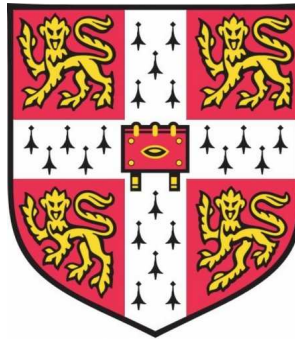


**‘Idle, Drunk and Good-for-Nothing’:**

**The Rank-and-File Perpetrators of 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine  
and Their Representation in Cultural Memory**



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July 2018

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## **Preface**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

The word count of this dissertation is 77, 082.

This falls within the word limit set by the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages Degree Committee.

## Abstract

This dissertation examines identifiable traces of the perpetrators of the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine, known as the Holodomor, and their representation in cultural memory. It shows that the men and women who facilitated the famine on the ground were predominantly ordinary people largely incongruous with the dominant image of the perpetrator in Ukrainian cultural memory.

I organise this interdisciplinary study, which draws on a wide range of primary sources, including archival research at all levels – republican, oblast', district, village and private, published and unpublished memoirs and, on one occasion, an interview with a perpetrator; major corpora of oral memory, post-memory and cultural texts – into two parts. The first part employs a microhistorical analysis of the perpetrators and their actions through. Chapter One, 'The Mechanism of the Famine on the Ground', outlines the Soviet policies that led to mass starvation and identifies various groups of people involved in the famine's facilitation. It offers an analysis of events on village and district level, which reveals previously understudied groups, and employs a criminological approach to advance a new typology of the perpetrator. Chapter Two, 'The Case Studies', focuses on perpetrators in two villages: Toporyshche in the Zhytomyr oblast' and Popivka in the Poltava oblast'.

The second part explores the representation of the perpetrator in cultural memory, with a particular focus on Ukrainian novel, poetry, drama, film and museum practice, and examines how different cultural narratives frame the question of the agency of the perpetrator. While Soviet-era Ukrainian texts characterise the perpetrators as purely ideological participants, post-Soviet and diaspora artists cast them as the Other, while dissident authors disperse agency altogether. In order to support these claims I bring together archival evidence and works of cultural memory.

In this dissertation I show that people who facilitated the famine on the ground were predominantly ordinary people as the participants in other cases of mass violence, thus rendering the image of the Other, aberrant or exclusively ideological participant in cultural memory inefficient to explain how this devastating famine was possible. By bringing together archival evidence and works of cultural memory, I foreground a central discrepancy between the identity and representation of the perpetrators of one of the most catastrophic events of the twentieth century.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Holodomor Research and Education Consortium and Marta Baziuk, the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, Ukrainian Studies Department at University of Cambridge and CEELBAS for making this research project possible. Their financial support was significant: it proved my research had a meaning. So too did the willingness of my supervisor Dr Rory Finnin to take on a student with abundant enthusiasm but no funding. I am forever in debt for his encouragement, guidance and support. I also benefitted significantly from the opportunity to lecture and supervise in the Department of Slavonic Studies and the History Faculty in Cambridge and grateful to Dr Claire Knight and Dr Mark Smith in particular. Finally, my researching with Anne Applebaum for her book on the famine made me confident I could complete this work.

Crucially, I could not have persevered without support of my family: my husband Paul for tolerating my being away and obsessions with people long gone; and my father Yuriy Storozhuk who accompanied me to the interviews in the far away villages. Archivists, historians, friends and my children – they all trusted me along this long journey. Researching this devastating famine made me realise how fortunate I am. That is why I dedicate this work, in words of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, to: ‘My fellow countrypeople... living, dead and as yet unborn’.

## **TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION, FILM AND INTERVIEW REFERENCING**

In this thesis I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration (without ligatures) to render the quotations from Russian and Ukrainian into Latin script. Where Russian or Ukrainian words appear in English language quotations or sources, I have kept the transliteration system used by the authors. At the time of writing, the state language in Ukraine is Ukrainian and so place names in Ukraine have been transliterated in Ukrainian (e.g. Kyiv not Kiev). Similarly, the names of individuals from Ukraine have been transliterated from the Ukrainian language. The intention is to provide some degree of consistency rather than to ascribe linguistic preference to any individual or place. Where provided, all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

The titles of films made at the Ukrainian studios have been transliterated in Ukrainian. At the first mention of the film, the title is followed by its translation into English, the last name of the director and the year of release in parentheses, unless the name of the director has already been mentioned. Interviews are referenced using transliterated names of the interviewees, except when their identity or the last name of the interviewee is kept anonymous.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CheKa	Chrezvychnaia Komissia (The Extraordinary Commission [for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption])
ChOP	Chastyny Osoblyvoho Pryznachennia (Special Assignment Detachments)
DAZhO	Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Zhytomyrskoi oblasti (State Archive of Zhytomyr Province)
DPU	Derzhavne Politychne Upravlinnia (The State Political Directorate)
HDA SBU	Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy (The Archive Department of the Security Service of Ukraine)
ICTY	The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
KNS	Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selian (Committees of Non-Wealthy Peasants)
KP(b)U	Komunistychna Partia (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy (Communist Party (Bilshovyk) of Ukraine)
MTS	Mashynno-Traktorna Stantsiia (Machine-Tractor Station)
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
OGPU	Ob'iedinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (The Joint State Political Directorate)
RGASPI	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History)
RPK	Raionnyi Partiinyi Komitet (District Party Committee)

RSChA	Robitnycho-selians'ka Chervona Armiia (The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army)
RVK	Raionnyi Vykonavchyi Komitet (District Executive Committee)
SNK	Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov (Council of People's Commissars)
SVU	Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrainy (The Union for the Liberation of Ukraine)
TORHZIN	Torhivlia Z Inozemtsiamy (Trade With Foreigners)
TsDAHOU	Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads'kykh Organizatsii Ukrainy (Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine)
TsK KP(b)U	Tsentral'nyi Komitet Komunistychnoi Partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy (Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bil'shovyk) of Ukraine)
TsK VKP(b)	Tsentral'nyi Komitet Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol'shevikov) (Central Committee of All-Soviet Communist Party (Bolshevik))
TSOAviaKhim	Tovarystvo Spryannia Oboroni, Aviatsii i Khimii (Society of Assistance to Defence and Aviation-Chemical Construction)
TsVK	Tsentral'nyi Vykonavchyi Komitet (Central Executive Committee) of Soviet Ukraine
VTsIK	Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet (The All-Russian Central Executive Committee)

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**‘Idle, Drunk and Good-for-Nothing’:**

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## **Introduction:**

### **Heroes and Villains in the Study and Memory of the Holodomor**

What the eyes do not see, the heart does not suffer.<sup>1</sup>

In late 1932 a young reporter from Kharkiv, Lev Kopelev, was sent by the party to help grain procurement in Kharkiv oblast'. At the height of a catastrophic famine striking the Ukrainian countryside, he searched peasant huts and confiscated grain, foodstuffs and valuables – all of which led to mass starvation. In his memoirs, Kopelev describes himself as 'a true believer,'<sup>2</sup> for whom the ends justified the means, and explains how he eagerly followed the examples set by the fervent local Communists. One of them at the time – the head of the village council, Bubyr – was, in the words of Kopelev, 'an epitome of truth and justice... he did not know what fear was.'<sup>3</sup> According to archival evidence and survivor testimonies, however, Bubyr was nothing but: he used his position of power to profit financially, and he was persecuted for cowardly behaviour at the front in 1942 and reportedly attempted to defect to the Nazis.<sup>4</sup>

Kopelev and Bubyr showcase a prominent, tragic divergence between history and memory oriented on the role of the men and women responsible for one of the darkest moments in the twentieth-century history of Europe. In local post-memory of the events of the famine of 1932-33 in Soviet Ukraine, known as Holodomor in Ukrainian,<sup>5</sup> Kopelev and his colleagues are inaccurately remembered as Russians from the North.<sup>6</sup> Historians cite them as genuine fanatics enforcing collectivization,<sup>7</sup> while writers cast them as savage Others in cultural texts.<sup>8</sup> In other words, they remain subject to a problematic reduction.

This dissertation – an interdisciplinary study of the traces of such rank-and file perpetrators

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<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian proverb: 'Choho ochi ne bachat', za te sertse ne bolyt'.

<sup>2</sup> The title of his memoir reads *Education of a True Believer*. Lev Kopelev, trans. G. Kern, *The education of a true believer* (London: Wildwood House, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Lev Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira* (Kharkiv: Ardis, 2010), p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavskii oblasti, f. R, spr. 19254, spr. 10143-c, spr. 15246, spr. 15140; from the interview with V. Osheka, the head of the village council in Popivka, 18.10.2015; D. Shupyk, S. Bilan, V. Osheka, *Dorooha do ridnoho domu (Istoriia sela Popivky Myrhorods'koho raionu Poltavskoi oblasti)* (Poltava, 2013), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> The term *Holodomor*, which connotes 'deliberate death by hunger' in Ukrainian, is used throughout this dissertation to underline the famine's man-made nature.

<sup>6</sup> UCRDC, Kataloh spohadiv, no 99, Oleksii Konoval, selo Petrivtsi.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), pp. 116-117; Robert Conquest, *Znyva skorboty. Kolektyvizatsiia i Holodomor* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1993), p. 191; Ronald G. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 227; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton&Company, 1992), p. 547.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Ulas Samchuk, *Maria. Khronika odnogo zhittia* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2014); Svitlana Talan, *Rozkolote Nebo* (Kharkiv: Klub Simeinoho Dozvillia, 2015); Natal'ia Vorozhbit, *The Grain Store* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009).

in history and in memory – seeks to shed overdue light on them. The Holodomor was part of a Soviet Union-wide famine caused by the policies of collectivization and excessive grain procurement. In Ukraine, a number of measures authorized by the Soviet leadership in late 1932 turned the famine into an event of mass violence and death. It is estimated to have claimed the lives of approximately four million people.<sup>9</sup> Our understanding of its actors on the ground remains unclear.

While it is generally accepted that most perpetrators of mass violence are ordinary people with rather banal motives,<sup>10</sup> the men and women who facilitated the famine on the ground are portrayed as anything but ordinary in cultural memory. In Soviet literature, for instance, they are characterised by Soviet writers as heroes and martyrs, while writers in the Ukrainian diaspora and in independent Ukraine describe them as idlers, savage Others or disillusioned Communists. Such contradictory representations in cultural memory circulate alongside each other in contemporary Ukrainian society, impeding knowledge of one of the most catastrophic events of the twentieth century. Today state ‘memory makers’ in Ukraine exhibit symptoms of the problem. For instance, the state-funded Ukrainian Institute of National Memory recommends that schools and local governments base commemoration of the famine on texts by post-Soviet or emigre literati, while a governmental online portal that serves 694 village councils advances a mostly Soviet narrative from the voluminous *Istoriia mist ta sil Ukraïns'koi RSR (History of Towns and Villages of Ukrainian RSR (1966-1973))*. Such entangled, contested memories reflect the complexity of the participation of ordinary people in an extraordinary catastrophe.

If the cultural memory of the perpetrator is entangled and even contradictory, what does history teach us? Indeed, who precisely were the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor? This is a striking question that has received little scholarly attention to this day. In an attempt to answer it, I examine the participation of various groups in collectivisation and the famine and consider the effects of virulent propaganda and routinized mass habituation to violence on the men and women whose actions made the Holodomor possible. While these processes make the famine not unlike other cases of mass violence, the Holodomor is distinguished from them in a number of ways. Unlike the perpetrators of other crimes, for example, the rank-and-file perpetrators of the 1932-

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<sup>9</sup> Estimations of the number of victims vary, but the dominant consensus among demographers and historians is 3.9 million. See: Jacques Vallin, France Meslé, Sergei Adamets, and Serhii Pyrozhkov ‘Kryza 1930 rr,’ eds. France Meslé and Jacques Vallin, *Smertnist’ ta prychny smerti v Ukraïni u XX stolitti* (Kyiv: Stylos, 2008), pp. 37-65; Omelian Rudnyts’kyi, Nataliia Levchuk, Oleh Wolowyna, and Pavlo Shevchuk, ‘Famine losses in Ukraine in 1932 to 1933 within the context of the Soviet Union,’ eds. Declan Curran, Lubomyr Luciuk, and Andrew Newby, *Famines in European Economic History: The Last Great European Famines Reconsidered* (London, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem – a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963); Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders – the Jewish Catastrophe* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992); Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men – Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992).

1933 famine were not trained, on the whole, to exercise coercion or physical force.

Nor have perpetrators of the famine been put on trial in their lifetimes, despite the general condemnation of Soviet crimes. On the contrary: as I will show, perpetrators of the Holodomor often exercised more power and authority *after* the famine. Many of them retained or ascended to key positions at the village level: as heads of collective farms and village councils, headmasters of schools, history teachers or collective farm brigade leaders. As such, they continued to *shape* – or even efface – the representations of the famine. As village officials and local historians, they even provided entries to the *Istoriia mist ta sil*, unwittingly promoted by the Ukrainian government today.

My use of the term ‘perpetrator’ merits elaboration. I employ it not to mark a moral or legal position but to distinguish those whose actions led to the starvation of millions of their fellow citizens at peace time. As O’Byrne observes, ‘there is no single definition’ of the term, which ‘varies according to context.’<sup>11</sup> I argue in this study that this terminology is apt due to the deliberate, violent nature of the Holodomor and its vast scope of destruction. Between late 1932 and early 1933, with famine already gripping much of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin applied a number of legislative provisions specifically to Ukraine, leading to what Applebaum, Graziosi and other historians of the Soviet Union call ‘a famine within the famine.’<sup>12</sup> These policies include the closure of the borders of the Ukrainian republic; the confiscation of all foodstuffs from starving peasants; the extensive ‘blacklisting’ of entire districts (*raiony*), which constituted almost half of Soviet Ukraine; increased grain requisitions; and the refusal of state relief to the starving. These policies and those who executed them on the ground led to the death of millions of innocent people.

Some scholars might oppose an interpretation of the actors of the famine on the ground as ‘perpetrators’, especially those who refer to its victims as ‘the human cost’ or inevitable ‘strain’ of the First Five-Year-Plan, which they present as a grand effort aimed at improving the lives of Soviet citizens through rapid industrialization or the result of ‘a badly conceived and miscalculated policy.’<sup>13</sup> Such a position, in my view, dehumanises the victims by accepting the epistemological authority and rationality of the top perpetrators and their followers. This stance is made possible by what Anderson calls ‘the subtle discourse of exoticism’: that is, the victims are distant from ‘us’ in

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<sup>11</sup> Darren O’Byrne, ‘Perpetrators? Political Civil Servants in the Third Reich,’ T. Williams and S. Buckley-Zistel, eds., *Perpetrators and Perpetration of Mass Violence: Action, Motivations and Dynamics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, p. 193; A. Graziosi, ‘The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?’ *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (2004), p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> In order of citations: Chris Ward, *Stalin’s Russia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), Chapter 3; R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 435, 441; Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, p. 228.

time, space or culture.<sup>14</sup> Others might argue that those who executed Soviet policy on the ground during the famine were merely acting in the service of the state; they were cogs without agency or criminals: e.g. ‘All officials involved were either following orders or were removed and most often repressed’<sup>15</sup> and ‘... more often than not did not have any morals, they stole the foodstuffs.’<sup>16</sup>

According to this logic, confiscating the last scrap of food from a starving child may be deviant from a moral point of view, but such actions were ultimately sanctioned by the Soviet state. Put differently, this thinking frames the perpetrator as ‘alienated from the product of his actions’, just as the worker in Marxian thought is alienated ‘from the product of his labour’.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Soviet Union can be understood in the 1930s as *criminogenic* (crime-producing)<sup>18</sup>, as actively perpetrating and condoning criminal acts. Gerlach in fact suggests that we should regard the Soviet Union of the Stalinist period as a society indelibly marked by excessive violence, most of which was conditioned by the experience of the First World War, revolution, and Civil War. Citizens were socialised to support violent acts through propaganda and within military organizations (RSChA, TSOAviaKhim), schools, and organizations for youth (pioneers and Komsomol).

This abrogation of personal responsibility is ubiquitous in cases of mass violence. It pivots on an understanding of the event as ‘a human evil of staggering magnitude without any authors.’<sup>19</sup> Yet such an argument lacks rigour. As Schmidt posits, even if structural political violence helps to withhold and obscure individual responsibility, perpetrators in events like the Holodomor still have agency, whether they are front-line actors or those whom Hanna Arendt named ‘mask murderers who had never killed’ and do not seem to have blood on their hands. This abrogation is summarised in the words of Eichmann: ‘I never killed a Jew, or a non-Jew, for that matter – I never killed a human being. I never gave an order to kill ...’<sup>20</sup> His words are echoed in Kopelev’s explanation: ‘Thanks God, I did not kill anyone, nor imprisoned...’<sup>21</sup> But actions of the perpetrators like him made the famine possible: they seized food from the starving; beat and tortured them for ‘hoarding’ grain; extorted property from them; kept desperate men, women and children from ‘pilfering’ fields; and restricted their movement and travel to destinations that may have saved their lives. These

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<sup>14</sup> Kjell Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide. A Criminological Account* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 105-106.

<sup>15</sup> S. Kul’chyts’kyi, *Holod 1932-1933 rr. v Ukraini iak Henotsyd: movoiu dokumentiv, ochyma svidkiv* (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2008), p. 120; M. Doroshko, *Nomenklatura: kerivna verkhivka radians’koi Ukrainy (1917-1938 rr.)* (Kyiv, 2012), p. 306; V. Borysenko, ed. *Svicha pam’iati: Usna istoriia pro henotsyd Ukrainitsiv u 1932-1933 rokakh* (Kyiv: Stylos, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> O. Udod, S. Kul’chyts’kyi and V. Lozyts’kyi, eds. *Holodomor 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini: zlochyn vlady – trahedia narodu* (Kyiv: Geneza, 2008), p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> J. Littell, *The Kindly Ones* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 2018, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Sybille Schmidt, ‘Perpetrators’ Knowledge: What and How Can We Learn from Perpetrator Testimony?’ *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 1.1 (2017), p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> UCRDC, Interview with Kopelev, sound roll 3.

actions had devastating consequences, and these consequences were tragically evident and foreseen. Locating agency in such individuals raises the question as to whether they should be considered *auctor delicti*, the authors of a crime, or *executors delicti*, the executors of a crime.<sup>22</sup>

While it is difficult to establish such degrees of legal responsibility and draw the line of perpetration, it is clear that Stalin, like Hitler, would have been ‘nothing but a wineskin bloated with hatred and impotent terror’ without the involvement of ordinary people.<sup>23</sup> This study seeks to examine the actions of these ordinary people and to explore their diverse itineraries in Ukrainian cultural memory; it does not focus on the actions of individuals within the DPU, the police, RSChA (the Red Army), or political departments at MTS (Machine-Tractor Stations), for instance, who by profession were trained and expected to employ coercion or violence.

### ***Historiography of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor***

If the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor do receive attention from scholars, the attention tends to be fleeting or underdeveloped. According to Maksudov, for instance, the perpetrators ‘pursued their own selfish interests, furthering their careers by establishing control over the rural population. All Communists and many Komsomol members were armed with pistols.’<sup>24</sup> Kuromiya, meanwhile, observes that survivors of the famine often mistakenly interpreted Russified cadre sent to their villages from Ukrainian cities and towns as ‘Russians.’<sup>25</sup> Such perceptions fuel a simplistic interpretation of collectivization and the famine as a predominantly Russian assault on Ukraine, which would later be developed in cultural memory by many diaspora and post-Soviet Ukrainian literati.

The fact that the scholarly discussion of the Holodomor perpetrators is in its infancy is due to the relatively recent nature of the Holodomor scholarship more generally. Academic discussion of the 1932-1933 famine as such did not start until the Khrushchev Thaw due to a thorough silencing of the subject by the Soviet regime. Refusing to acknowledge the famine and referring to it by way of euphemisms like ‘food difficulties,’<sup>26</sup> Soviet historians identified the following as the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Littell, *The Kindly Ones*, 2009, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Sergei Maksudov and Marta D. Olynyk, ‘Dehumanization: The Change in the Moral and Ethical Consciousness of Soviet Citizens as a Result of Collectivization and Famine,’ *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1/4 (2008), pp. 130-131.

