participated in this study was the desire for their children to be able to read their stories and understand the trauma and hardships their parents had endured. As young people, they were forced into silence as speaking out about hunger and starvation would have jeopardised their lives and those of family members. In their old age, they were able to face down their fear and speak out about their experiences at the hands of Stalin and the Soviet regime and have these testimonies recorded and understood as part of history. Their desire was to have their stories told.

The Ukrainian refugees' testimonies are a part of the collective memory about Ukraine's Holodomor of 1932–1933 and the years that followed. They provide evidence for posterity and a record for families in both Ukraine and Australia. They make an important contribution to the historical record regarding these events and the decisions world leaders may make on the issues surrounding the Holodomor as genocide.

## Conclusion

There is still much to explore and understand about the Holodomor. In her discussion of the Holocaust Williams questions why nations were silent 'when people's lives and dignity were at stake'. She also notes that neutrality always helps the executioner and with seventy-five percent of the current world population being born after World War Two, 'it is not a question of memory but a matter of learning'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed one of the problems in studying the Holodomor has been its obscurity and as more is revealed about this period, a more complete picture of events is emerging.

Australia has provided refuge to people of many nationalities fleeing from dictatorial and dangerous regimes. First hand testimonies, such as those recorded for this study, can aid our understanding of migrant refugees and help us support their meaningful transition into Australian society. Macnamara states that such material 'erases the boundaries between generations' and ensures that no matter how much time has passed, 'you will be standing in direct relationship with the witness'.<sup>2</sup> With knowledge and understanding of our different communities, comes health and strength for the spiritual and political development of our nations. As Williams states, 'whatever we record, restore, or transmit will become public record. Whatever we decide to ignore, to discard, or to overlook will disappear'.<sup>3</sup>

This stories of the Ukrainian refugee migrants must not disappear from the history of Western Australia, any more than the story of the Holodomor should disappear from the history of Ukraine. This study has given this group of migrant refugees a voice. Figes calls the Holocaust survivors in his research heroes.<sup>4</sup> The Ukrainian migrants in Western Australia join the ranks of such heroes for having the courage to share their memories of such a painful and traumatic past. The poignant words of Ukraine's National Anthem have provided strength and emotional sustenance to Ukrainians from the time they were written by Pavlo Chubynsky of Kyiv in 1862 and 1863. The Greek-Catholic priest Myhaylo Verbytsky composed the music and the anthem

was first performed in Lviv in 1864. The words resonate with all Ukrainians confronting the traumatic history of their homeland:

*Ukraine is not yet dead,  
Nor its glory and freedom,  
Luck will still smile on us brother Ukrainians.  
Our enemies will die  
As the dew does in the sunshine,  
And we too brothers,  
We'll live happily in our land.  
We'll not spare either our souls or bodies to get freedom  
And we'll prove that we brothers are of Kozak kin.*

Memories tend to inform the alternative or hidden emotional transcripts of disenfranchised individuals just as official historiography is part of the public transcript asserted by the state to explain and naturalise power relations.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that these ethnic Ukrainian refugees have been able to integrate successfully into Australian society. They have quietly gone forward with the heavy weight of their distressing history etched in their memories. Until this study began.

Ukrainians honour those who suffered during the Holodomor on 27 November each year, holding a memorial service with candles, songs of mourning from the Ukrainian choir, and poignant eulogies. The number of survivors diminishes each year, but their memories will now live on within those of you who have read their stories. Their names will be found on the welcome walls at the Maritime Museum in Fremantle Western Australia which commemorate migrants who came to the state by sea from 1947 onwards.

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*Right:* Holodomor 1932–1933 in Ukraine (detail). (Courtesy Morgan E. Williams Collection.)

# VICHNAYA PAMYAT

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*Eternal memory*



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# ENDNOTES

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## CONCLUSION

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LESA MELNYCZUK

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## L E S A M E L N Y C Z U K

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Lesa Melnychuk was born in 1954 to Ukrainian post-war migrant refugees in Perth, Western Australia. She has been a teacher, academic and active and passionate member of the Ukrainian community in Perth, and has raised two daughters. In 2009 Lesa was awarded her doctorate based upon research on the Ukrainian Holodomor 1932–1933 and the Ukrainians in Western Australia who remembered those years in Soviet Ukraine. She is a regular speaker at Ukrainian commemoration events, exhibits her collection of Holodomor paintings and images and encourages the preservation of Ukrainian heritage in Western Australia. Lesa works in supporting all ethnic groups in Perth through the History of Migration Experiences (HOME) Centre with Curtin University and the Western Australian Museum. She also sits on the Board of Ishar, a not-for-profit migrant women's health and welfare organisation.

Lesa is also working with her editor, Katherine Wallace, on the book of memories resulting from her doctoral study. This will provide a broader narrative based upon the interviews from her research.

Millions of Soviet Ukrainians died in the Holodomor (death by starvation) of 1932–1933 at the hands of Stalin. However, the struggle for the survivors continued beyond the end of the Holodomor.

The children who lived through the famine and genocide then faced the bombings and invasion by Hitler and, as teenagers, forced labour in Germany, followed by post-war Displaced Persons Camps, and eventual migration to the other side of the world.

The hunger and shock, the fears and humiliations were part of a long struggle for survival, freedom and life in a new country.