<sup>25</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbass. A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s* (Cambridge University Press), p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> James Mace, ‘Radians’ka istoriographiia Holodu. Pisliastalins’kyi period,’ *Velykyi Holod v Ukraini. Zvit kongresovo-prezydents’koi komisii SShA z doslidzhennia Velykoho Holodu 1932-1933 rr v Ukraini* vol. 4 (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy Dim ‘Kyievo-Mohylians’ka Academia,’ 2008), pp. 70-105; Stanislav Kul’chyts’kyi, ‘Holodomor u pratsiakh ukraiins’kykh radians’kykh istorykiv 1956–1987 rr,’ *Istoriia v suchasni shkoli: naukovo-metodychnyi zhurnal*, no. 10 (146) (2013), pp. 29–31; Janusz Radziejowski, ‘Collectivization in Ukraine in light of Soviet historiography,’ *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 5, no. 2 (1980), pp. 3–17.

major causes of what were ‘food shortages’: unfavourable weather conditions; poor management of the collective farms and organization of grain procurement on the ground; ‘excesses’ by the Soviet and party officials; and anti-Soviet activities by the enemies of the regime.<sup>27</sup> While some Soviet researchers placed responsibility for this ‘situation’ on Stalin, Kaganovich and Molotov – adding that Stalin ‘encouraged arbitrariness towards the peasantry’<sup>28</sup> – others laid the blame entirely on the rank-and-file officials in a manner similar to Stalin’s article ‘Dizziness with Success.’<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, a number of Soviet scholars revealed the involvement of various groups in the grain procurement of unrealistic targets that led to the famine: MTS, KNS (Committees for Non-Wealthy Peasants), thousands of village commissions that consisted of local officials and activists, collective farmers, trade union workers, members of the Komsomol, various plenipotentiaries, workers, and Communists from the cities.<sup>30</sup> According to these sources, these perpetrators worked in precarious conditions: they were verbally and physically assaulted and, according to Slyn’ko, faced purges of up to 25-30% in some districts in Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> Another Soviet scholar, Suslo, even claimed that district and village officials deliberately exaggerated the amount of grain that could have been procured to their superiors in order to advance their career. As a result, they drove their constituency into destitution. He also implied that the officials at the republican level were complicit in this behaviour, hence removing agency from the Kremlin.<sup>32</sup>

Between the Thaw and the 1980s, there is little Soviet scholarship on the events of 1932-33. In the face of the Soviet denial of the famine, and given that the archives were largely closed to western scholars, an article on the role of KNS in facilitating the famine by Mace in 1983 appears to us today as a remarkable study indeed. Mace posits that KNS members played a key role in enforcing the policies that led to famine on the village level.<sup>33</sup> He claims that KNS consisted of village outcasts empowered by the regime but not representative of the rural society. Recent research by Levandovska reveals that the state did not rely on KNS alone when it deployed tens of

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<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, V. Bondarenko, *Razvitie obshchestvennogo khoziaistva kolkhozov Ukrainy v gody dovoennikh piatiletok* (Kyiv: AN URSSR, 1957), p. 35; O. Kasymenko, *Istoriia Ukrainy v RSR: populiarnyi narys* (Kyiv: AN URSSR, 1960), p. 292; S. Iudachev, *Bor’ba KPSS za organizatsionno-khoziaistvennoe ukreplenie kolkhozov (1933-1934)* (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1962), pp. 19-34.

<sup>28</sup> V. Danilov, N. Ivnikskii, ‘Leninskii kooperativnyi plan i ego osushchestvlenie v SSSR’ and I. Ganzha, I. Slyn’ko, P. Shostak, ‘Ukrainskoe selo na puti k sotsializmu,’ *Ocherki istorii kolektivizatsii sel’skogo khoziaistva v Soiuznykh respublikakh*, ed. V. Danilov (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1962), pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup> S. Iudachev, *Bor’ba KPSS*, 73; M. Kutz, *Pytannia kolhosnogo budivnytstva na Ukraini, 1929-1941 rr.* (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Lviv’skoho universytetu, 1965); J. Stalin, ‘Golovokruzhenie ot uspekhov’, *Pravda*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1930.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, *Sotsialistychna perebudova i rozvytok sil’s’koho hospodarstva Ukrainy v RSR*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Vyd-vo Kyiv’skoho un-tu, 1967), 460-461; I. Slyn’ko, *Sotsialistychna perebudova i tekhnichna rekonstruktsiia sil’s’koho hospodarstva Ukrainy (1927-1932 rr)* (Kyiv, 1961), pp. 285-289.

<sup>31</sup> I. Ganzha, I. Slyn’ko, P. Shostak, ‘Ukrainskoe selo,’ p. 199.

<sup>32</sup> Mace, ‘Radiants’ka istoriographiia Holodu’, 2008, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> James E. Mace, ‘The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selian and the Structure of Soviet Rule in the Ukrainian Countryside, 1920-1933,’ *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct., 1983).



thousands of Communists and workers from the cities. Moreover, during NEP, KNS as an organization was considerably weak, and many of its members were purged.<sup>34</sup>

The first academic monograph on the 1932-1933 famine, Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (1986), opened up scholarly discussion of the famine among academics in the West. Without assigning a separate chapter to the perpetrators, Conquest identifies them as the same people who were involved in dekulakization and collectivization: local officials, KNS, Komsomol, Communists and workers from the cities, teachers and activists. Using oral memory and memoirs as sources while critically assessing Soviet scholarship on the subject and newspapers of that period, Conquest demonstrates that the men and women facilitating the Holodomor on the ground did have agency: many local officials defied the orders, while others duly followed them, sometimes with enthusiasm. Conquest acknowledges that they faced resistance and repressions and that they were often accused of sabotage as well as excesses. Their motivation varied from fanaticism to the settling of personal scores. Due to the sweeping scope of the book, however, Conquest offers no typology of the perpetrators, nor does he reflect on the long-term implications of their participation. Overall, in his view, the rank-and-file activists who searched the houses and confiscated food from the starving families were not much different from 'thugs and idealists.'<sup>35</sup> To prove this point, he lists a large number of examples of violent searches, beatings and murders and cites from the memoirs of those who claimed they participated out of their belief in the Soviet project.

The pioneering works by Mace and Conquest received an almost immediate response from Soviet scholars. In 1987, first secretary of the TsK KPU Shcherbyts'kyi officially acknowledged the famine, which sparked vivid public discussion. Journalistic media were flooded with memoirs and letters from survivors, documentaries produced and works by the Soviet and diaspora Ukrainian authors were published.<sup>36</sup> In 1988 Kul'chyts'kyi, then a Soviet historian, explained the famine along the lines of the academic discussion of the Thaw. He also stressed the importance of the III All-Ukrainian Party conference in July 1932, when some of the district and republican officials criticised the grain procurement plan and pointed to the disastrous state of the countryside.<sup>37</sup> In this way Kul'chyts'kyi demonstrated that the decisions about the policies that led to the famine were made in Moscow. From this point on, Kul'chyts'kyi's research would evolve continuously, proving

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<sup>34</sup> Levandovs'ka E., 'The Role of Committees of Poor Peasants in Realization of the Soviet Policy in Ukrainian village,' *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakultetu Zaporiz'koho natsional'noho universytetu*, 2013, no XXXVII, 122.

<sup>35</sup> Conquest, *Znyva skorboty*, p. 192.

<sup>36</sup> Liudmyla, Hrynevych, 'Vid zaperechuvannia do vymushenoho vyznannia: pro mekhanizmy vkhodzhennia temy holodu 1932-1933 rr. v ofitsiinyi publichnyi prostir v SRSR ta URSR naprykintsi 1980-kh rr.' *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky: Mizhvidomchyi dovidnyk naukovykh prats'* 18, 2008, pp. 232-44.

<sup>37</sup> Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi, 'Historical Experience: Vital Today', *News From Ukraine* (1988), No. 2, p. 7.

a subject for research in and of itself. While he has never published any dedicated work on the question of the perpetrator, he advanced the claim in 1992 that profiteering was a major motivation for the mass participation in dekulakization, while his co-author Shatalina pointed to the gratuitous violence that most peasants feared.<sup>38</sup>

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives, an impressive body of research and documentation on the political decisions that led to the famine<sup>39</sup> has accumulated both in Ukraine and abroad. As Andriewsky points out, most historians approach the mechanism of the famine from the position of the state and its leadership, confronting their intentions, methods and decisions.<sup>40</sup> In their study of the top perpetrators, Vasyl'iev and Shapoval detail how decisions made by Stalin were put into action by his envoys Kaganovich and Molotov.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the best illustration of such implementation of Stalin's policies on the ground to date is a collection of documents edited by Vasyl'iev, Werth and Kokin.<sup>42</sup> Vasyl'iev has also published widely on the power relationship between the Ukrainian Communist leadership and the Kremlin, pointing out that the former lost its position of sub-centre during the famine.<sup>43</sup>

Scholars have also examined distinct groups of perpetrators on the ground. Fitzpatrick considers the participation in and support of the state policies by younger generations in the 1930s;<sup>44</sup> Viola focusses on the role of the Twenty-Five Thousanders – workers sent to organize collective farms. In fact, together with Vasylyev, Viola has delved deeply into the subject of the trained perpetrators of the Great Terror in Ukraine, the DPU, elucidating their role during the famine. In their work on collectivisation and the peasant resistance to it, Vasyl'iev and Viola note that among the millions of state employees involved in collectivisation and the famine, there were many hard-working and responsible individuals who 'with sympathetic reluctance ... applied their training and expertise to uproot and divide families.'<sup>45</sup> Viola's latest work on the lower- and middle-level NKVD

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<sup>38</sup> Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi, and Ie. Shatalina, 'Protses rozkurkulennia 1929 – 1932 rr. ochyma selian', *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: Fakty. Sudzhennia. Poshuky. Respublikans'kyi mizhvidomchyi zbirnyk naukovykh prats'* (Kyiv, 1992), No 2, 41-45; Ie. Shatalina, 'Ekspropriatsiia selians'kykh gospodarstv v Ukraini u 1929-1932 rr.', *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1992 (No 3).

<sup>39</sup> Nicolas, Werth, 'Keynote Address for the Holodomor Conference, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 17-18 November 2008', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1/4 (2008), pp. xxix-xxviii.

<sup>40</sup> Olga Andriewsky, 'Towards a Decentred History: The Study of the Holodomor and Ukrainian Historiography', *Contextualizing the Holodomor. The Impact of the Thirty Years of Ukrainian Famine Studies*, ed. by Andrii Makuch and Frank E. Sysyn (Edmonton-Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2015), p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Iurii Shapoval and Valerii Vasyl'iev, eds. *Komandyry velykoho holodu: Poiizdky V. Molotova i L. Kaganovycha v Ukrainu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1932-1933 rr.* (Kyiv, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Valerii Vasyl'iev, Nickolas Werth and Serhii Kokin eds. *Partiino-radians'ke kerivnytstvo Ukrain's'koi SSR pid chas Holodomoru 1932–1933: Vozhdi. Pratsivnyky. Actyvisty. Zbirnyk dokumentiv ta materialiv* (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy, 2013), p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Valerii Vasyl'iev and Lynne Viola, *Kolektyvizatsiia i selians'kyi opir na Ukraini (lystopad 1929 – berezen' 1930)* (Vinnitsa: Logos, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>45</sup> L. Viola and V. Vasil'ev eds., *Kollektivizatsiia i krest'ianskoe soprotivlenie na Ukraine* (Vinnytsia, 1997), p. 229.

cadres who carried out the purges in 1937-1938 shows the impact of situational and individual factors on the execution of the orders.<sup>46</sup> In Ukraine, Ievseieva has touched upon the participation of ‘military atheists’ in grain procurement; Kis’ has noted the absence of research on female perpetrators of the famine; Kas’ianov has commented on the role of teachers in the dekulakization campaign; and Riabchenko has researched the everyday life of students sent to the villages during the collectivization drive.<sup>47</sup>

Other researchers have approached mass violence during collectivization in Ukraine from a completely different perspective. In his comparative analysis of mass violence in the twentieth century, Gerlach places Ukraine among a group of extremely violent societies that, in certain circumstances, explode in paroxysms of violence.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, disdain for the rule of law in the practice of lynching was widespread before the famine. Further research into widespread lynching during and after the famine reveals that village officials often joined, if not led, the lynching mobs. The scale of lynching was so extreme that the first secretary of TsK KP(b)U ordered provincial party committees to punish the culprits.<sup>49</sup> At the time prominent writer and political activist Vynnychenko regarded this endemic of violence as stemming from the psychological state of the peasantry, habituated to violence during the First World War and ensuing revolution.<sup>50</sup>

Though the study of the perpetrators of the famine is in its initial stages, several Ukrainian historians have started writing ‘history from below.’ For instance, Drovoziuk has sought to establish behavioural patterns of the village activists during the famine. In his research, he argues that the policy of Sovietization of the Ukrainian rural population defined the qualities that the new regime was looking for in potential perpetrators.<sup>51</sup> Drovoziuk also explores various ‘practical’ capacities in which local peasants could have been involved in collectivization: compiling lists for dekulakization, confiscating property, evicting and persecuting the dekulakized. He splits the perpetrators into two groups: those who defied the orders and those who implemented them with sadism and terror.

Drovoziuk explains participation by way of personal traits and speculates that a

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<sup>46</sup> Lynne Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial. Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> T. Ievsieieva, ‘Bezbozhna p’iatyrichka. Dial’nist’ voiovnnychkh bezvirnykiv,’ *Holod 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini: prychny ta naslidky* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2003), pp. 656-675; Oksana Kis’, ‘Defying Death: Women’s Experience of the Holodomor, 1932–1933’, *Aspasia* 7, pp. 42-67; Heorgii Kas’ianov, ‘Ukraiins’ka intelihentsia v 1933 r.’, *Problemy istorii Ukrainy* (Kyiv, 1992), No. 2, pp. 93-94; O. Riabchenko, *Studenty radians’koi Ukrainy 1920–1930-kh rokiv: praktyky povsiakdennosti ta konflikty identyfikatsii* (Kharkiv: KhNAMG, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> N. Romanets’, ‘Borot’ba z samosudamy v Ukraiins’komu seli, 1933–1935 rr’, *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakul’tetu Zaporis’koho Natsional’noho Universytetu XXIX* (2010), p. 186.

<sup>50</sup> Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii* (Kyiv, 1990), p. 51.

<sup>51</sup> Stepan Drovoziuk, ‘Povedinka sil’s’kykh aktyvistiv pid chas sutsil’noii kolektyvizatsii ta Holodomoru Ukraiins’koho narodu (1932-1933 rr)’, *Istoriia Ukrainy. Malovidomi imena, podii, fakty*, vol. 34 (2007), pp. 67-79.

microhistorical approach might help substantiate his claims. He advocates a study of the perpetrators as involving analysis of their biographies and their ‘reputation within the local community’ in a given historical context. First, he notes, historians should establish identities at the village level and examine how people were selected as well as their social background, education, work, political views, age and reactions in various life situations. The latter is important, he argues, as it demonstrates whether society ‘was able to put aside cruel types of perpetrators to enforce the policies of totalitarian regimes.’<sup>52</sup> Though he acknowledges the importance of the ‘silent majority’ by referencing Kapustian,<sup>53</sup> Drovoziuk concludes that village activists represent a separate psychotype essential for the maintenance of totalitarian power.

Another historian who explores behavioural patterns of the activists, Lysenko, argues that collectivisation actors on the ground can be split into three categories: marginalised elements of the village; sadists; and sympathetic officials who left or hid grain in the villages, opposed directives and encouraged the peasants to resist.<sup>54</sup> Veselova, meanwhile, argues that individual behavior during the famine also depended on the stage of starvation: desperate to survive, she claims, some peasants became aggressive and defied all social constraints.<sup>55</sup> Finally, perpetrators at the district level are mentioned in the work of Doroshko on party officials or *nomenklatura* in the 1930s and during the famine in particular. He focuses mainly on their remuneration, repressions in case of disobedience, and ‘blind’ and thorough completion of tasks.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of the Perpetrators of the Holodomor***

According to Mamdani, both academic and popular accounts of crimes against humanity suffer from three silences.<sup>57</sup> One of the silences is an evacuation of agency from the men and women who perpetrate mass violence on the ground in discourse that prefers to concentrate on top-down dynamics or advance a monocausal motivation of perpetration. I argue that this silence is largely present in the case of the Holodomor. Taking Mamdani’s argument further, I posit that when political discourse presents the famine as an exclusively state project and ignores its subaltern and

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<sup>52</sup> Stepan Drovoziuk, *Natsional’no-kul’turne ta dukhovne zhyttia ukraiins’koho selianstva u 20-30-kh rr. XX stolittia. Istoriographichniy narys* (Vinnytsia: O. Vlasiuk, 2005), p. 224.

<sup>53</sup> G. Kapustian, *Dvi ‘pravdy,’ abo ukraiins’ke selo v dvadtsiati roky dvadtsiatoho stolittia* (Kremenchuk, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Olena Lysenko, ‘Typolohiia povedinky sil’s’kykh aktyvistiv u konteksti zdiisnennia sutsil’noii kolektyvizatsii sil’s’koho hospodarstva v Ukraini (pochatok 1930-kh rr.)’, *Istoriia Ukrainy. Malovidomi imena, podii, fakty: Zbirnyk statei*. Vol. 36 (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2010); ‘Informatsiino-analitychni dokumenty organiv DPU USRR iak dzherelo vyvchennia dial’nosti sil’s’kykh aktyvistiv v umovakh sutsil’noii kolektyvizatsii (kinets’ 1920-kh – pochatok 1930-kh rr.)’, *Z arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*. 2010, No. 1 (34); pp. 336-358.

<sup>55</sup> O. Veselova, ‘Uvikopomnennia zahybykh vid holodnoho moru’, O. Veselova, *Holod-genotsyd 1933 roku v Ukraini* (Kyiv: Libra, 2000), pp. 432-457.

<sup>56</sup> Doroshko, *Nomenklatura: kerivna verkhivka*, pp. 299-223.

<sup>57</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers. Nationalism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

‘popular’, rank-and-file character, it tends to reduce the violence to a set of meaningless outbursts, ritualistic and bizarre, in which ‘idle, drunk and good-for-nothing’ elements of the pre-modern Ukrainian village come to the fore.

To confront this silence, I incorporate into the theoretical framework of this dissertation approaches from history, social psychology, memory studies and criminology – approaches that are widely employed in the analyses of the rank-and-file perpetrators of other historical events of mass violence. In particular, I borrow the typology of perpetrators of mass violence presented by Smeulers.<sup>58</sup> This typology, I contend, presents new opportunities for the study of the Holodomor. I also employ a critical reading of the perpetrator testimonies that is suggested by Browning who, unlike Westermann, does not find it possible to ‘infer’ motivation from testimony, party membership, or a belonging to a certain generation, indoctrination and brutalization. According to Westermann, most perpetrators of the crimes of totalitarian regimes are ideological perpetrators – despite recent research on the subject that reveals that only around 5% of perpetrators can be characterised as such.<sup>59</sup>

A comparative analysis of the testimonies of the perpetrators of other events of mass violence, such as the in-depth interviews of Eugene de Kock or the accounts of Adolf Eichmann, can provide directions for further inquiries into how the perpetrators reflected upon their experience. In fact, a typology of the subsequent responses of the perpetrators, suggested by Anderson, explains how they made sense of collectivization and the famine: e.g. by excusing their agency; by denying participation or remaining silent; by showing remorse or regret; by defending the use of violence (sometimes in Bolshevik language).

I also employ a microhistorical approach developed by Carlo Ginzburg, which has been successfully adopted by other researchers of the mass violence and genocide including Browning, Oppenheimer and Gross.<sup>60</sup>

From a social psychology perspective, I am influenced by the towering work on the compliance to authority of ordinary people and their conditioning by Milgram and Zimbardo, which has proven formative for the field of criminology. As Milgram demonstrated in his work,

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<sup>58</sup> Alette Smeulers ‘Perpetrators of International Crimes: Towards a Typology,’ in *Supranational Criminology: Towards a Typology of International Crimes*, ed. Alette Smeulers and Roelof Haveman (Antwerpen: Intersentia, 2008), pp. 233-265.

<sup>59</sup> See Jonathan L. Maynard, Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26/5 (2014); Jennifer Welsh & Serena Sharma (eds.); *The Responsibility to Prevent: Overcoming the Challenges to Atrocity Prevention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alex Alvarez, ‘Destructive Beliefs: Genocide and the Role of Ideology,’ *Supranational Criminology*, ed. A. Smeulers and R. Haveman.

<sup>60</sup> C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Penguin Books, 1992); Browning, *The Ordinary Men*; T. Brink, J. Oppenheimer, *Killer images : Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence* (London: Wallflower Press, 2012); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbours. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland, 1941* (London: Arrow Books, 2003).

conformity is crucial for the perpetration of mass violence. It is present in all societies as some amount of it is ‘necessary to the functioning of any social system.’<sup>61</sup> I also consider the question of perpetration from a gender studies perspective, relying on the work of Sjoberg and Gentry, who show how the representation of female perpetrators in media usually reduces them to cliché types of promiscuous, fanatics or sadists – i.e. ‘abnormal’ females, which is largely how they are depicted in cultural memory of the Holodomor.<sup>62</sup>

Cultural memory in this dissertation is understood as texts, rites, and images that preserve memory of the famine and help determine the officially sanctioned reflection on a fateful event.<sup>63</sup> In the second part of this dissertation, which explores the representation of the perpetrators in Ukrainian literature and film, I draw from the work of such Ukrainian literary critics as Dibrova, Slaboshpyts’kyi and Stepula and such interdisciplinary historians as Clark, Shkandrij and Yekelchuk. I analyse the current representation of the perpetrators in the Holodomor Victims Memorial Museum in the context of other memorial sites of mass violence and other museums of totalitarian regime in post-Soviet republics. Finally, I conceptualize the discrepancy between identifiable and memorial traces with the theoretical scaffolding on the memory of traumatic events developed by Adorno and Todorov.

### ***Sources***

Of all the sources I have consulted, the TsDAHOU and HDA SBU archives in Kyiv, Poltava and Zhytomyr provided me with an abundance of material. Central were also the provincial and district archives in Ukraine and the collections of testimonies at the Holodomor Research and Education Center in Toronto and Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia University. Given that most perpetrators of the Holodomor died before the scholarship began to confront the famine freely and directly, I have also relied on the ‘post-memory’ of the famine at the prompting of Hirsch, who agrees that the concept – of the transfer of the memory of the deeply traumatic events, experiences or people between the generations – can be applied in the Holodomor studies.<sup>64</sup>

I have been less successful in accessing archival sources on the 1932-1933 years on the village level, though the district archives in Myrhorod and Khoroshiv revealed identifiable traces of the perpetrators in 1960-1970s. The village museums made the presence of the perpetrators almost

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<sup>61</sup> Stanley Milgram, ‘Nationality and Conformity,’ *Scientific American*, vol. 205, no. 6, 1961, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Leonid Kononovych, *Tema dlia medytatsii* (Lviv: Kal’varia, 2004); Talan, *Rozkolote Nebo*; Vorozhbit, *The Grain Store*.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,’ *New German Critique* 65 (1995), p. 129.

<sup>64</sup> This has been confirmed to the author by Marianne Hirsch at the Mnemonics Summer School at University of Stockholm on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2014.



palpable as many of them were its founders. Overall, I have found substantial new information on the tumultuous lives of the perpetrators in the years preceding the famine and afterwards. As I collected these materials, I saw lost lives, villainy, cowardice and complicity as well as the prolonged suffering of the survivors who often had to live along with (and sometimes marry into) the families of perpetrators. It has been difficult to remain unmoved.

Various published collections of archival documents also helped facilitate research of the perpetrators. The prominent edited collections that include resolutions passed by the Politburo or the TsK KP(b)U on grain procurement, Stalin's correspondence with Kaganovich and Molotov and ODPU reports on the situation on the ground including the letters from the perpetrators themselves, are the voluminous *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni: Dokumenty i materialy, Holodomor 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: dokumenty i materialy* and *Sovetskaïa derevnia glazami VchK-OGPU-NKVD*. One ODPU report to Stalin in 1932, which was published in these collections, was identified by Martin as the key document in understanding the resistance of the village officials in Ukraine against unrealistic grain procurement quotas. This resistance within the party intensified following the III KP(b)U Conference when the quotas were approved and accepted to immediate implementation by republican, provincial and some district officials.<sup>65</sup>

Another valuable source are the corpora of eyewitness testimonies by survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. While some scholars reflect on the impossibilities of bearing witness to a traumatic event,<sup>66</sup> the amount of research using eyewitness testimonies of mass violence is consistently growing,<sup>67</sup> along with a host of fiction and non-fiction works that rely on these accounts for content. The first survivor testimonies of the Holodomor were collected in the aftermath of the Second World War from Ukrainian displaced persons in the West and later in diaspora such as *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* and by the U.S. Commission on the Ukrainian Famine in Washington. No less valuable are major collections published in Ukraine: '*33-i Holod*': *Narodna knyha-Memorial*, *Transformatsiia hromadians'koho suspil'stva, Ukraïns'kyi holokost, Pam'iat narodu, Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertv Holodomoru*, and *Svicha pam'iaty*. The testimonies in the latter two works were collected with a standard questionnaire addressing the question about the perpetrators. Using such a unified questionnaire in assessing oral memory is

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<sup>65</sup> Terry Martin, 'Famine Initiators and Directors: Personal Papers: The 1932-33 Ukrainian Terror: New Documentation and Surveillance and the Thought Process of Stalin', Isajiw W. Wsevolod, ed., *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932-33* (Toronto: UCRDC, 2003), pp. 107-8.

<sup>66</sup> S. Felman, D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>67</sup> Major oral history corpora of testimonies include, among others: publications of the reports by US Congressional-Presidential Commission on the Ukraine Famine; Lidiia Kovalenko and Volodymyr Maniak, eds. *Holod-33. Narodna knyha-memorial* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1991); voluminous *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertv Holodomoru* (2008); *Oral History Program* at Prairie Centre for the Study of Ukrainian Heritage (1992-1993); online collection *Share the Story* by Ukrainian Canadian Congress and Ukrainian World Congress (2008).

essential for a critical analysis of survivor testimonies.

The other obvious source on the perpetrators are their very own accounts – memoirs, diaries, interviews, testimonies during trials and interrogations. Researching perpetrator accounts presents a series of hermeneutic and ethical problems, and using such sources raises the question of how these forms of life writing should be approached. Indeed, we have to consider the intrinsic problem of memoirs as creative acts and deliberate questions of self-censorship and external censorship, factual errors, distortions, omissions, falsifications. Memoirs are political acts too: they are aimed at a specific audience within a specific political context. As such, they can be divided into two groups: recollections written by Soviet citizens published in the West during the Cold War, critical of the Soviet system, and memoirs by upwardly mobile individuals published in the Soviet Union who sought to legitimize the state-sanctioned violence and often presented their accounts as part of a collective experience.

Indeed the life stories of Stakhanovites deal more with public matters than private ones. Fitzpatrick compares these memoirs to *testimonios* – accounts of members of revolutionary movements in Latin America in which individuals are only representatives of a collective experience recording a change in society.<sup>68</sup> In such testimonies the authors often compare their disadvantaged position in the past with a happy present, thus justifying their violence against the victims as a fair struggle or retribution: ‘[we] helped the Communists arrest them [the peasants] and confiscate their property, which had been acquired dishonestly through the efforts of others.’<sup>69</sup>

In an article on the historiography of Soviet memoirs, Kuromiya demonstrates that there is ‘little compelling reason to believe that the memoirs published in the West are more “objective” than Soviet memoirs.’<sup>70</sup> Moreover, official criticism of Stalin’s rule during the Thaw encouraged some perpetrators to critically assess their own involvement. In 1962 Nadia Zahlada wrote about the mistakes of the early thirties in *Ogoniok* (Kuromiya calls such Stakhanovites ‘repentant’), although many others remained silent or defended the necessity of violence (‘die-hards’).<sup>71</sup> Confiscated diaries, letters and suicide notes of the perpetrators, re-discovered in the archives after 1991, confirm most of the published memoirs. For instance, a diary by Zavoloka, a repressed party official from Kyiv involved in grain procurement in 1932-1933, reveals the atmosphere of fear and compliance that is strikingly similar to the memoir by Kravchenko (1947) published in the West during the Cold War.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, the ‘interchangeable’ justification of violence by a collective or

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<sup>68</sup> S. Fitzpatrick, ‘Lives and Times,’ S. Fitzpatrick and Y. Slezkine, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women From 1917 to the The Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> A. Solovieva, ‘Sent by the Komsomol,’ Fitzpatrick Slezkine, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution*, p. 238.

<sup>70</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, ‘Soviet Memoirs as a Historical Source’, *Russian History* 12, 2/4 (1985), p. 294.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 322.

<sup>72</sup> Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: the Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (London: Robert Hale,



shared mentality in the memoirs by Stakhanovites can also be found in the recollection of grain procurement by Lev Kopelev.

Nonetheless, such memoirs have key limitations as historical sources. To address them, I conduct four tests as suggested by Browning: the self-interest test, the vividness test, the possibility test and the probability test.<sup>73</sup> In other words, of prime interest are the statements in the testimony made against the self-interest of the perpetrator, the events described in greater detail, and the claims that can be confirmed in other sources. According to Gerlach, a scholar should use such testimonies as supportive evidence together with many other sources.<sup>74</sup> Should the source pass the four tests, a degree of trust is established which reduces the risk of a symbolic re-enactment of violence by accepting the authority of the perpetrators 'to convey or to establish common knowledge.'<sup>75</sup> Accepting the epistemic authority of the perpetrators in their account of the events poses another risk. Schmidt points out that such acceptance entails empowering the account of the perpetrator or recognising their rational agency; therefore, she counsels, researchers should beware of adopting the perpetrators' points of reference.<sup>76</sup>

Engaging with a variety of sources on the perpetrators more often than not includes assessing their testimonies in one or another format: an interview, a diary, a memoir, letters or court testimony. When approaching perpetrator testimony as a discursive practice, Schmidt distinguishes between external and internal truth – i.e. reconstruction of external events and personal account of experience. 'The interruptions, the silence, and even the flaws within Holocaust survivor testimonies are symptomatic expressions of the internal truth'<sup>77</sup> of the events they witnessed. Perpetrator testimony might lack that perspective. Schmidt notes that their non-witnessing, lack of internal truth and silence in the testimony represents a 'constitutive element of genocide.'<sup>78</sup>

### ***Plan of Dissertation***

In the first chapter I will place the lower rank perpetrators within the mechanism of the famine from district to village level and explain what acts can be regarded as perpetration. I will further explore, by using typology of perpetrators of mass violence, their motivation for participation. The mechanism will be explained further by looking into the composition and

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1947); V. Borysenko et al, eds. *Rozsekrechena Pam'iat': Holodomor 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini v dokumentakh GPU-NKVD* (Kyiv: Vydnychi Dim Stylis, 2007), pp. 552-572.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Browning, 'Perpetrator Testimony. Another Look on Adolph Eichmann,' *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 2004), pp. 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Christian Gerlach, 'The Eichmann Interrogations in Holocaust Historiography,' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 3 (winter 2001), pp. 429, 434, 442.

<sup>75</sup> Schmidt, 'Perpetrators' Knowledge,' p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 99, 101.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

activities of the local search brigades, institutional affiliation of its members and *buksyrni bryhady* (tugboat brigades), as the prime agents in removing provisions from the victims. The variety of roles of participation such as providing intelligence (informers and village correspondents), support (spouses) and preventing victims from accessing food (field guards) will be addressed too.

Throughout this chapter, the important issue of their life after the famine will be touched upon: how participation affected their later life, what possible choices they did or did not have and how they reflected on past experience.

The second chapter provides two detailed case studies of the perpetrators in villages. Firstly, the perpetrators are identified – their numbers and roles. Their testimonies, where available, are read by using Browning's methodology. Their participation is explored chronologically to demonstrate how they became involved and whether or not they influenced the life of their communities after the famine. One village is Popivka in Poltava oblast' – the very village in which Soviet dissident Lev Kopelev procured grain as a young reporter. The second village, Toporyshche in Zhytomyr oblast', in theory presents a different case – a multiethnic community in a district that suffered considerably fewer casualties during the famine (30% or 2,200 in Popivka; 8% or approximately 100 in Toporyshche). Further analysis, however, reveals that enforcement of the famine and the perpetrators' experience are essentially the same.

The second part of the dissertation on the representation of the rank-and-file perpetrators in Ukrainian cultural memory, consists of five chapters: prose (Chapter III), poetry (Chapter IV), drama (Chapter V), film (Chapter VI) and museum (Chapter VII). All the works subject to analysis were chosen based on their reach to a mass audience – i.e. their presence in cultural memory of the famine. I explore the representation of the famine in prose, poetry and drama according to three distinct modalities based on the location of the agency of the perpetrator: 1) officially approved Soviet works in which the perpetrators embrace their agency; 2) those produced by dissidents and circulated through *samvydav* and *tamvydav*, with a more nuanced or dispersed agency; 3) Ukrainian diaspora and by post-Soviet Ukrainian authors who represent the perpetrators with displaced agency – as the alien Other or deviant local types that are influenced by the Other. While the chapter on film is split into an analysis of the fictive and the documentary, it follows a similar approach of differentiating between the aforementioned modalities of Soviet, dissident and diaspora/post-Soviet narratives. The final chapter on the museum investigates how the rank-and file perpetrators are represented in the current exhibition of the Holodomor Memorial museum in Kyiv. Based on analysis conducted, possible options for inclusion of the rank-and-file perpetrators in its narrative are suggested.

These chapters are united by a common subject – the rank-and-file perpetrators of the 1932-

1933 famine in history and memory. I argue that the perpetrators of the famine on the ground were more often than not ordinary people and ordinary Ukrainians. In approaching the perpetrators of the famine, it is crucial to differentiate between the actors and their deeds. Indeed, reducing them to an impersonal and anonymous 'they' does not bring us closer to understanding how people born in the same thatched huts came to kill or facilitate the deaths of their neighbours.

## PART I

### Chapter I

#### The Mechanism of the Holodomor on the Ground

One intelligent writer on state matters argued fairly that if you have to commit an atrocity in order to achieve a political aim, then you have to do it most eagerly and fast, because people would not tolerate cruelties for long.

*Lenin, in a letter to Viacheslav Molotov, 1922*<sup>79</sup>

This chapter focuses on the place of the rank-and-file perpetrators in the mechanism of the famine; it asks how the famine was possible on the ground level and who were the people involved. The analysis will be developed by outlining the acts of perpetration; identifying the actors and suggesting a typology through which to understand them; and exploring the role of the district officials through their initiation into the mechanism of the famine in the second half of 1932. Their demographics will be addressed, and a relevant case study provided. The analysis will then proceed with an examination of search brigades and their institutional composition: village officials and collective farmers, KNS, Komsomol, party plenipotentiaries and teachers. It will focus on tugboat brigades that had a devastating effect on peasants, as many survivors testify. Finally, the importance of auxiliary roles in the mechanism will be discussed, including informers like village correspondents, field guards and spouses.

#### ***1. The Acts of Perpetration***

Both Ukrainian and Western historians of the 1932-1933 famine argue that the following legislative provisions led to the famine<sup>80</sup> and made the men and women who were engaged in their enforcement complicit in mass violence:

1. Collective and individual farmers had to surrender grain and renounce the right to retain any for their own consumption, including the seeds. The state still collected meat, milk, eggs and other produce from collective and individual farmers.

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<sup>79</sup> 'Letter to Molotov,' 19 March 1922, in Richard Pipes, ed., *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 152-3.

<sup>80</sup> Sergei Maksudov, 'Victory over the Peasantry', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 2001, pp. 188-189; Shapoval and Vasyl'iev, eds. *Komandyry velykoho holodu*.

2. The homes of all peasants could be searched arbitrarily; in the case that grain was found, peasants could be persecuted for theft.
3. Collective farms, villages and entire districts could be ‘blacklisted’ and, in actuality, turned into ghettos. The supply of any goods including salt, gas and matches would be stopped, all available foodstuffs confiscated and removed, commerce and communications banned.
4. From 20<sup>th</sup> November 1932 meat procurements were demanded fifteen months in advance from the collective farms and from individual farmers who failed to meet grain procurement targets, leaving almost half the rural population without any livestock.<sup>81</sup> All the grain previously distributed to collective farmers for their work was ordered to be returned; all grain in the villages was confiscated and credited toward procurement.<sup>82</sup>
5. The peasants, when found in the fields, were prosecuted under the Law from 7<sup>th</sup> August 1932 for ‘pilfering.’
6. Commerce in food was banned until the procurement quotas met. (They were never met.)<sup>83</sup>
7. Train travel for peasants was restricted.

The mechanism of the famine entailed the cooperation of many institutions of the state to remove all foodstuffs from the peasants and to ensure that the starving did not have access to the storehouses or the fields or a means of escape from the villages. The people involved in the implementation of these legislative provisions on the ground, I argue, should be regarded as perpetrators of the Holodomor. A detailed study of all perpetrators in reference to the aforementioned provisions would be beyond the scope of this work. I focus my attention on the people involved in enforcing the first five points above: those who conducted searches, removed foodstuffs and valuables, denied available resources to the starving, and engaged in other activities such as denouncing, instigating or perpetrating violence.

The house searches that loom large in the oral memory of the famine were conducted by

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<sup>81</sup> In 1931, 88% of peasants in Ukraine had livestock; in 1932-1933 around 50% peasants did. See *Narodne gospodarstvo USRR* (Kyiv, 1935), p. 252.

<sup>82</sup> Feliks Rudych, Ruslan Pyrih, eds. *Holod 1932-1933 rokiv na Ukraini: Ochyma istorykiv, movoiu dokumentiv* (Kyiv: Vyd-vo politychnoi literatury Ukrainy, 1990), pp. 250-4, 278-9, 296-9.

<sup>83</sup> Iurii A. Moshkov, *Zernovaia problema v gody sploshnoi kollektivizatsii sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR 1929-1932 gg.* (Moscow, 1966).

search brigades. Soviet historians characterise the members of the brigades in the following way: ‘the best, leading collective farmers ... who revealed acts of theft and hidden bread and helped to maintain grain procurement.’<sup>84</sup> Eighty percent of survivors in the Poltava oblast’ commented that the search brigades consisted of local or *svoi* (our own) people, who included collective farmers and village officials – usually the heads of the village councils or the chairmen of collective farms.<sup>85</sup> For most of them, participating in collectivization and dekulakization served as a precursor to participation in the famine. In other words, they were already habituated to violence. Local officials, in their turn, received their orders from district officials and liaised with security services who helped to enforce policies in cases of insurgency or the failure of local officials.

## ***2. Identifying the Perpetrators***

The timeframe of the famine should not be limited to the late 1932 – early 1933. The Holodomor would not have been possible in a vacuum. Its perpetrators had previous experience of collective violence: for some, *prodrazverstka* in 1921 was formative, while for most, grain procurement in 1928-1929 and the event of collectivization were decisive. Collectivization saw Soviet officials and activists in every village ordered to dekulakize a specified number of peasants. This number was dictated by the district, that in 1932-1933 ordered to procure a specified amount of grain or other produce in lieu of grain. That is, these numbers based not on previous quantitative assessments of how many peasants were indeed ‘kulaks’, whatever that meant, on how much grain was actually harvested.<sup>86</sup> What mattered was simply what was *expected*.

Removing land and other property from private ownership, displacement or deportation, and conducting various repressions and executions were referred to as ‘the third front’ in public discourse and were described in militaristic language: ‘mobilization,’ ‘soldiers,’ ‘offensive,’ ‘enemies’ etc.<sup>87</sup> This war was fought not in a distant trench, but in the villages of a largely agrarian country. This state-sanctioned violence, which led to what we would today characterize as gross criminal violations of human rights, unfolded gradually and progressively. Once engaged in these activities for years, it became more difficult for perpetrators to recede from ‘the front.’ Like the subjects in Milgram’s experiment on obedience, they subjected the victims with the highest shock only after a progressive series of smaller shocks<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Ivan Trifonov, *Ocherki istorii klassovoi bor’by v SSSR, 1921-1937* (Moscow, 1960), p. 255.

<sup>85</sup> O. Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Poltavs’ka oblast’* (Poltava: Oriiana, 2008), pp. 916-1188.

<sup>86</sup> First Secretary of the TsK KP(b)U Stanislav Kosior in his speech at the TsK plenum in February 1933 confirmed that data on the 1932 harvest could not be disclosed. See TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 400, ark. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, p. 85.

<sup>88</sup> S. Milgram, ‘The Dilemma of Obedience,’ *The Phi Delta Kappan* 55, no. 9 (1974), p. 604.

Their roles were not limited to the forceful removal of foodstuffs during the grain procurement in 1932-1933; they also included preventing peasants from leaving villages or obtaining food elsewhere, instigating violence, reporting and providing intelligence on the starving peasants and concealing the truth of events as they unfolded. Many perpetrators in the famine did not see themselves as perpetrators due to the fact that the mechanism of the famine was a composite of non-lethal and lethal functions that together contributed to mass murder. In most cases, a perpetrator had a specific purpose to fulfil based on their job. Serving as a watchman at a granary in a village is typically a mundane job; during the famine, it involved actively denying emaciated villagers grain, which led to organised starvation. Given that many perpetrators acted in the positions assigned to them by the state, I will explore their roles based on their institutional affiliation.

Empowered or instructed to carry out a task, officials or village activists did not necessarily have an intention to cause harm or death. Their work was sanctioned behind the screen of collectivization, grain procurement and so called ‘class war’ in the village. They were activists, officials, conductors, guards, plenipotentiaries, teachers, field watchers. They may have felt that their function in the mechanism of the famine did not change anything or that there was little point in objecting. Or that their involvement was part of a great transformation of the country. Or perhaps they could not feel anything at all. Although some of their supporting roles may fall short of criminal responsibility, their importance in contributing to the deaths of millions of men, women, and children cannot be underestimated. Even the role of bystanders needs to be confronted as well. Perpetrators observe the reaction of others. If bystanders remain passive, perpetrators may consider their actions are justified.

Female perpetrators often had similar tasks to their male counterparts, but their gender also determined distinctive roles. War is traditionally a male-dominated domain, and the ‘bread front’ was no exception. The perpetrators were accordingly expected to possess qualities usually perceived as masculine: ‘courageous’, ‘strong’, ‘brave’ etc. At the same time, women who opposed the state during collectivization and the famine were called ‘backward’, ‘dark’ and ‘ignorant.’ In an attempt to prove themselves as capable and trustworthy ‘soldiers’, female perpetrators were reportedly crueler than their male colleagues. They often dealt with the most vulnerable. Some female members in search brigades sought to discover hidden foodstuffs by talking to children, who would be more likely to disclose this information to them. As one survivor recalls: ‘A woman and two men came to us. [While the men searched the house,] she used to ask us, the little ones, so many questions.’<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> P. I. Haman et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zherty Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Cherkas'ka*

In a conservative village, many young women likely encountered significant pressure to obey orders from their superiors whom few could defy, even if many initially had a difficult time when ordered to confiscate foodstuffs for the first time. One female teacher, sent to the countryside in 1930 and ordered to dekulakize the peasants, was violently sick on the first day of her participation. Yet she eventually got used to the system. Her partner, a teacher in a similar position, grew increasingly concerned about whether she became brutalised like him.<sup>90</sup> According to Staub, perpetrators thus join the ‘continuum of destruction’ and accept their new behaviour as normal: ‘Institutions are changed or created to serve violence. The society is transformed. In the end, there may be a reversal of morality.’<sup>91</sup>

While there were 112,000 Communists in the countryside and half a million Komsomol, we cannot assume that they all participated in the requisition of food as part of a tugboat brigade, as some historians of the famine tend to suggest.<sup>92</sup> In 1932 many Communists in rural areas indeed held positions of power – 7,500 chaired collective farms, 5,300 were brigade leaders, 15,000 in state-owned cooperation network – but 36,000 were ordinary collective farmers with a further 6,000 not having any relation to collective farms.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, in October 1932 senior Soviet official Gapeev noted at the TsK KP(b)U plenum that out of 51,789 Komsomol sent to the village, almost 40% left the countryside within one month.<sup>94</sup> Hence not all members of organizations or institutions that were expected to enforce grain procurement, apart from trained perpetrators, obeyed the orders.

While most people are naturally influenced by orders from figures of authority or the expectations and behaviour of collectives, some choose not to progress on a continuum of destructiveness, as Milgram makes clear and demonstrated in the report discovered by Martin.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, during the Holodomor some collective farmers refused to search the houses of their neighbours. As a 19-year-old collective farmer, Olena Dun’, from Kam’iani Potoky in Kremenchuk district recalled: ‘Once the village council sent me to an old woman. There I found a hungry woman crying. I was like her myself; why would I look for whatever she had? You can put me on trial tomorrow, but I won’t go and I didn’t go.’<sup>96</sup>

It is the agency of the perpetrators that most scholars of collective violence and

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*oblast’* (Cherkasy: Vyd. Chabanenko Iu., 2008), p. 918.

<sup>90</sup> T. Belaiia, ‘Ia tol’ko boius’, kak by serdtse tvoe ne zagrubelo...’, *Sobesednik*, 1988, no. 21, pp. 12-13.

<sup>91</sup> E. Staub, ‘The Roots of Evil: Social Conditions, Culture, Personality, and Basic Human Needs,’ *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1999, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 183.

<sup>92</sup> S. Maksudov, ‘Victory Over the Peasantry,’ 190; Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*; the documentary film *Harvest of Despair* (1984), discussed later in this work. The number is first mentioned in *Sotsialistychna perebudova i rozvytok sil’s’koho hospodarstva Ukrainy RSR, vol. 1, 1917-1937 rr.* (Kyiv, 1967), pp. 462-3.

<sup>93</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 176.

<sup>94</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 395, ark. 147.

<sup>95</sup> S. Milgram, ‘Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority,’ *Human Relations* 18 (February), 1965, p. 72.

<sup>96</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, p. 1036.



international crimes base their typology on.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the most detailed, inclusive and overarching typology based on the motivational factor is one developed by Smeulers.<sup>98</sup> Her typology can be applied to the Holodomor, as I illustrate in the table below. Depending on the context, individuals can have multiple motivations:

Group	Definition	As applied to the Holodomor
Professional	Trained to enforce policies (sometimes with violence)	Security services (the DPU), police, and in some cases, the army.
Profiteer and careerist	Benefits from participation	Rural and urban Communists, village and district level officials, Komsomol, collective farmers, teachers and others who use their position of power to benefit financially, settle scores with neighbours or advance their Party career through deployment in the village.
Fanatic	Driven by ideology; Believes victims are necessary 'for the greater good'	Local and urban Communists, Komsomols and collective farmers. Kopelev calls them 'true believers' who maintained that violence was justified; the starving were somehow to blame, and sacrifice was needed for the greater good.
Sadist and criminal	Uses situation for fulfilment of their sadistic deviation	Officials, plenipotentiaries and activists that tortured, raped and murdered the victims.
Follower	Majority of perpetrators who follow orders or comply	Most collective farmers, officials and plenipotentiaries. When confronted during the search about his actions leading to the deaths of children, one perpetrator replied: 'Well, and what else ... that's it, we are sent and we are doing it.' <sup>99</sup>
Compromised	Vulnerable people, including children, who participate because of explicit or implicit coercion, threats or aggressive indoctrination (particularly in the case of children or teenagers)	Men and women who feared for their lives or the lives of their families, young Komsomols and pioneers.  As the survivor, Prokip Luk'ianets', explained: 'They faced a choice to collect a certain amount ... or to be thrown out. Everybody wanted to live. ... The ones who searched were ordinary people like us.' <sup>100</sup>

### ***3. District Officials or 'The Fate of Agriculture Is Decided There'*<sup>101</sup>**

The mechanism of the Holodomor on the ground included district officials – namely the RPKs and plenipotentiaries who leveraged the orders from the top to the village level. Though the

<sup>97</sup> See, for instance, Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, ix-x; M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> Smeulers, 'Perpetrators of international crimes ...' p. 237.

<sup>99</sup> Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, p. 980.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 918.

<sup>101</sup> From the speech of Yalov, the secretary of the Rubezhany RPK at III Conference of KP(b)U on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1932. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 222.

directives on grain procurement usually came from the republican leadership, district officials were the ones who would inform and instruct the village councils, collective farms and Communists in the country. At times the orders came from the elite leadership of the Soviet state: in late December 1932, for instance, Kaganovich met the leaders of the Voznesens'k and Zinov'iev districts in Odesa oblast' in his train car after receiving telegrams from Stalin approving harsh methods.<sup>102</sup> To explore the actions of district officials in more detail, I proceed with a discussion of the party conference and purges that initiated participation in the Holodomor; demographics; and the case of Andrii Richyts'kyi.

### ***3.1 A Watershed: III KP(b)U Conference and the Purges***

While district officials were not new to enforcing unpopular policies, their involvement in the Holodomor started with the adoption of quotas for the 1932-1933 grain procurement campaign. These targets were introduced at the III KP(b)U conference on 6-9<sup>th</sup> July 1932 in the Kharkiv Opera house. The importance of this event in the Holodomor's chronology has been emphasised by many scholars, including Kul'chyts'kyi and Shapoval.<sup>103</sup> Yet it is subject to only two specialised studies.<sup>104</sup> Molotov and Kaganovich attended the conference to ensure that grain procurement quotas were accepted by the republican and the district officials. During the conference, however, several of the eighteen RPK secretaries who gave presentations – there were thirty-three speakers altogether – voiced their opposition to the quotas. Moreover, they warned of the famine and listed the policies causing it, despite deprecation and chastising from colleagues and superiors. All such unwarranted remarks were also removed from the plenum's stenogramme before it was published, so officially there was no resistance to grain procurement within the party, nor was there starvation in the countryside.<sup>105</sup> The significance of this event is even more striking when one compares the uncensored script with the uncensored script of the IV party conference eight months later. After all the policies responsible for the famine had been implemented, in February 1933 district officials voiced no objections.

The conference in July 1932 reveals a number of key details about district officials. It was attended by 252 delegates, of which 158 or 62.7% were RPK secretaries.<sup>106</sup> In his opening words, the first secretary of the TsK KP(b)U Kosior admitted that there was starvation in many districts,

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<sup>102</sup> V. Vasyl'iev, 'Tsina holodnoho khliba. Polityka kerivnytsva SRSR i USRR v 1932-1933 rr.' in Shapoval and Vasyl'iev, eds. *Komandyry velykoho holodu*, p. 57.

<sup>103</sup> Kul'chyts'kyi, 'Historical Experience: Vital Today', 7; Yu. Shapoval, 'III konferentsia KP(b)U: Proloh trahedii holodu' in in Shapoval and Vasyl'iev, eds. *Komandyry velykoho holodu*.

<sup>104</sup> Iu. Babko, M. Bortnichuk, *Tretia Vseukrainska konferentsiia KP(b)U* (Kyiv: Politvydav Ukrainy, 1968); Yu. Shapoval, 'III konferentsia KP(b)U ... '.

<sup>105</sup> *Tretia konferentsiia KP(b)U, 6-9 lypnia 1932 r. Stenografichnyi zvit* (Kharkiv, 1932).

<sup>106</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 385, ark. 6.

but stressed that the priority was to procure grain and that peasants had to give up all supplies to the state. He complained that district secretaries who allowed torture and searches of the homes of collective farmers only damaged the Party's reputation: 'they conducted terror and violations only abnormal people or staunch counter-revolutionaries are capable of.'<sup>107</sup> He deemed incorrect and counter-revolutionary 'the theory of the unrealistic procurement plan' and emphasised that the 'kulak' should be 'burnt out.'<sup>108</sup> He also noted that he and his colleagues could not have been aware of the situation in all individual districts (indeed, there were over six hundred of them). Thus they re-distributed quotas in such a way that some districts had six times the original quota to compensate for the absence of grain elsewhere, which in turn devastated them. In other words, Kosior's described a situation on the ground 'in the whole of Ukraine' marked by widespread violence, with the famine already underway and with defiance among district secretaries, whom he blamed for the dire situation in the republic.<sup>109</sup>

Despite rather discouraging remarks by the first secretary of KP(b)U, some RPK secretaries spoke out. For instance, Amcheslavs'kyi from the Skvira RPK reminded Kosior that district officials informed the TsK KP(b)U of 'excesses' on the ground. In Amcheslavs'kyi's district, three district party plenipotentiaries had 'worked' (Richyts'kyi, Kulishev and Kryvenko) prior to his arrival. They dekulakized over 5,000 poor peasants and drove many others into destitution.<sup>110</sup> The Smila RPK secretary, Fomin, noted that some government officials made matters worse with their visits. So did many party plenipotentiaries who contributed nothing to grain procurement because they did not know the district. Drabiv district secretary Sherstov was more direct: one tugboat brigade in his district organised a mass beating of the collective farmers, removed all seed funds and forced farmers into buying state loans they could not afford. He also informed the audience that starving farmers could not work in the fields and that there was no food left in the district. Sherstov illustrated the absurdity of the orders from the top when he recounted how he had been instructed to procure cabbages and carrots for dispatch to Leningrad in the Olevs'k district, which was 'covered in woods and stones, where vegetables are not cultivated.' When Sherstov had failed to comply, he was interrogated by the DPU.<sup>111</sup>

Although Molotov and Kaganovich dismissed all criticisms at the time as 'whining' and 'opportunism,' they later discussed them with Stalin and commented that party leaders in Ukraine were more obedient than expected.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, feeling the firm approach of Molotov and

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<sup>107</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 50.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, ark. 29.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, ark. 31, 33, 37, 42.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, ark. 198.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, ark. 209.

<sup>112</sup> Pyrih, ed., *Holodomor*, pp. 229-32.

Kaganovich, republican leaders proceeded to blame *raionshchiki* (district secretaries) for the devastation in the countryside. Some district secretaries themselves, like Kulish from Konotop, accused Sherstov and others of ‘attempting to hide one’s incapability.’ Such wording is reminiscent of the pressure put on Browning’s ‘ordinary men’ when ordered to participate in a massacre.<sup>113</sup> Ultimately the delegates passed the resolution that bound them to the ‘unconditional fulfilment’ of the grain procurement plan.

Passing the resolution, however, did not equal enforcing it. Many district secretaries in fact evaded grain procurement. According to a report by Veger, for example, the Dnipropetrovs’k provincial committee turned a blind eye to the Novo-Troits’k RPK, which did not adopt grain procurement targets in August 1932. When the party cells in the district voted against the imposed grain quotas, the RPK informed the provincial committee, which did not respond.<sup>114</sup> More generally, the ODPU report that Stalin received about the reluctance of the rank-and-file officials to adopt the plan revealed widespread defiance. It prompted Stalin to write to Kaganovich on the ‘terrible’ state of affairs in Ukraine:

... They say that in some parts of Ukraine (it seems, Kyiv and Dnipropetrovs’k) around 50 district committees have spoken out against the grain requisition plan, considering it unrealistic. In other district committees, it appears that the situation is no better. What is this? This is not the Party, not a parliament; this is a caricature of a parliament...<sup>115</sup>

The report addressed expressions of doubt or outright defiance to grain procurement in 199 or 33% of districts in the Ukrainian republic from August to November 1932, following the meetings of district secretaries with officials and collective farm managers from the villages in their respective districts. But over 60% of RPKs proceeded with grain procurement. One secretary explained in detail how obedience to authority worked: ‘We could not say a word at the [oblast’ Party committee] meeting. Despite our explanations that the quota is high and the average yield is exaggerated, Comrade Cherniavs’kyi [the secretary’s superior at the time] asked only one question: ‘So do you think the oblast’ plan is possible or not?’ – I had to reply that it was possible and to agree to fulfilment.’ Some questioned party policies altogether: ‘They could make mistakes in 10 or 20 districts, but to make mistakes in all districts in Ukraine – this means that something is wrong.’<sup>116</sup> Other secretaries argued that acceptance does not mean enforcement, and warned of leaving their positions and the Party altogether. What was undoubtedly disturbing for the Soviet

<sup>113</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 55-70.

<sup>114</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 406, ark. 156.

<sup>115</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 298.

<sup>116</sup> Udod and Lozyts’kyi, *Holodomor 1932-1933 rokiv*, p. 134.

leadership was that the key people in the vertical of the executive branch of the state and the Party could no longer be trusted to carry out the policies in the countryside.<sup>117</sup>

This dissent among the rank-and-file was swiftly crushed. In October 1932, the Ukrainian Party underwent a purge aimed at both the district and village levels. At the plenum of the TsK KP(b)U a senior party official, Manuil's'kyi, spoke of the necessity of Party purges in the countryside and claimed that the districts lagging behind in grain procurement were led by 'class enemies.' At the same time he acknowledged that many good district secretaries were disheartened: 'their arms dropped,' he said, comparing them to soldiers discouraged with defeat. He therefore argued that, as in the army, they 'should be temporarily taken to the rear, given a cigarette, and [allowed] to pull themselves together and then brought back to the battle.' The republican leadership had to issue a clear directive to the district commissions on purges to 'take into consideration the difficult situation, the cases of malnutrition in a number of districts, the endemics in whole villages.' The purges had to be conducted without specific targets, unlike dekulakization:

... we should not despair if some rural districts... would have only 10% Party members left. There will be at least 20% wreckers among them ... The purges should reveal a new *aktiv*, which was raised during spring sowing campaign this year and proved to be better than a year ago. That is the aim of the purge.<sup>118</sup>

At the time, local purging commissions were to be staffed with Communists who joined the party before 1929. Manuil's'kyi noted that during collectivization many 'unreliable types' were admitted into the Party, whereas those who served in the Red Army were considered even more reliable than the DPU. Molotov, who returned to Ukraine in October 1932 as the head of the extraordinary commission to help grain procurement, oversaw the purges.<sup>119</sup> The head of the DPU in Ukraine, Balyts'kyi, reported that 11,000 were arrested in relation to procurement within the first four months of grain requisition campaign. Over the course of the following month (between 15<sup>th</sup> November and 15<sup>th</sup> December 1932), a further 16,000 were arrested. This figure included 2,260 from collective farm management, including 409 collective farm heads. 108 or 0.6% of 16,000 were sentenced to death.<sup>120</sup> The total number of arrests in connection to grain procurement in 1932 was 27,000.<sup>121</sup> Those who retained their positions received regular telegrams from oblast' committees demanding the fulfilment of quotas within 5 or 10 days. In some oblast's the DPU servicemen in

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<sup>117</sup> HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 25 (1951), spr. 3, ark. 4-68.

<sup>118</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 407, ark. 188-191.

<sup>119</sup> Yu. Shapoval, "'Povelitel'naia neobkhodimost': god 1932." *Den'*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2002.

<sup>120</sup> RGASPI, f. 81, op. 3, spr. 215, ark. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Borysenko, ed., *Rozsekrechena pam'iat*, pp. 428-9.

their full uniform would visit collective farms and insist that management to fulfil the quotas.<sup>122</sup>

Was everyone who failed to fulfil procurement quotas purged or put on trial? While there is no quantitative analysis on the subject, the highly publicised show trials of district officials offer insight into what one could potentially expect for not reaching grain procurement quotas set for a district. In the case of Orikhiv, for instance, 16 district officials were tried in late 1932 for failing to meet the grain procurement target, which they argued was unrealistic. Some of them reportedly pressured the management of local communes and collective farms to leave some grain behind for forage, seeds and other funds. None of them pleaded guilty, despite the pressure put on them by Skrypnyk, the Commissioner of Education at the time, who demanded them all to be sentenced to execution by firing squad.<sup>123</sup> Despite his efforts, only one official was sentenced to death; two were pardoned, and the rest received various terms in camps. Shortly after the sentences were announced publicly, the death sentence was changed to imprisonment, and all of them were released by 1935.<sup>124</sup> Most continued to work for the government and later retired.

When the case was re-examined in 1964, all the witnesses who were also involved in grain procurement at the time confirmed that the 1932 plan was impossible to fulfill.<sup>125</sup> They described how accused officials deployed trusted plenipotentiaries to oversee the removal of all grain from the storehouses, organised house searches to confiscate ‘private supplies’ and organised additional threshing of straw. As this re-examination took place during the Thaw, some witnesses noted that these efforts led to the death of many peasants in the district – a fact later confirmed by the testimonies of the survivors, archival records and demographers.<sup>126</sup> The witnesses, who were themselves perpetrators at the district and village levels, had no convictions; they were otherwise ordinary citizens with families and mostly local or from other parts of Ukraine. Many were not even Communists. One witness, Gavriil Masliuk, who testified against the accused in 1932, openly reflected on the risk of repression in 1932 thirty years later: ‘For falling negligibly short of this or that requirement, [they] *could* expel any district employee from the Party or remove them from work.’<sup>127</sup>

In other words, this show trial served its purpose. Held at a cinema theatre similar to the infamous SVU show trial in 1930, the trial intimidated district officials and caused some to fear for their lives. But were they compromised perpetrators, as some historians suggest?<sup>128</sup> Indeed: if the

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<sup>122</sup> RGASPI, f. 81, op. 3, spr. 215, ark. 11.

<sup>123</sup> HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 25 (1951), spr. 3, ark. 198.

<sup>124</sup> HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 25 (1951), spr. 3, ark. 200.

<sup>125</sup> Vasyl'iev, Werth and Kokin, eds. *Partiino-Radians'ke kerivnytstvo*, pp. 176-205.

<sup>126</sup> O. Starukh et al, eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zherty Holodomoru 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini. Zaporiz'ka Oblast'* (Zaporizzhia: Dyke pole, 2008), pp. 958-961.

<sup>127</sup> Vasyl'iev, Werth and Kokin, eds. *Partiino-Radians'ke kerivnytstvo*, p. 203.

<sup>128</sup> Borysenko, ed. *Svicha pam'iaty: Usna istoria ...*, 30; Conquest, *Znyva skorboty*, pp. 188, 192, 199.

officials arraigned at the show trial received milder sentences than initially expected – ultimately, they all survived after spending 1.5 years in Siberia constructing a railway – and if the chances of facing a firing squad were 0.6% provided one was persecuted, then how accurate is it to characterize district officials as compromised into perpetration, especially when the risk of such punishment paled in comparison to certain death by starvation?

One of the convicted, the secretary of the Orikhiv RPK, Golovin, provides an answer to this question. Upon receiving a ‘difficult’ quota, he went to the oblast’ committee with the RVK secretary in a bid to reduce it. They were ordered to return ‘to execute the grain procurement plan under all circumstances. As disciplined and devoted Communists, we did everything we could to fulfill it.’ Acknowledging that the procurement of grain had left the district without any supplies in the summer of 1932, Golovin mentions that repressions for district officials like him only started in November 1932, upon the arrival of Molotov and Kaganovich to Ukraine: ‘An assault on the Communist cadre started at once. In a mere week, they put the Party and Soviet leadership of several rural districts on trial.’ Indeed, by that time Golovin was in charge of a construction of a plant in Nikopol. In other words, his obedience preceded the purges and his removal from work in grain procurement did not prevent him from working elsewhere. In 1935 he was released under the VTsIK directive on amnesty for those ‘who committed crimes in the countryside’ and under Article 58-14 in particular.<sup>129</sup>

Obedience to orders out of fear of severe punishment cannot explain the perpetration of Holodomor in places like Orikhiv, as those who ended up implementing the policy on the ground accepted the unrealistic quotas before the trial took place. It is conceivable that the relentless execution of orders by Orikhiv district officials and many others stemmed from obedience *to authority*, in accordance with Milgram’s theory. Approaching this notion as a by-product of evolution, Milgram explains obedience to authority as a ‘deeply ingrained behavioral tendency’ to comply with the directives of superiors, despite the fact that their actions violate moral norms and other people’s right to life.<sup>130</sup> As Milgram demonstrated in his experiments, two thirds of any group obey the orders of ‘authority’ to inflict extreme pain on the victims even without external coercive force. In the case of the Holodomor, many district officials, and village officials alongside them, accepted the unrealistic grain procurement plans and proceeded to execute it not out of fear. Rather, they demonstrated the notions that Milgram calls ‘loyalty, duty, discipline’ – something Golovin and many other witnesses stressed in their testimonies. In his words, they were ‘disciplined and devoted Communists.’<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Vasylyev, Werth and Kokin, eds. *Partiino-Radians’ke kerivnytstvo*, pp. 177-180.

<sup>130</sup> S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: Experimental View* (New York: HarperPerennial, ModernThought, 2009).

<sup>131</sup> Vasylyev, Werth and Kokin, eds. *Partiino-Radians’ke kerivnytstvo*, p. 178.

Insights drawn from Milgram's work might offer an even more sophisticated explanation of the behaviour of the district and village officials. His repeated experiments demonstrate that compliance is greater when the subject who is instructed to give the actor/victim an electric shock does not see and hear them. Yet compliance is as low as 30% when the subject has to touch the victim. If the subjects have auxiliary roles that do not directly involve inflicting pain, obedience is almost total. Likewise, when the subjects are part of the group instructed to deny the orders to inflict pain, disobedience is nearly total. In the case of the Holodomor, most district officials were shielded from the starving peasantry by both time and space. Ordering the removal of food from homes or cordoning off villages was temporally removed from the effects of such orders – from the actual deaths of the victims. But some understood their role clearly – it is not for nothing that most district officials demonstrated a reluctance to work on the ground, as we shall see in Chapter Two.

### ***3.2 Demographics***

District officials that retained their positions were remunerated for their service during the famine. Each RPK consisted of over a dozen secretaries for each area of work – from district planning to healthcare and propaganda. Along with the district prosecutor, the district judge, the editor of the district newspaper, the police and the DPU – there were over 34 categories of 'top district officials' with dependants that were put in 'the first category' of distribution in 1933.<sup>132</sup> This position meant that their rations included a daily 800 grams of baked bread (400g for dependants) as well as monthly amounts of cereal, pasta, herring, sugar, preserves, oil, confectionary, cigars 'of high quality', soap, etc.<sup>133</sup> The districts were also organised according to their economic and strategic importance, i.e. whether they were the site of heavy industry, sugar production etc. The total number of officials with dependants in the districts of the top category in 1933 was 30,834.<sup>134</sup>

The personal files of 125 Communists at the RPKs in 12 *okruhy* (administrative units) in 1930 reveal the following demographics: 96.5% male, most with only primary education, from the working class, with an average of 9 years of party membership. Some were Red Army veterans. Women were exclusively secretaries of women affairs departments, and their wages were lower compared to their male colleagues, an average of 100 rubles against 149.5 rubles respectively.<sup>135</sup> With a few notable exceptions, women do not play crucial roles as elite political leaders at times of

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<sup>132</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6397, ark. 22.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, ark. 17.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, ark. 19.

<sup>135</sup> The following *okruhy* Volyn', Lubny, Luhans'k, Mariulop', Melitopol', Mykolaiiv', Nizhyn, Pervomais'k, Pryluky, Poltava, Proskuriv, Odessa. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3470, ark. 26 and TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3493, ark. 1-132.



mass violence.<sup>136</sup> During the Holodomor, they did not dominate among district officials either. At the Orikhiv trial, the only woman out of the 12 officials put on trial, Maria Skypian-Bazilevich, held a variety of posts during her career at the district and oblast' levels, but she never chaired a Party committee. She was among the two pardoned officials in the trial.

### 3.3 *The Richyts'kyi Case*

In early 1934 seven men were put on trial on charges of counter-revolution during grain procurement in the Arbuzyinka district of the Odesa oblast'. They were accused of deliberately using excessive violence 'to foster disaffection' with the Soviet state in late 1932 – early 1933. The incriminated activities included illegal demolishing of peasant huts, various types of public shaming, arrests, beatings and sexual violence. While the exact number of the victims in Arbuzyinka district remains unknown, the names of 138 victims in the town of Arbuzyinka alone were recovered by way of survivor recollections, which suggests that the total number of people starved to death in the district was high.<sup>137</sup> The accused perpetrators included the secretary of the Arbuzyinka RPK, Ivan Kobzar, and a TsK KP(b)U plenipotentiary, Anatolii Richyts'kyi. As the ten volumes of records from the trial demonstrate, these individuals – along with a number of their colleagues from the DPU, police, the RVK, the district newspaper and the party cells in the district – were instrumental in organising the famine on the ground, and their methods even drove some peasants to committing suicide.<sup>138</sup> A close reading of the trial records elucidates the role of district officials in the events of the famine.

The excesses described in the trial were not new to the peasants in that district. In fact, several district officials had been removed from their positions for the same excesses earlier that year. The 1932-1933 procurement started in August 1932 when the RPK secretary, Kobzar, accepted new quotas and instructed the chairmen of the collective farms and the Communists to execute it, and even ordered dozens of individual farmers in each village to join the searches. At the same time, Kobzar had been known to be disliked by his colleagues at the RVK and the district newspaper. They 'sabotaged' procurement by leaving grain in the villages. In fact, during the six years of Kobzar's tenure as the RPK secretary, Arbuzyinka had never fulfilled its grain procurement quotas. The RPK was said to be 'an empty space' where few records were kept of what was procured or sown.<sup>139</sup>

The situation changed drastically with the arrival of the TsK CP(b) U plenipotentiary,

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<sup>136</sup> Smeulers, ed., *Supranational criminology: towards a typology*, pp. 233-265.

<sup>137</sup> D. Kozlyk, et al, eds., *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rr. v Ukraini. Mykolaiivs'ka Oblast'* (Mykolaiiv: Shamray, 2008), pp. 187-188.

<sup>138</sup> HDA SBU, f. 6, spr. 69251-fp, vol. 4, ark. 16-17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, ark. 1-140.

Richyts'kyi, in December 1932. Firstly, he called for a RPK meeting during which he introduced new approaches to make recalcitrant peasants reveal hidden grain. These methods were immediately approved by Kobzar and leveraged down through the attendees to the villages. Within days peasants were detained in small rooms without being permitted to sit or lie down for several days; they were then interrogated by several officials in a 'conveyer belt' manner. On one occasion, a kerosene-soaked cat was set alight and thrown into the cellar with the detained women and children. On another occasion, a few men swollen from starvation were beaten and left to die in their own faeces. The peasants were stripped, placed in barrels and driven from village to village or made to dance and sing as a form of public shaming. Others had all their possessions and dwellings confiscated or destroyed.<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, Richyts'kyi and Kobzar organized meetings in key villages to instruct activists (up to 100 attendees per meeting) – collective farm chairmen, village council heads, party cells secretaries, plenipotentiaries etc. – on how to find grain. Each collective farm had several search brigades. Oral instructions were followed by 5-pages-long directives from Richyts'kyi and Kobzar to the village council heads and the party cells. Richyts'kyi attempted, in his words, to 'break the activists [perpetrators] away [from other peasants] and make them join the active fight for bread'. At a meeting in the village of Novo-Krasne, brigade leader Gekov confirmed the efficiency of the new methods in making peasants reveal hidden provisions. His brigade took evicted peasant families with infants and elderly to the remote fields and left them in the snow without adequate clothing. Attendees at the meeting were said to be 'completely terrorised' and 'disorientated': one official sobbed and hid in a bookcase. Kobzar threatened to send anyone who questioned the new orders 'to the polar bears' and visited villages every other day to see how the new methods were being applied. In one village Richyts'kyi put all collective farmers under arrest until they reported on each other for hiding provisions.

But there were local officials who questioned the new methods. One district plenipotentiary, Polunin, told Richyts'kyi that fulfilling the grain quota was impossible. He was immediately arrested. When another village official, Romanovs'ky, returned from a resort and called the new methods unlawful, Richyts'kyi verbally attacked him. Romanovs'ky complained to the RVK to no avail. Witness after witness, most of whom were perpetrators themselves, explained that they followed orders because of bullying by Kobzar or Richyts'kyi, who represented the higher authority at the time. Some felt terrorized by Polunin's arrest.

Likewise, Kobzar blamed his adoption of the harsh methods on the authority of Richyts'kyi, who was introduced to him by a secretary of the TsK KP(b)U, Panas Liubchenko.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1932, Rychyts'kyi and Kobzar attended a meeting with Kaganovich in Voznesens'k, which Kaganovich mentions in his diary. The senior Soviet figure told the men that they were not harsh enough and had to put peasants under such pressure 'that [they] themselves show where the grain is hidden.'<sup>141</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> January they had a meeting with another senior Communist, Zaton's'ky in Arbuzyinka, who also approved 'concentrated strikes' on peasants. Rychyts'kyi admitted that Kaganovich's speech encouraged him to proceed with harsher techniques 'for a greater effect'. Rychyts'kyi was known to the head of the DPU, Balyts'kyi, and even Kaganovich 'showed trust' by sending him a personal telegramme in late December 1932. Rychyts'kyi stressed his devotion to the party, and the DPU in particular, both of which he claimed he had always kept informed by keeping a grain procurement diary and sending regular reports.<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, Kobzar pointed out that other officials – district DPU head, Lashko; the RVK head, Krzhevits'kyi; and the district newspaper editor, Rytov – also participated in excesses, so he too felt peer pressure to comply. Seeing them adopt harsh methods proved convincing; as Kobzar remarks, '[They were] also silent; it felt awkward for me to speak up'.<sup>143</sup> This assertion was questioned by Rychyts'kyi who noted that he had 'no disagreements' with Kobzar, but that Krzhevits'kyi and Rytov insisted on leaving 60% of grain for collective farmers' consumption.

Perhaps more striking is Rychyts'kyi's own testimony. 'All facts and all actions under certain circumstances have a certain political meaning and a completely different meaning under other circumstances,' he said. 'From the position of today, those actions were wrong, but at the time I considered them right, and they were taken according to the instruction of Sovnarkom [in November 1932].' Rychyts'kyi argued that the TsK Politburo directive on the application of harsh methods in grain procurement included the confiscation of houses, fines and taxes. In fact, these were exactly the same methods he had earlier applied in the Makhnov district in Vinnytsia oblast', with wide approval and success. Yet his actions were mentioned in the aforementioned stenogramme at the III Party conference by another district official as having a devastating effect on the peasants. At the time, republican leaders chose to award him with a medal for his 'firm' approach to grain procurement.<sup>144</sup>

Equally important are testimonies by witnesses who admitted destroying houses, conducting searches and confiscating food. They mentioned these activities as a matter of a fact, as something rather mundane and ordinary. In other words, the rank-and-file perpetrators blamed their participation on the district authority and did not see their actions as crimes at all. They shied away

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<sup>141</sup> Pyrih, ed., *Holodomor*, pp. 504–5.

<sup>142</sup> HDA SBU, f. 6, spr. 69251-fp, vol. 7, ark. 37.

<sup>143</sup> Vasyl'iev, Werth and Kokin, eds. *Partiino-Radians'ke kerivnytstvo*, p. 351.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, p. 357.

by downplaying their role. For example, the secretary of a large party cell, Tkach, stated that he did not initiate excesses or take part in searches but only ‘discovered pits’ with grain. Another accused perpetrator, Dymchak, complained about the pressure to join the search brigade and admitted to evicting one family: ‘I had to go there on order of the collective farm chairman and only because there was a directive to send 8-20 people, and it happened to be me. ... they needed people to destroy the huts.’<sup>145</sup>

Such witnesses presented themselves as ordinary Soviet citizens who acted on orders. After the famine, they did not face any retribution for their participation. Richyts’kyi worked as an associate chief editor of Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia and as a research assistant of the All-Ukrainian Association of Marx-Lenin Institutes in Kharkiv; Kobzar was an associate head of the agricultural department at the Odesa oblast’ consumer union; Gekov, who was personally involved in searches and torture, worked in the management of the Toms’kyi plant in Makiivka in Donbas; another perpetrator, Oleksandr Ivanchenko, enjoyed a career as an employee at a power station in Nova Odesa.<sup>146</sup>

While this trial was seemingly part of the campaign against national Communists like Richyts’kyi – who was, among other things, a former member of a non-Bolshevik party, a biographer of Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko, and the first translator of Karl Marx into Ukrainian – his participation in grain procurement was used as evidence that he was plotting to discredit Soviet rule. Blaming the rank-and-file perpetrators for excesses was not new; in 1930, after all, Stalin did just that when collectivization was provoking a powerful peasant uprising. But Richyts’kyi’s activities were not regarded as crimes either by himself, his colleagues, or his superiors. On the contrary: when he protested against his arrest to the TsK KP(b)U Politburo, Richyts’kyi listed his ‘achievements’ in grain procurement as a proof of his absolute devotion to the Party.<sup>147</sup> Ultimately, Richyts’kyi, Kobzar and others behaved no differently from the other district officials in Ukraine during the famine. Nevertheless, Richyts’kyi was sentenced to death and executed, while Kobzar and the others, branded as ‘honest big mouths’, were sentenced to 3 years in prison.<sup>148</sup>

#### ***4. Search Brigades***

On the village level, the mechanism of man-made famine starts with the elimination of food from the peasants’ possession. In the case of the Holodomor, this task was performed by search

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, pp. 353-354.

<sup>146</sup> HDA SBU, f. 6, spr. 69251-fp, vol. 8, ark. 32.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, vol. 7, ark. 30-31.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, ark. 132.

brigades. Such brigades were groups of local men and women supervised by local officials to conduct house searches in order to confiscate grain. The local officials involved were most often the heads of the village council or the chairmen of the local collective farm that received orders from district officials. Search brigades could also include teachers, district officials, police or the DPU servicemen. From November 1932 search brigades could requisition other agricultural produce in lieu of grain and seize personal possessions towards the procurement campaign. From 19<sup>th</sup> January 1933 they could also keep 15% of the foodstuffs or grain found in these searches,<sup>149</sup> which undoubtedly motivated more peasants to participate in searches. These actions devastated peasant households. In survivor testimonies, the brigades are often mentioned by the descriptive names: *aktyvisty* (activists), *buksyry* (tugboats), *vlada* (authorities), *bryhady* (brigades), *shtyrkhachi* (poachers), *krasna mitla* (red broomstick), *komizany* (from *Komnezam*), *komsomol'tsi* (Komsomol) etc.<sup>150</sup>

While there is no dedicated research or known archival documentation with statistical data on all search brigades, some details can be gleaned from reports by the DPU servicemen and local officials, complaints from the peasants, or the perpetrators' own personal files. These documents, however, cover the brigade members who either refused to follow orders (e.g. those who questioned procurement plans and distributed foodstuffs before being replaced by the more obedient members) or were accused of excesses on the ground (e.g. profiteers, drunks, sadists and murderers). The requisition of foodstuffs and possessions was indeed often accompanied by violence, debauchery, and profiteering. At the III KP(b)U conference in 1932, for example, Kosior criticised village officials for profiting and using up to 35% of the income from collective farms for their personal benefit instead of the expected 3%. He accused them of managing village activists 'with administrative measures,' while Petrovs'kyi stressed the widening divide between village leadership and the rest of farmers.<sup>151</sup>

To reconstruct a fuller picture of search brigades, oral memory can be used. While one oral memory of a traumatic experience is deeply personal and individual, 200 survivor testimonies can be more reflective of collective traumatic experience, offering insights for quantitative analysis. Most notable corpora of oral memory of the Holodomor naturally focus on the victims and the survivors. A questionnaire by Borysenko in the voluminous *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, however, concentrates on these brigades specifically. Here I offer one of the first analyses of this data. Borysenko's questions on the perpetrators are the following:

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<sup>149</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 42, d. 81, str. 103-105.

<sup>150</sup> V. Borysenko, ed., ed. *Svicha pam'iaty: Usna istoria ...*, 56-57; T. Boriak 1933: *'I choho vy shche zhyvi?'* (Kyiv: Clio, NAN Ukrainy, 2016), p. 684.

<sup>151</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 170, 251.

- 1) Who confiscated the foodstuffs grown in the fields and kitchen gardens?
- 2) Were there any rewards for reporting your neighbour for hiding bread?
- 3) Did the searchers present any papers before proceeding with confiscation?
- 4) Did they punish people, attack, deport or arrest?
- 5) Were they armed?
- 6) How did people defend themselves?
- 7) Who was involved in the searches? What were their names?
- 8) How many of them came inside the house? Who were they?
- 9) Did they take only food or other belongings – clothes, livestock, etc.?
- 10) Who was watching the fields?
- 11) At what time did they conduct the searches?
- 12) How many times did they search?
- 13) Who did not starve in the village and why?
- 14) Who do you consider responsible for the famine?

All 210 testimonies from the Poltava oblast' provide consistency in data.<sup>152</sup> While explicit sampling quotas cannot be used, the pool of subjects was fairly balanced by geography within the oblast' and by age at the time of the famine. The answers elaborate on the identities and demographics of the perpetrators; the brigade size; the actual perpetration; and institutional composition. Depending on its size, one village could have had several brigades. Usually one brigade operated in an allocated part of the village known as *kutok* or *sotnia* (corner or hundred). In some cases, however, the brigades were relocated to work in the neighbouring villages or other districts so that the perpetrators would not be known to local peasants personally. Thus they could be more effective.

When survivors were asked to name the members of the brigades, only 54% did. In a handful of testimonies, they named the district officials but never any police or the DPU servicemen. Almost all the identified men and women were residents of the villages in which they operated or residents of a village nearby. In fact, 80% of survivors commented that brigades consisted of entirely local people. 17% of survivors recalled teams that included plenipotentiaries from the cities, with only 3% describing searches or *trusy* (raids) being conducted by people from outside the village.<sup>153</sup>

Why did 46% of the survivors fail to provide any names? Here they offered various reasons: they forgot; they were too young to remember; or they had reservations, especially if the perpetrators' families still lived in the village at the time of the interview. Some survivors did not regard the members of the brigades as perpetrators. A rather telling instance is of the survivor who did not consider her father a perpetrator, even though he was in a brigade: 'I remember an incident,

<sup>152</sup> Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, pp. 916-1188.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

my father was [in the search brigade] there, so they got inside the house and found a big barrel with muddy water. My father looked inside and went away, but the other [perpetrator] put his arm in the barrel. At once, the owner sprung on the man and stabbed him from behind. The owner was murdered [for that] of course; such incidents took place.<sup>154</sup> Eventually her family house was searched ten times a month, and her father eventually died at the end of the famine.

In fact, a number of survivors explained that collective farmers searching or watching the fields were doing their job. One day they were told to work in the field, the following day they were told to search the houses. In this way, participation in the searches became mundane: ‘The brigade was put together; whoever wanted could sign up. They used to collect all food. They said: “According to the law”. And what can you do about it? Our village folk used to collect everything. I did not like them.’<sup>155</sup>

While the brigades were predominantly male, there were all-female teams too. Some members of them were poor; others, better off, joined the collective farm to protect themselves from dekulakization. A small number of survivors comment on the perpetrators being ‘kulak’ offspring taking revenge on the poor. Almost all the survivors knew the perpetrators before and after the famine through a variety of roles – as neighbours, distant relations or relations-to-be, co-workers etc. The common ground the members of the brigade shared was their belonging to the collective farm in various capacities. The size of the group varied with an average brigade consisting of 4-5 members. Larger groups were rare – being only 12% of the cases. Though perpetrators felt more comfortable in numbers, brigades consisting of between one to three persons were not rare – 31%.

While the brigades were supposed to procure grain, only one out of 210 survivors said perpetrators confiscated only bread. 52% of survivors said the perpetrators confiscated *everything*: foodstuffs, life-stock, personal items, valuables, clothes etc. Later some of the confiscated goods were sold off by the village council, whereas other items were appropriated by the perpetrators or their relatives: ‘I remember one wearing my father’s suede jacket for a long time.’<sup>156</sup> During the searches every possible hiding place was checked manually or with steel rods to pierce the soil, the walls or the floor. The beds, cots, chests, ovens and even chimneys were often damaged. The searches mostly took place during the day, although the perpetrators could also come at night to catch the starving peasants by surprise. A quarter of survivors felt the brigade would only stop once there was nothing left. According to 70% of the witnesses, perpetrators returned again and again. Only 22% of the survivors commented on searches taking place just once or twice.

Upon arrival, the brigade would usually demand the grain or other foodstuffs. According to

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 1082.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 922.

98% of testimonies, they did not present any papers authorising them to conduct the searches, nor were they expected by those whose homes were searched. Most survivors commented more often than not, they were not armed: only 29% of survivors remember a member of the brigade having a gun or a shotgun. Survivors rejected the plausibility of resistance, given that the perpetrators ‘could do anything’ or that they were ‘too scared even to say a word.’ Many survivors described babies being thrown out of their cradles in search of food. There were instances of perpetrators locking children inside the houses and closing the chimney while blackmailing the parents.<sup>157</sup> Evidence of violence during these searches is ubiquitous in all corpora of oral memory. Indeed, 83% of survivors in Poltava oblast’ remembered their family or people they knew as being either deported, dekulakized, imprisoned, or physically and verbally abused during the searches.

As the amount of resources differed from oblast’ to oblast’, and with local officials approaching the management of supplies differently, no one was spared from hunger in some villages. 21% of survivors asserted that everyone in their village, including the perpetrators, starved. In fact, 2% recalled local brigade members and their families dying from starvation.<sup>158</sup> But more than half of all survivors (54%) remembered that perpetrators and leaders and their families did not starve during the famine. Almost unanimously (95%), survivors considered ‘authorities’ responsible for organising the famine. The ‘authorities’ include the whole vertical chain of government, from Stalin to the village officials. Only 2% suggested that it was ‘people like us’ who made the famine possible.

Finding ‘righteous ones’ amongst the searchers beyond the anecdotal evidence is challenging. The existing collection of testimonies on the 140 ‘righteous officials’ includes a number of unverified accounts. For example, a son of a chairman of a collective farm describes his father as the saviour of the village of Uzdytsia in Hlukhiv district, Sumy oblast’. According to the official’s son, not a single person died in Uzdytsia during the Holodomor.<sup>159</sup> A list of the victims from the same village, however, contains 65 names, over 60% of whom were children.<sup>160</sup> While there is no quantitative data on the numbers of those who left the brigades, it is clear that some perpetrators helped the starving peasants hide food in their allotments as they were not subjected to searches.<sup>161</sup> There are many instances where some brigade members did not search as meticulously as others. In other words, perpetration, as survival, was an individual experience and depended on many circumstances. As in Browning’s case study, in which two different officers had opposite

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 963.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, pp. 1044, 1188.

<sup>159</sup> V. Tylishchak, V. Yaremenko, eds. *Liudianist’ u neliudiany chas* (Lviv: Chasopys, 2013), 111.

<sup>160</sup> O. Lavryk et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Sums’ka oblast’* (Sumy: Sobor, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 1091.



reactions to the policemen asking to be relieved from their duty to shoot the victims, various officials on the ground had different approaches to the evasion techniques of their subordinates.<sup>162</sup>

### ***5. Institutional Composition of Brigades***

The vast majority of the Holodomor survivors name the heads of the village council as the chief organisers of house searches. In fact, in many cases, the heads of the village council actually took part in the searches themselves. The lists of the perpetrators include the chairmen and board members of the collective farm. 30% of survivors in the Poltava oblast' also mention that the district officials who decided how to organise searches and what to confiscate played a role too. Survivors also mention *peredovyky* (shock workers), teachers, Komsomol and Communists and – to a lesser extent – outsiders, KNS, Twenty-Five Thousanders, police and the DPU. Membership in these groups can overlap: the head of the village council could be a KNS member, a plenipotentiary could be a teacher, a Komsomol can belong to the KNS. The key position of the village council head and the chairman (rarely chairwoman) of the collective farm was acknowledged by their rations. Together with the party cells, they received bread and cereals from the district milling tax (5%).<sup>163</sup> While we cannot assume that all these people facilitated the famine, it is safe to say that they were expected to participate in the grain procurement campaign.

Female officials and activists could head, albeit rarely, the brigades that searched peasant houses and confiscated grain. Though outnumbered by men, they loom large in over 20% of the accounts by the survivors who accentuated women participation.<sup>164</sup> As one survivor, a child at the time, succinctly puts it: 'Most poignantly was that there were women among them, who took the last piece of bread from children.'<sup>165</sup> These women defied the gender stereotypes of nurturing maternal actors and instead participated in violence that led to the death of children. While they tend not to try to explain the motivation of such women, survivors sometimes refer to their institutional affiliation: as officials, members of the village KNS, collective farmers, shock farmers, and teachers.

According to Stalin himself, women were grossly underrepresented on the village councils: they constituted only 1% of membership in 1923 and 2.9% in 1924.<sup>166</sup> During the upheaval of collectivization, however, the representation of women in local government increased. In 1930 women headed 4.2% of village councils, while 3.7% of village council secretaries and 19.1%

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<sup>162</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men ...*, pp. 55-77.

<sup>163</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6397, ark. 32.

<sup>164</sup> This number is based on analysis of 212 testimonies from Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, pp. 916-1188.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1067.

<sup>166</sup> I. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 6 (Moscow: OGIZ, 1947), p. 195.

village council members were females in the Kyiv oblast'. During the famine, this female participation grew further. By the end of 1933, in only 16 districts of the Kyiv oblast', there were 22,000 female team leaders, and in 44 districts of Dnipropetrovsk oblast', 307 female tractor drivers and 215 female brigade leaders.<sup>167</sup> Women at those positions were expected to participate in all campaigns in the village, including grain procurement, which – coupled with gender expectations – helps explain the presence of women in oral memory.

### 5.1 KNS

KNS, also known as *Komnezamy*, were state-sponsored organizations in the Ukrainian countryside between 1920-1933 that supported and enforced state policies on the ground. Some historians, including James Mace, argue that the famine of 1933 is a measure of their 'success' in grain procurement, given that they controlled the village councils. Indeed, 80% of the heads of the village council were KNS members in 1931.<sup>168</sup> Other researchers, on the other hand, point out that KNS failed as an effective force during collectivization due to its poor management and neglect by the state in the preceding years. In particular, Levandovs'ka highlights a large number of reports on the inactivity of KNS organizations: 'KNS works so poorly that if there had been no lists of members, one would think that KNS does not exist' or 'the village KNS does not exist in real life, only on paper'.<sup>169</sup> She concludes that the involvement of tens of thousands of plenipotentiaries from the cities proves that Kremlin leaders did not trust KNS to facilitate the famine. As oral memory and archival evidence demonstrate, the key role was reserved for the village council, party cell and collective farm leadership. Yet some of these key village perpetrators were also KNS members, which warrants an exploration of its role in the Holodomor.

Introduced in Ukraine in 1919 by the Bolsheviks, *kombidy* (*komitety bednoty*, committees of the village poor) were supposed to exercise political authority in the villages. Later they were reformed into KNS, which sought to control village councils that were established in 1922 and assumed power in the countryside. The name of the new committees underlines the intention to encourage non-wealthy peasants – or *seredniaky* (middle peasants) – to support Soviet policies in agriculture. Its members were granted favourable conditions for loans and industrial distribution of consumer goods in the village in the 1920s. In return they were expected to redistribute the land of the gentry and 'kulaks' among the landless and smallholding peasants; to requisition agricultural produce (while keeping 25% of it);<sup>170</sup> to fight the 'enemies' of Soviet power; to denounce the

<sup>167</sup> P. Postyshev, *Itogi 1933 sel'skokhoziaistvennogo goda i ocherednie zadachi KP(b)U. Rech' na ob'iedinennom plenumе TsK i TsKK KP(b)U 19 noiabria 1933 goda* (Khar'kov: Partizdat TsK KP(b)U, 1933), p. 17.

<sup>168</sup> Mace, 'The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selyan,' p. 487.

<sup>169</sup> Levandovs'ka, 'The Role of Committees of Poor Peasants', p. 122.

<sup>170</sup> Mace, 'The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selian', p. 491.

village council to higher authorities etc.<sup>171</sup> KNS thus controlled or at least had leverage in every aspect of the village life. Such leverage attracted, on the one hand, marginal elements in the village who embraced violence and theft and gave KNS its infamous reputation and, on the other, the industrious poor peasants who became self-sufficient by the end of the decade thanks to the benefits of KNS membership.<sup>172</sup> KNS was subject to recurrent purges, resulting in 840,316<sup>173</sup> of its members being expelled.

When the state took a break from radical policies during NEP, subordinated KNS to village councils and deprived it of some of its privileges, 54% of its members left the organisation.<sup>174</sup> During collectivization, however, the government again fostered the return of KNS, allowing the arbitrariness and illegality for which they were granted immunity in the past. KNS members ‘threw themselves into a decisive offensive against the kulaks, showing heroic initiative during important economic and political campaigns in the village’.<sup>175</sup> Upon arrival in the village, party plenipotentiaries could count first and foremost on KNS, which often dominated on the collectivization committees, helped to compile lists for dekulakization, and provided intelligence. For their activity in collectivization, dekulakization and grain procurement, they were also (once again) threatened and killed by peasants. At the same time, a number of KNS members refused to search houses in 1928 when allowed by law to confiscate property other than land.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, only 20% of KNS members joined collective farms by the end of 1929.<sup>177</sup>

Indeed, only 3% of 212 survivors in the Poltava oblast’ name KNS members among those who searched their houses and confiscated food. These accounts do not differ substantively from the others, as KNS members involved in house searches showed as much mercy as anybody else in their position. Some profiteered and made a career to provide for their own families; only in one case did a KNS member share his rations with the starving. One survivor describes them as idle people, whereas the rest characterise them as simple peasants or profiteers who joined collective farms with virtually nothing.<sup>178</sup>

Several accounts mention women or *komnezamivky*. While the Soviet historians often cited female members of KNS as evidence of female political participation,<sup>179</sup> the number of women in

<sup>171</sup> P. Zahors’kyi, P. Stoyan, *Narysy istorii komitetiv nezamozhnykh selian* (Kharkiv: Vydavnytstvo AN URSR, 1960), pp. 5-9.

<sup>172</sup> Levandovska, ‘The Role of Committees’, p. 120.

<sup>173</sup> P. Zahors’kyi, P. Stoyan, *Komitety nezalezhnykh selian Ukrainy (1920-1930): Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kyiv, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p. 414.

<sup>175</sup> From the article by O. Fesenko in *Visti VUTsVK* on May 9, 1930, p. 5 as quoted in Mace, ‘The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selian’, p. 497.

<sup>176</sup> P. Zahors’kyi, P. Stoyan, *Komitety nezamozhnykh selian*, p. 393.

<sup>177</sup> P. Zahors’kyi, P. Stoyan, *Narysy istorii komitetiv*, p. 130.

<sup>178</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, pp. 935, 940, 1011, 1019, 1087, 1174.

<sup>179</sup> Zahors’kyi, Stoyan, *Narysy Istorii komitetiv*; M. Berezovchuk, *Komnezamy Ukrainy v borot’bi za sotsializm* (Kyiv,

KNS increased only in the winter 1922-1923 and during the collectivization, i.e. when membership gave access to the distribution of resources for the poor. Indeed, the women who joined the KNS were usually among the most socially vulnerable: widows and unmarried women. Like men, other women joined because of the opportunities KNS could potentially provide them: education, training and employment. Female participation in KNS, however, was never higher than 25%.<sup>180</sup> The report on KNS in Volyn' okruha, for example, notes 5136 women in KNS (or 14.2% of all members) in 1925.

But KNS did not always represent the poor. The report on KNS in Volyn okruha, for instance, reveals that only 13% of all poor peasants (or 36,123 people) joined the organization, which included only 6.5% of the rural population. Many (38,6%) were illiterate, while less than 1% were Communists and 2% were in Komsomol. According to Voloshenko and Bilokon', however, KNS members were by definition poor peasants with little experience of successful farming. With many dependants to feed, they received loans that were often used for food, luxury items and alcohol instead of investment into farming equipment and land acquisition.

At the same time, the report also relates that many peasants called KNS members 'drunks, good-for-nothings and bastards.'<sup>181</sup> In fact, some Communist leaders questioned the motivation and morale of some KNS activists at the time: Petrovs'kyi and Kviring described them as a corrupt part of the poor peasantry, interested only in the benefits and prone to alcohol abuse. This characterisation is echoed by researchers Mel'nychuk and Hryhorchuk.<sup>182</sup> This stereotype was exacerbated by the failure of KNS members to make their farming sustainable during the years of the NEP. By contrast, Soviet historiography of the 1960s that offered a partial re-assessment of collectivization, depicted the KNS members as the fighters against alcoholism, corruption, brutality and bureaucracy.<sup>183</sup> During the famine, however, argues Smirnov, most of them were confused by the 'extreme violence' that accompanied state policies and simply obeyed orders.<sup>184</sup>

## 5.2 Shock-Collective Farmers

In most survivor testimonies, collective farmers are mentioned as ordinary people from the

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1965).

<sup>180</sup> V. Voloshenko, G. Bilokon', 'Zhinky u lavakh KNS: shtrykhy do sotsial'noho portretu,' *Materialy VII Międzynarodowej naukowopraktycznej konferencji 'Naukowa myśl informacyjnej powieki – 2011'* Prawo. Historia: Przemysł. Nauka i studia, vol. 9, pp. 63- 67.

<sup>181</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2126, ark. 128-129.

<sup>182</sup> H. Petrovs'kyi, *Nezamozhnyky i seredniaky v desiatyrischnii borot'bi za sotsializm* (Kharkiv: DVU, 1927), p. 23; *Partiia i selo. Statti i promovy za 1924 rik provodyriv komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy tt. Hr.Petrovs'koho, V.Chubaria, D.Lebedia, E.Kviringa* (Kharkiv: Chervonyi Shliakh, 1925), p. 87.

<sup>183</sup> P. Zahors'kyi, P. Stoyan, *Narysy istorii komitetiv*.

<sup>184</sup> V. Smirnov, *Suspil'no-politychni ta ekonomichni peretvorennia v ukraiins'komu seli v period novoi ekonomichnoi polityky* (Kharkiv: Maidan, 2002), pp. 143-170.

village: neighbours, acquaintances, distant relatives, classmates. While ordinary collective farmers rarely published their accounts of collectivization and the famine, the memoirs of shock-collective farmers are widely available. A careful analysis of over thirty biographies of Stakhanovite collective farmers reveals that in 1932-1933 they were complicit in facilitating the famine. Maria Demchenko, Nadiia Zahlada, Olesia Kulyk, Maria Martsun, Marta Khudolii, Pasha Angelina and many other Stakhanovite farmers may have achieved remarkable results in growing sugar beets, wheat and flax, but they also participated in collectivization, dekulakization and grain procurement in the early thirties. Most of them were among the founders of the collective farms in their villages, or were Komsomol members. Since the Komsomol and the first members of the collective farms were usually the primary actors in dekulakization, their participation in the grain procurement in 1932-1933, including in the searches, was likely widespread. Many participated voluntarily; some were forced; others followed suit. Naturally, their consistent support of the various state policies and willingness to work hard made them trustworthy candidates for the Stakhanovite movement. To illustrate their participation I will review three examples: Maria Demchenko, Nadia Zahlada and Olesia Kulyk.

Maria Demchenko (1912-1995) was a celebrated sugar beet grower from Starosillia in Cherkasy oblast' who built a personal rapport with Stalin. Having left the village in search of work during NEP, she worked at the Magnitogorsk plant in a cement workshop but then returned home. Her family was one of the first to join the collective farm where she was a team leader in 1930-1936. In March 1933, when many peasants in her village were starving to death, she joined the Komsomol for her hard work. At the ceremony, Demchenko and her brigade leader David Burda pledged not to discard a single sugar beet in the fields or by the road.<sup>185</sup>

In 1934 Demchenko's team achieved high results, for which she went to a Komsomol conference in Moscow and met Stalin. At the conference Demchenko met fellow sugar beets growers Khrystyna Baidych and Kateryna Androshchuk from the village of Kuz'myn in Vinnytsia oblast'. Like her, they promised Stalin they would achieve even higher results in the following years and kept in touch with Hryhorii Petrovs'kyi.<sup>186</sup> This enthusiasm inadvertently cost lives, as the survivors from Kuz'myn recalled that the starving peasants' only hope for survival was the sugar beets discarded in the fields or by the road.<sup>187</sup> While in Kuz'myn there were over 20 established identities of the Holodomor victims,<sup>188</sup> the list of identified victims of the famine in Demchenko's

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<sup>185</sup> V. Shmerling, *Mariia Demchenko* (Moscow: Molodaiia Gvardiia, 1936).

<sup>186</sup> V. Shmerling, 'Geroini', *Za pishchevuiu industriiu* (Moscow), 1936, no. 258.

<sup>187</sup> I. Havchuk et al, eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zherty Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Khmelnyts'ka oblast'* (Khmelnys'ts'kyi, 2008), p. 454.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

village reached 94, which suggests that the total number was considerably higher.<sup>189</sup>

In her efforts to achieve a higher yield of sugar beets, Demchenko was assisted by many local officials, in particular Ivan Tyshchenko, a Komsomol secretary at the collective farm, and Mykhailo Lial'chenko, the RPK secretary appointed in 1932. According to Demchenko, seeing insects flying to the lights of a district committee member's Ford car one night gave her an idea of how to get rid of beets moths – by making fires in the fields at night.<sup>190</sup> Also supportive of Demchenko was her friend and fellow Stakhanovite, Marina Hnatenko, one of the prominent Komsomols in the village. Unlike Demchenko, who, according to contemporaries, resembled a factory worker with her short hair and clothes, Hnatenko still had her hair plaited and wore a home-spun embroidered shirt. While the journalists commented that a military uniform would suit Hnatenko better, her embroidered shirt offers us an important detail. During the Holodomor, the starving peasants often sold their embroidered shirts in the cities or to their neighbours for food or money. Having an embroidered shirt in the immediate aftermath of the Holodomor may indicate that she had access to foodstuffs or kept the shirt from the items she confiscated during dekulakization, or both. As Demchenko stated at the time: 'We destroyed the kulaks and took everything into our hands. Now we have power over everything, and they are going crazy from jealousy.'<sup>191</sup>

Having secured support from the officials, Demchenko noted hostility in the village, even at the peak of the Stakhanovite movement. Like male perpetrators, these young women faced the vengeance of survivors after the famine. In Skrahlivka (Berdychiv district, Zhytomyr oblast'), where over 26 people died in the first three months of 1933, a group of farmers murdered two female shock workers upon their return from Moscow. During the trial, the two suspects said the women were 'dogs that served Moscow'.<sup>192</sup> Neither Demchenko nor Hnatenko stayed in the village. After burying her parents in the 1960s, Demchenko moved to central Kyiv where she lived alone until her death in 1995.<sup>193</sup> Hnatenko also died in Kyiv in 2006.

Nadiia Zahlada (1894-1977), who was older than Demchenko during collectivization, was one of the founders of a collective farm in her village of Vysoke in the Zhytomyr oblast'. She was on the collective farm board in 1929 and briefly chaired it after the Second World War. An illiterate widow with six children, she also nursed and adopted an infant girl of her neighbours who starved to death. She also worked in the local orphanage during the famine. The registrar records show only

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<sup>189</sup> P. I. Haman, eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>190</sup> V. Kataev, 'O Marii Demchenko,' in *Krasnaia nov'*, 1936, no 1.

<sup>191</sup> Shmerling, *Mariia Demchenko*.

<sup>192</sup> 'Ukraiina i Moskva,' *Ukraiins'kyi Visnyk, orhan Ukraiins'koho Natsional'noho ob'iednannia v Nimechchnyni*, Berlin, August 1943, part 17, p. 30.

<sup>193</sup> A. Abarinov, 'Ne prosto Mariia,' *Den'*, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1996.

thirteen deaths of starvation in Vysoke in 1932-1933, most of them infants, but it is safe to assume that the death toll there was considerably higher.<sup>194</sup>

Reflecting on the 1930s almost thirty years later, Zahlada commented on the past carefully: 'We all remember how badly collective farms were managed under Stalin. It was all about numbers, not sorting things out, but empty words. Many collective farms were damaged; some are still recovering today. Many people were forced to go against their own conscience!'<sup>195</sup> It is possible, that she implies that her own conscience was compromised, contributing to events that claimed lives in Vysoke. Despite her activism and commitment, Zahlada was expelled from the party during the purge in 1933. Her expulsion was something she could not comprehend, although she re-joined the party in 1940: 'What else do they want? I work [as hard] as I can, I threw the icons away ...'<sup>196</sup> In 1962, in her widely publicised article about conscientious collective farmers, she criticized the lack of enthusiasm among collective farmers and chairmen in the 1960s.<sup>197</sup> Zahlada received a lot of responses to her article, many people calling her a 'genuine Communist' and a 'true builder of Communism.'<sup>198</sup>

In 1930 a sixteen-year-old Olesia Kulyk (1914-198?) from the village of Popivka in Myrhorod district in the Poltava oblast' enrolled into tractor driver classes with other Komsomol members despite her mother objections. Olesia's story became an inspiration for the poem *Pisnia Tractorystky* (A Song of a Female Tractor Operator, 1933) by renowned poet Pavlo Tychyna. The poem was included in school curricula for decades, making Olesia, while not a Stakhanovite, a well known female tractor operator. Like other collective farm employees, she received a ration during the famine and was required to follow orders from the village management, – from driving tractors to conducting house searches. Popivka saw over 2,000 people or 1/3 of its inhabitants die in 1932-1933.<sup>199</sup>

In 1932 Olesia was already a driver at the collective farm. One winter day in 1933, she drove Pavlo Tychyna into the village and told him about her life. Olesia left the village in 1938, moved on to work at a steel factory in Dnipropetrovs'k. She later settled in southern Ukraine, married, and had four children. She visited the village in 1982 and had an emotional reunion with close friends like Omel'chenko, one of the village perpetrators and a KNS member since 1920.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> L. Kopiichenko, eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Zhytomyr'ska oblast'* (Zhytomyr: Polissia, 2008), p. 794.

<sup>195</sup> N. Zaglada, 'Dorozhite chest'iu khleboroba! Gorovit Nadezhda Grigor'ievna Zaglada,' *Pravda*, no. 237, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1962, p. 1.

<sup>196</sup> D. Prykordonnyi, 'Chelovek bogatii sovest'iu,' *Ogoniok*, no 44, 1962, p. 16.

<sup>197</sup> N. Zaglada, 'Dorozhite chest'iu khleboroba! ...', p. 1.

<sup>198</sup> N. Pecherskyi, 'Pochta Nadezhdy Grigori'evny Zaglady,' *Pravda*, No. 243, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1962, p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> Shupyk, Bilan, Osheka, *Doroha do ridnoho domu...*, p. 46.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 32, 43.

Her career path is similar to the one of another native of Poltava oblast', Maria Kalashnik. A Komsomol in 1932-1933, she also left the village after the famine and eventually became the chairwoman of a bread factory in Poltava. Historian, Voronina, identifies such a career pattern as a familiar one for the female activists of the 1930s.<sup>201</sup>

### 5.3 'Leave the Schools to the Women'

During the Rwandan genocide, women in various occupational fields facilitated the mass murder of Tutsis. Teachers at schools betrayed their pupils and handed them over to killers; so did nuns.<sup>202</sup> During Holodomor, teachers in Ukraine were also instrumental in mass violence. As one high-ranking Communist official commented: 'There is not a single village where teachers would not have been in the commission or brigades of grain procurement and collectivization.'<sup>203</sup> That is, 74,046 teachers – almost 2/3 (or 41,317) of whom worked in villages<sup>204</sup> – were there not only to educate the villagers, but to help bring about their 'social transformation.' In practice they dekulakized, created collective farms and enforced propaganda campaigns. During the famine, they organised *chervoni valky* (red trains – carts with procured grain); acted as informers; perused private post; instigated violence; and searched peasant huts. With the percentage of women in the teaching profession at 55.8% in 1928,<sup>205</sup> more than 20,000 women would have had the opportunity to oversee or engage in the aforementioned activities.

The importance of teachers in enforcing political campaigns was understood well by the top leaders in Soviet Ukraine at the time.<sup>206</sup> They regarded the teachers as 'a third front' (after military and economy) and a key agent of the influence of Soviet power in the countryside. In fact, the official position was that 'children were to be schooled into fighters for communism or not to be schooled at all.'<sup>207</sup> As the teachers in Ukraine did not support the Bolsheviks during the

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<sup>201</sup> M. Voronina, 'Nova radians'ka zhinka: genderna polityka radians'koi vldy u 1930-kh rokakh,' *Ukraiins'ki zhinky u hornyli modernizatsii*, ed. O. Kis' (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2017), p. 137.

<sup>202</sup> A. Smeulers, 'Female perpetrators – ordinary and extra-ordinary women,' *International Criminal Law Review* no 2 (2015).

<sup>203</sup> From the report compiled by A. Kvyliia from ROBOS to TsK KP(b)U on the state of village teachers in May 1930. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3099, ark. 8. ROBOS stands for Profspilka robitnykiv osvity (Trade Union of Education Workers).

<sup>204</sup> By the end of 1927. See H. Yefimenko, 'Sotsial'ne oblychchia vchytel'stva USRR v konteksti transformatsii suspil'stva (1920-ti roky),' *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky: Mizhvidomchyi zbirnyk prats*, 2007, no. 17; I. Klitsakov, *Pedahohichni kadry Ukrainy (1917-1937 rr.)*, p. 143.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

<sup>206</sup> V. Zatons'kyi, *Pro vchyteliv ta shkolu [Promovy]* (Kharkiv: Radians'ka shkola, 1935); A. Khvyliia, 'Vykhovaty molode komunistychno pokolinnia,' *Komunist*, 1933; A. Khvyliia, A. 'Po bil'shovys'tkomu zustrity novyi navchal'nyi rik!' *Komunist*, 1933.

<sup>207</sup> Yefimenko, 'Sotsial'ne oblychchia vchytel'stva USRR v konteksti transformatsii suspil'stva (1920-ti roky)' in *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky* (2007), no. 17, p. 149.



revolutionary years,<sup>208</sup> the Soviet state reduced funding for the schools and anyone wishing to enter the profession was required to pass a ‘reliability’ exam.<sup>209</sup> At the conferences of teachers in 1924-1925 over a quarter of them ‘accepted the Communist party as their only leader,’ 50% were politically passive (‘a political marshland’) and the rest resisted Soviet rule. During collectivization, however, passivity could have been interpreted as siding with enemies and ‘the political marshland’ shrunk to a quarter in 1928,<sup>210</sup> though only 3.3% of all teachers were Communists (and 4.1% Komsomol).<sup>211</sup> In 1930, however, 35% out of 11,000 new teachers were Komsomol and this percentage was projected to grow.<sup>212</sup>

Khvyliia, a member of the TsK KP(b)U who submitted a detailed study of the situation of the teachers in the countryside in 1930, pointed to female teachers as being more vulnerable to abuse in the village.<sup>213</sup> Women had less authority or confidence than their male colleagues who also could have been ordered to watch the possessions of the dekulakized, the granary or the stables or to watch and then convoy the arrested ‘kulaks’ or to collect eggs from the peasants. Based on ROBOS statistics, Khvyliia concluded that if the teacher was a young and attractive woman, she was likely to be sexually harassed. Moreover, the attackers, often village officials themselves, used their position of power to discipline a teacher that refused their advances. The teachers in the countryside often faced insufficient food provision, delays in pay, poorly heated school premises that required renovation, inadequate accommodation.

In some districts the local officials were made teachers’ superiors (Pervomais’k, Tul’chyn) by the district Inspection of Education. The teachers were required to join the collective farms, their salary then belonged to the collective, they could get food and other products only through the farm and were required to work at the farm as well as to teach. Moreover, according to one district inspector of education, it was up to the collective farm chairman to issue a reference for the teacher should they want to pursue further education or transfer.<sup>214</sup> Naturally, the teachers under such circumstances could be interpreted as compromised perpetrators.

Enforcing violent state policies made them enemies with their students’ parents that sometimes demanded teachers reveal the lists of peasants to be dekulakized. For example, in the village of Tarasivka, Kytaihorod district, Kam’ianets’ okruha, a teacher was the only one who ‘categorically’ objected to an agreement between the village council and the local KNS that there

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<sup>208</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3099, ark. 1-9.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, ark. 7-8.

<sup>211</sup> Yefimenko, ‘Sotsial’ne oblychchia vchytel’stva ...’, p. 158.

<sup>212</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3099, ark. 44.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, ark. 14.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, ark. 5.

were no 'kulaks' in the village.<sup>215</sup> These conflicts often resulted in violent clashes. In fact, in Annopil district there was only one village in which the teacher has not been beaten by the peasants. They were threatened, assaulted and their huts set alight. But sometimes teachers would show remorse, especially if the starving peasants were their own students. One survivor recalls how her teacher Savins'ka in the village of Velyka Obukhivka (Myrhorod district, Poltava oblast') returned the cloths she had confiscated earlier that day to the children.<sup>216</sup> All these circumstances prompted some teachers to flee, while others starved and even committed suicide.<sup>217</sup>

Ukrainian Soviet writer Anatolii Dimarov recalled how his mother participated in dekulakization as a teacher. He also remembered her crying when a peasant her team dekulakized committed suicide. That man was a father of Dimarov's school friend.<sup>218</sup> His mother left his father when they learnt they were to be dekulakized, changed her name and relocated to another village with the children. Dimarov later described her experience through the character Tetiana in the novel *The Hungry Thirties* (1989). Compromised by her repressed family Tetiana follows the orders so that her sons survive. Despite her work at school she still has to work at the farm to earn meagre portions of food which she shares with her children. One day she is thankful she does not have to dekulakize the family she has been lodging with. Clearly a compromised perpetrator, she is only one teacher of thousands. While the teacher's family was likely to suffer from malnutrition or poor diet, the teachers were rarely subject to house searches and in most cases received a ration – a lifeline many victims did not have.

Indeed, some teachers understood all too well the processes they were part of. Following Stalin's article in 1930 in which he criticised violence on the ground, many perpetrators wrote to him to express their dismay. One teacher from Uzyn in Kyiv oblast', where more than 1,563 out of 6,000 inhabitants died during the famine,<sup>219</sup> wrote to the paper *Radians'ke Selo*. She was concerned about the article's repercussions for the perpetrators and wondered if Stalin was aware of the situation on the ground: 'Didn't he know that the churches were closed down with force, that people were pulled into the collectives, thrown out of trade unions and KNS? That every single agency pushed for collectivization, sued its underlings and issued warnings?'<sup>220</sup> She was afraid that Stalin's article could negate the results of the perpetrators' arduous work and undermine their authority. Her description of the work of teachers is telling of their later involvement in the procurement in 1932-

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, ark. 2-3.

<sup>216</sup> Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, p. 1081.

<sup>217</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3099, ark. 18.

<sup>218</sup> A. Dimarov, *Prozhyty i rozpovisty: Povist pro simdesiat lit* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1997), Part I, p. 37.

<sup>219</sup> V. Ul'ianchenko et al, eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertyv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rr. v Ukraini. Kyivs'ka oblast'* (Kyiv: Bukva, 2008), p. 115.

<sup>220</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3107, ark. 27.

1933:

How many times during my work in the brigade when collecting seeds and collectivizing did I see tears, hear curses and pleas. A dirty wet hut, a bunch of pale, filthy rag-clad people. You come, check for grain and take everything they have, and then inform them that their cows, pigs, chickens and vegetable patch are collectivized; then demand donation for the tractor, 15% cash for the shares and 30% for the joining fee and all their savings (because some people are put on trial for being too slow in selling state loans). There was a case when a poor peasant nearly slashed the brigade and threatened to kill the Communists in the near future. At one meeting peasants demanded that all civil servants would pay to the collective for the eggs, hens and butter they consume.<sup>221</sup>

#### ***5.4 Komsomol***

Komsomol members often appear in oral memory as young people acting on the orders of village officials. The actions of Komsomol members facilitating collectivization is indicative of their later role in the Holodomor. While Komsomol members can be interpreted as compromised perpetrators – most of them were teenagers, susceptible to propaganda – their motivations varied. Some of them were local, while others, mostly students, were sent to the countryside from the towns by oblast' Komsomol committees. Both urban and village Komsomol members maintained close contact with the local officials, the DPU and police and sometimes acted on their direct orders. Upon completing their assignments, Komsomol members reported on their work caucus meetings at the district centres.<sup>222</sup>

Urban Komsomol members would first register at the district Komsomol committee and then proceed to the villages where they would report to the village council, which would give them specific tasks. According to many memoirs, the instructions from the district committees to fight 'kulaks,' engage in mass agitational work among the peasant youth, and determine 'where the kulaks are hiding the grain' left young people confused: 'This was a huge task; were we up to it? We really knew nothing about these things; we did not know where to begin.'<sup>223</sup> Guided by senior comrades from the Party, however, many of these young people soon adapted. Usually they introduced themselves to the village youth and informed them of the opportunities that membership in the collective farm offered. Komsomol members attended youth gatherings in the village and the local reading huts. From the village youth they would retrieve information about hidden grain and village affairs. Often, the personal details revealed by these exchanges were used in dekulakization. In one village, a peasant whom the activists intended to dekulakize shot at them from a rifle and locked himself in the house. One urban Komsomol member demonstrated resourcefulness and acted

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 20, Spr. 3083, Ark. 1-101.

<sup>223</sup> Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, p. 236.

as a Trojan horse. Having learnt from the village youth that the peasant was very religious, she disguised herself as a nun and asked him to let her in for the night. In the morning she opened the gates to the brigade.<sup>224</sup>

There is no statistical data on how many urban Komsomol members deserted their posts or committed suicide, but based on oral memory, it is clear that many persisted in the work fulfilling their instructions. When one such Komsomol member in Kuban, Maksim, was questioned by his friend on the necessity of violence – and on the practice of starving children to death in particular – he justified such methods by explaining that all citizens had a collective responsibility to cooperate with authorities. Moreover, Maksim argued that saving the children would prolong the struggle between the state and the peasantry:

It is a necessary measure. Cossacks must be terrorised, or collectivization will fail. When we collected grain and revealed the saboteurs hiding it, we received virtually no support from the population. Here's an example: we discovered that one kulak buried a lot of grain in a pit, about 5 tonnes. Obviously it took him a long time to dig such a large pit, but when we asked his neighbours, everyone assured us that they knew nothing. ... We must finish off the kulaks at all costs; if we don't finish them, they will finish us.<sup>225</sup>

Local Komsomol members were naturally well acquainted with the situation in the village. While they were supervised by the senior Party members, they were often supported by their relations, except for cases when Komsomol members disowned their peasant parents. A celebrated Stakhanovite tractor driver from Donbas oblast', Pasha Angelina, was a Komsomol member in 1930. According to her autobiography, she took part in collectivization along with her family. Her brother Vasily was the chairman of the village KNS and the head of agitation and propaganda at the RPK, while another brother, Ivan, was the secretary of the village Party cell. Another, Nikolai, was in the Party, and another two siblings were in the Komsomol. The Angelin family also had long-term grievances against the local farmers who had employed them in the past. When Angelins failed to win the majority of votes for the creation of the collective farm, they simply dekulakized their enemies and took their land. Though their actions were interpreted in the village as profiteering, Angelina regarded dekulakization as part of the inevitable struggle in which 'we, the ordinary people' won. More importantly, she claims that their actions were similar to those of activists in many other villages around the country and that the younger generation, which she represented, could not 'wait for [better] future with folded arms.'<sup>226</sup>

Like other perpetrators, they were attacked: Angelina's mother was beaten, and the siblings

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 239

<sup>225</sup> V. Bogdan, *Studenty pervoi piatiletki* (Buenos-Aires, 1973), p. 79.

<sup>226</sup> P. Angelina, *O samom glavnom: moi otvet na amerikanskiu anketu* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Pravda, 1948), p. 6.

were threatened and shot. Angelina herself was deliberately run over by a cart. She recalls how fellow female collective farmers objected to her organising an all-female brigade of tractor drivers and how older women rejoiced at lightning hitting her, which was seen as a punishment for her actions. Angelina explains that the Komsomol members like her moved on to administrative work in mid 1930s: they headed various district level organizations and institutions or became chairmen of the collective farms and secretaries of different level Party committees.<sup>227</sup>

In an in-depth interview I conducted with Oleksandr O., which was based on the questionnaire by Borysenko, we can gain yet another view into the role of Komsomol members in the perpetration of the Holodomor. Oleksandr O. was only fifteen years old in 1932. While denying participation in the events for immediate profit, Oleksandr O. admitted that his village blacksmith family profited from their loyalty to the regime over the long term. His two uncles secured high-ranking Party jobs at oblast' and republican levels. His family was one of the first to join the collective, exercising what Noll calls a *ritual myth* to prove the loyalty and enthusiasm of the family.<sup>228</sup> One uncle became the headmaster of a village school and 'of course organised the teachers and students into search brigades.' Like many other perpetrators of mass violence, Oleksandr O. denied the very event of the famine in interview. He claimed that not many people died and that it was a temporary difficulty and not man-made. Later, however, he added that it was avoidable, recalling several dead people dumped on a cart in the village of Velyki Krynky every day.<sup>229</sup> When he admitted to seeing hundreds of the starving peasants at the train station in Khorol – where they were later shot en masse for attempting to break into grain storehouses – Oleksandr O. expressed regret that the authorities made no attempt to help the starving peasants.<sup>230</sup>

The Komsomol offered young people like him many opportunities, claimed Oleksandr O.. Coming from a family of the church elder, he excelled in chemistry at school and used his chemistry set to debunk 'religious miracles' in front of a 100-strong audience in the village club. Later he joined the prestigious Kyiv Polytechnic, fought at the front during the Second World War. After many years of service, he retired in Kyiv where he recently died at the age of 99. During the famine, he said, 'I was young but could not understand why they [the victims] gave up so easily. They put up their arms and died. We, students, were asked to search too, so that no one could hide anything. There was a house we came to, with a little roof above the entrance, where a man hid a sack of grain. But we found it. We were so happy when we got it! The man told us that it was for

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>228</sup> W. Noll, *Transformatsiia hromadians'koho suspilstva* (Kyiv: Rodovid, 1999), p. 127.

<sup>229</sup> 894 names of the victims in Velyki Krynky are recovered to date which suggests the toll was considerably higher. Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsionalna knyha pamyati...*, p. 114.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with Oleksandr O. on 08.08.2014 in Kyiv. At the time of the famine he resided in Khorol, Poltava oblast'.

the seeds and to survive... But we said “no”, enough said and took the sack to Zagotzerno.’<sup>231</sup> None of his comrades died from hunger; most stayed in Khorol but continued their studies elsewhere. The chairman of the collective was later fired for using wood from the local church as fuel for the school.

His Komsomol brigade of five teenage boys was one of many acting on the orders of the RPK, which were passed down through the school in Khorol. They and other perpetrators, all of them local, searched all houses. No one searched the searchers, however: ‘The officials trusted us. When we were tasked with upturning the grain in storage – the grain store was full – we filled our special pockets too.’ When asked about the starving peasant whose grain he found, Oleksandr O. sounded indifferent: ‘we did not know him... Maybe he ate beets after that or had a little more hidden somewhere.’ He admitted that participation in these searches was voluntary and that no one was punished for refusing to search. According to him, no one refused: ‘We were keen to do it!’<sup>232</sup>

At the same time, however, his family had to sell the gold and silver they had and even take embroidered towels to exchange for grain in Belarus, where ‘they did not know that we were dying.’ One of his aunts and her many children survived only thanks to her more influential brothers. They also employed her father-in-law to collect corpses. During the Second World War his family was targeted by the survivors; his house was put on the list to be burnt as the Germans retreated. But the individuals whom the family of Oleksandr O. had helped during the famine ensured his family house was saved. His first cousin in Khorol confirmed that Komsomol activists served in the search brigades but did not name anyone. She also omitted mentioning the part her father played in the famine as the headmaster of the school who organised brigades himself. She justified the participation of teachers by their dependence on rations. Like her cousin, she recalled helping the extended family to survive and blamed the famine on state policies.<sup>233</sup>

### ***5.5 Plenipotentiaries***

The Party plenipotentiaries (*upovnovazheni*) were drawn from various institutions and sent to the countryside with special powers to organise or oversee grain procurement. In 1929 the all-Ukrainian Council of Trade Unions sent 120 brigades to assist in collectivization.<sup>234</sup> Some came as teachers or the Twenty-Five Thousanders. Throughout 1932, thousands of men and women – many with a ‘reliable’ record of work in the village during collectivization – were deployed to procure

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, pp. 1144-1145.

<sup>234</sup> L. Viola, V. Danilov et al., eds. *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930. The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 148.

grain and had to stay in the countryside for at least two years.<sup>235</sup> According to archival materials and oral memory, college students worked alongside the Party members and university staff: ‘In Adriivka in the Sanzhary district, there was a college, and the boys from the college, armed with guns, came in [groups of] fifteen. They split into smaller groups, and with several members from the village council, went to Svaturivka, Bazarivka, Nekhvoroshcha.’<sup>236</sup> One such student, sent as a plenipotentiary from Komsomol to help grain procurement in late 1932, claimed that collectivization, the incompetence of people like him, and the local corrupt officials caused the famine.<sup>237</sup>

The students were also joined by the army. According to the political office of the RSChA in spring 1933, 186 brigades of soldiers and officers worked in the countryside searching for grain hidden by the peasants. They apparently discovered 374 pits with grain.<sup>238</sup>

Others embraced the opportunity to procure grain in order to advance their career. One Soviet engineer recalled one such careerist type in his memoirs: Borys Lisnychevs’kyi, the chairman of Shepetivka construction trust: ‘an ethnic Jew, a roofer by training, and, of course, an ardent Communist.’<sup>239</sup> Lisnichevs’kyi was responsible for Party work in the office: there were frequent two-hour-long meetings after work, which were mandatory to attend, where he read the latest Party resolutions and news of Soviet successes far away that nobody could verify. In the autumn of 1932 Lisnichevs’kyi was sent by the Party to the countryside ‘to pump bread from the peasants. Here Lisnichevs’kyi demonstrated such enthusiasm that in the district where he worked, peasants literally had not a pound of grain left. He worked so hard that he was sent to do the same job to another district. He ‘pumped out’ bread there too. Afterward he was promoted to a higher position and given a flat in the house that was being constructed.’<sup>240</sup> According to his file at the SBU archive, Lisnichevs’kyi’s career was cut short in 1937. He was arrested on charges of sabotage, terrorism and participation in a counter-revolutionary organization. At the time of his arrest Lisnyshevs’kyi was the director of the construction trust of Vinnytsia oblast’.<sup>241</sup> His property was confiscated. Within a few months he was executed; his wife received five years in the labour camps.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5801, ark. 3.

<sup>236</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, p. 1075.

<sup>237</sup> Haman, et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, p. 798.

<sup>238</sup> N. Bem, ‘Politychni nastroii ukrains’koho selianstva v umovakh kolektyvizatsii sil’s’koho hospodarstva (Istoriographichniy ohliad)’, *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky*, 2004, no. 11, p. 497.

<sup>239</sup> Bakhmetteff Archive at Butler Library at Columbia University, Bernard, K. Handwritten memoirs (BAR GEN MSColl), pp. 8-9.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> L. Spiridonova, V. Latsyba, S. Neshyk et al., eds. *Reabilitovani istorieiu: U dvatsiaty semy tomakh. Vinnyts’ka oblast’*, vol. 3 (Vinnytsia: DP ‘Derzhavna kartographichna fabryka,’ 2010), p. 507.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

Despite the previous experience of collectivisation, some plenipotentiaries appeared to be unprepared for the famine that was to unfold. Party leadership in Kharkiv received many reports on the plenipotentiaries ‘deserting’ their positions in droves, getting drunk with the local activists, or criticizing the very policies that they were expected to enforce.<sup>243</sup> Poor provisions by the state did not help their situation either. Some plenipotentiaries committed suicide ‘ridden with guilt and full of sympathy for the starving’ and feeling powerless to change anything.<sup>244</sup> According to a report by Khataievich on the situation in Odesa oblast’, there were almost 30 plenipotentiaries in the Arbuzynka district between September and October 1932. Eleven of them left the district without prior warning. Only one of them was expelled from the Party after commenting on the plan being unrealistic.<sup>245</sup>

Despairing plenipotentiaries coined a name for grain procurement as ‘extermination with death’ or the ‘tugboat of death.’<sup>246</sup> They faced the pressure from above, as seen in a directive letter from Kosior on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1932. It stipulates that plenipotentiaries were required to report every ten days on 1) the actions taken [to reach procurement quotas] and to fight defeatist moods in grain procurement and 2) the results in procurement, with examples of excellent work and of repressions applied to individual farmers in accordance with an earlier directive from 18<sup>th</sup> November 1932 to those hoarding grain.<sup>247</sup> In other words, the letter outlines what was expected from them: to procure, to repress and to report. When they failed to meet these expectations, however, they were not necessarily punished. Protocols of the RPKs across the republic reveal many instances of plenipotentiaries failing to procure, to repress, or to report. Often they received warnings or moved from one place to another. Some were expelled from the Party, while in other cases they kept their jobs.

Yet there were also cases of some plenipotentiaries trying to help the starving peasants. One 30-year-old district plenipotentiary, Honcharenko, in Zhashkiv worked as a chairman of the collective farm in Skibin during the famine. He states that 201 people in Skibin starved to death in the winter of 1933 alone:

Despite these difficulties [I] organised a sowing campaign and helped a neighbouring collective farm. During the 1933 harvest, after much discussion with other people on the collective farm board and with the secretary of the Party cell, I milled some grain to feed the farmers... By August I spent 1,500 [kilograms] and procured 800. I was reported by the the RPK and the MTS

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<sup>243</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6311, 6339, 6340, 6341.

<sup>244</sup> Maksudov, ‘Victory over the Peasantry’, 2008, p. 144.

<sup>245</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5386, ark. 110.

<sup>246</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 185, 196.

<sup>247</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5384, ark. 187.



polit[ical department] ... and sentenced to 10 years of camps.<sup>248</sup>

Honcharenko justifies his own actions by explaining that he successfully completed the harvest, and claimed that he had not profitted, and also notes that his pregnant wife and three little children had already been evicted from their house.

In January 1933, at a meeting of the Kharkiv oblast' Party committee, its first secretary, Roman Terekhov, provided the following typology of plenipotentiaries: 1) those scared of the excesses; 2) defeatists; 3) saboteurs; 4) and the incapable. He acknowledged that most plenipotentiaries changed after encountering 'difficult circumstances' on the ground; they quickly shifted 'from the right positions to the neutral ones.'<sup>249</sup> These euphemisms point to a large number of perpetrators, most of whom were not trained to enforce violence, questioning their orders and, if not immediately defying them, then simply not proceeding to fulfil them quickly, though many of them, like the aforementioned Richyts'kyi and Lisnichevs'kyi, chose to proceed.

## **6. Tugboat Brigades**

There were other outsiders that burrowed themselves deep in oral memory. These are the so-called *bukusyry* (tugboat) brigades. The name 'tugboat' characterized their role – to speed up procurement within any given collective farm, village or district. While in oral memory, they are often conflated with the village brigades, the tugboat brigades consisted of Party members, civil servants, and collective farmers from outside the village. According to a resolution by the Politburo of the TsK KP(b)U on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1932, 600 Communists from industrial centres (140 Communists to be sent from Kharkiv) were to assist 40-50 'key' RPKs in grain procurement campaign. Several brigades with 3-4 persons in each, in turn, were to organize by the beginning of December 1,100 local activist collective farmers to procure grain from individual farmers or in neighbouring villages.<sup>250</sup> Other tugboat brigades were organised by decisions of district, oblast' party committees or the TsK KP(b)U. The composition of a brigade depended on the organization it was set up within. Tugboat brigades were generally larger than local brigades and sometimes reached 800 members. The appearance of such a large number of strangers reportedly intimidated the peasants, meanwhile the members of the tugboat brigades, not bound by any ties to the starving peasants, were more likely to obey the orders and requisition the last foodstuffs.<sup>251</sup>

One such tugboat brigade worked in Zinov'iev okruha in October 1930 and left a detailed

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<sup>248</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6210, ark. 62-64.

<sup>249</sup> DAPO, f. P-35, op. 1, spr. 13, ark. 20-27.

<sup>250</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 6, spr. 237, ark. 207-217.

<sup>251</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6210, ark. 1-64.

report on its assignment.<sup>252</sup> It consisted of 203 members from various organizations: 15 Komsomol, 3 pioneers, 102 members from RSChA, 173 who participated in the 1928-29 grain procurement campaign, and 87 non-Communists. The 12 women in the brigade came from the conference of female collective workers of Zinov'ievs'k okruha, where 312 women delegates gathered to discuss progress in grain procurement. This tugboat brigade visited villages where local brigades failed to fulfil grain procurement targets or where individual farming prevailed and the local officials were either 'feeling confused and betrayed' or had left the villages altogether.<sup>253</sup> The report acknowledges difficulties in the district which pushed masses of the poor peasants into a 'consumerist' practices.

When the tugboat brigade arrived in the villages, the peasants refused to accommodate or feed the *chuzhozemtsi* (foreigners) or *chervona mitla* (red broomstick) who, according to the peasants, 'came for their bread' and thus were openly hostile to them. The brigade was met with hostility by village officials who were supposed to assist them. In particular, one local official told the arrivals that there was no work in the village for them, for which he was promptly expelled from the Party by the RPK.<sup>254</sup> The head of the village council in Kovalivka commented that local officials like him were 'bought' to let the tugboat brigade take their remaining bread whereas the secretary of the Party cell in Malynivka 'sabotaged' the work of the brigade, accusing its members of 'excessive eagerness.'

Eventually the brigade set to work. They split the villages into smaller parts of 20 houses, where they sought to procure grain and organise separate meetings for collective farmers and their children. A group of 57 members of the brigade worked in 14 villages where they organised 32 village meetings in five days. They dekulakized 37 families and collectivized over 1,454 farmsteads. Female members of the brigade worked with the peasant women and children. As the RPK applauded the tugboat brigade in the media, one plenipotentiary rushed to the RPK with a plea to reduce the quotas: 'If you don't cut the target now, I will not see the village council head and the chairman of the collective farm alive again. I'm afraid they will take their lives.'<sup>255</sup> He was moved to another position, and the quota was unchanged.

Within five days of its work, the tugboat brigade procured more grain than the regular search brigades had done in the past. In two districts, Voznesens'k and Nova Odesa, regular search brigades had procured 390,259 puds in 67 village councils, whereas the tugboat brigade procured 449,000 puds in 25 village councils.<sup>256</sup> Upon the tugboat brigade's return from the village, the RPK organised a rally in Voznesens'k, where the attendees decided to build a plane and name it after the

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<sup>252</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3144, ark. 123.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, ark. 124.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, ark. 126.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, ark. 130.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, ark. 132.

brigade.

## 7. *Variety of Roles*

There were many other groups that contributed to the mechanism of the famine, including railway workers, who were ordered not to sell tickets to peasants without permits to leave their village – that is, to escape the famine – or train conductors who did not allow often emaciated stowaways with children on the train. Naturally, they also faced checks, purges and repressions. Some obeyed the orders; others did not. One train conductor in Osnova near Kharkiv, named only as S.K., let peasants with children in his train car, which was in contravention of instructions. His colleagues reported him to their supervisor, O. Onopko, and the DPU. He was promptly fired.<sup>257</sup>

While it is impossible to explore all such roles in this dissertation, I will highlight a select number: informers, field guards and wives.

### 7.1 *The Informers: Sil'kory and Neighbours*

Village correspondents or *sil'kory* (short for *sil's'ki korrespondenty*) also facilitated the famine on the ground. Sometimes the role of village correspondent was combined with that of the head of the village council, or the head of the village Party cell. In most cases it involved providing intelligence to the security service. In 1926 Zaton's'kyi commented on peasant correspondents as a minority working in difficult conditions: 'We are well aware of the attitude toward you that is expressed by the kulaks and even by some disgraceful representatives of Soviet power.'<sup>258</sup>

The number of *sil'kory* grew steadily during collectivisation. If in 1925 there were only 300 correspondents in Soviet Volyn, which is part of today's Zhytomyr oblast', by 1929 there were 500. Their reporting to the district papers was oblique, yet telling. At the peak of the famine, a *sil'kor* called Leninets in the village of Toporyshche in Zhytomyr oblast' reported 3 collective farmers for not qualifying for daily rations at the farm. He accused them of being idle and sleeping in the field instead of working. According to oral testimonies from the village, however, these men were swollen from hunger and unable to work.<sup>259</sup>

From January 1933 someone reporting hiding grain would yield 15% of the find. It tore families apart. Kateryna Hrebelnyk, from Korovaii in Hrebinky district, Poltava oblast', recalls a case of a woman boasting to her sister that her husband hid grain. Her sister in turn told her own husband, who reported his brother-in-law. The grain was found, the man imprisoned and

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<sup>257</sup> S. Pidhainy, eds. *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: The White Book*, vol. 2 (Detroit, 1955), p. 104.

<sup>258</sup> V. Zaton's'kyi, *Leninovym shlyakhom (Promova na poshyrenii naradi sil'koriv 'Radians'ke selo')* (Kharkiv, 1926), 21, as quoted in Mace, 'The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selian ...', p. 502.

<sup>259</sup> *Za Bil'shovyts'ki Tempy*, 8th July 1933.

vanished.<sup>260</sup> Very often it set neighbour on neighbour. Indeed, some informers became so good at the practice that they used their new skill to profit further, offering starving peasants the chance to keep their foodstuffs in exchange for intelligence on their neighbours.<sup>261</sup> During the Holocaust, a similar dynamic was observed. While the Dutch could earn money by betraying Jews, the captured Jews could save their lives – if only temporarily – by reporting other Jews. The infamous Ans Van Dijk was first denounced as a Jew; instead of being sent to the death camp immediately, she chose to stay by betraying others. She allegedly betrayed over a hundred Jews.

## 7.2 *The Field Guards*

As the 1933 harvest approached, many starving peasants turned their hopes to the fields. So did the Party leaders in Kharkiv, but for a different reason. They did not want the starving peasants to ‘pilfer’ the fields. A year earlier, at the III Party conference, Kosior stated to district secretaries: ‘Absolutely nothing can justify pilfering: not a lack of bread or dire need.’ He suggested using collective farmers as guards.<sup>262</sup> At the TsK KP(b)U plenum in June 1933, Kisis argued that ‘pilferers’ will try ‘to simulate the hunger ... in order to get some moral justification for stealing the harvest.’<sup>263</sup> Almost every speaker expressed concerns about the ‘protection’ of the new harvest and admitted that the famine – some used the word *holod* openly – exceeded that of 1922 and was ‘not like any other famine in the past.’<sup>264</sup> The protection of the harvest was therefore to be organized in accordance with decree by the TsK VKP(b) and SNK from 24<sup>th</sup> May 1933: ‘bread’ had to be protected both in the fields and during transportation, and ‘the thieves’ were to be prosecuted under the law of 7<sup>th</sup> August 1932. The field guards were to be recruited locally and watchtowers erected. In Odesa oblast’, for instance, more than seven hundred watchtowers were constructed.<sup>265</sup>

At the same plenum, Odintsov and Khataievich argued that the collective farmers, and the shock-collective farmers in particular, should guard the fields under supervision by police and the DPU, whereas Cherniavs’kyi suggested making field brigades at the collective farms responsible for protecting the harvest through mounted patrols.<sup>266</sup> Kosior, on the other hand, argued that the most effective way to stimulate collective farmers to protect the harvest was to give them bread. He added that there was not enough grain for everyone, so the guards would have to be promised bread from the new harvest that they would protect.<sup>267</sup> Kosior reasoned that establishing mounted patrols

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<sup>260</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, p. 944.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, pp. 916-1188.

<sup>262</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 377, ark. 92-93.

<sup>263</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 406, ark. 37.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, ark. 146.

<sup>265</sup> T. Snyder, *The Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 39.

<sup>266</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 405, ark. 19, 20, 113, 129.

<sup>267</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 406, ark. 141-142.

would yield little, especially in the light of a ‘colossal quantity of parasite and stray elements.’

Kosior’s suggestion worked. Many non-Party farmers volunteered to become guards in the fields; they were usually armed with a rifle or a whip, moving on horseback or observing from the newly erected wooden towers. Many field guards were village activists (members of search brigades), while others joined to receive a ration that could save lives. Others still simply followed orders, like Pavlo Ivashko from Kobeliaky in the Poltava oblast’: ‘Local people, collective farmers ... You got a job allocated to you and you do it ... They were at work, these people did their work.’<sup>268</sup> Very often children helped to watch the fields. During the summer of 1933, for instance, over 540,000 school age children guarded the fields and helped to collect ears of wheat after the harvest.<sup>269</sup>

Apart from physical punishment, the guards could also bring the ‘offenders’ to the village council, where they will be dealt with by police. The security services also reported numerous cases of ‘offenders’ being lynched by collective farmers and local officials. Some guards were strict or sadistic, punishing anyone who dared to cut ears of wheat. Others turned a blind eye to the children swollen with hunger. Indeed, the role of the guards in the famine should not be underestimated: by the beginning of 1933, tens of thousands of people were caught in the fields or caught breaking into storehouses or granaries; 54,645 of them were convicted under the Law of 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1932; 2,000 peasants were executed; and the number of peasants lynched still remains unknown.<sup>270</sup>

In a report on the involvement of the Komsomol in protecting the harvest, Muskin notes that 40,471 Komsomol members in the Kharkiv oblast’ and 38,000 in the Dnipropetrovs’k oblast’ participated in the spring 1933 campaign on the ground.<sup>271</sup> Apart from all other duties, they organised ‘agro-guard’ (or mounted patrols), and thousands of guarding teams, who were not supposed to compete with the collective farm brigades but rather ‘to motivate the brigades to protect the harvest on its field.’ Ten thousand Komsomol men and women worked like shock-workers, and thousands received bonuses for ‘the exceptional heroic deeds.’<sup>272</sup>

Some survivors remember outsiders guarding their fields. Indeed, at times the responsibility of watching the fields was delegated to members of the TSOAviaKhim or RSChA. Despite its military inclination, many members of TSOAviaKhim were young women like shock-workers Demchenko and Hnatenko, who joined the organization to gain training or to fulfil their dreams.

In 1933 thousands of the activists from the city cells of TSOAviaKhim were deployed in

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<sup>268</sup> Bilous’ko et al., eds. *Natsional’na knyha pam’iati*, p. 984.

<sup>269</sup> P. Postyshev, *Itogi 1933 sel’skokhoziaistvennogo goda i ocherednyie zadazhi KP(b)U. Rech na ob’iedinennom plenum TsK i TsKK KP(b)U 19 noiabria 1933 goda* (Khar’kov: Partizdat TsK KP(b)U, 1933), p. 17.

<sup>270</sup> Yu. Shapoval, ‘“Povelitelnaia neobkhodimost’’: god 1932’.

<sup>271</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 406, ark. 9-10, 16.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

the countryside ‘to guard the new harvest.’ In the first days of August 1933 the chairman of the central council of Ukrainian TSOAviaKhim, Bohdanov, reported to the Politburo of the TsK KP(b)U with reference to an earlier request that 2,200 TSOAviaKhim volunteers watch the fields in *sovkhozy* (state collective farms). He stated that 2,420 men and women were deployed at 141 farms as ‘part of a great effort’ by TSOAviaKhim in the village. Meanwhile, the Kharkiv oblast’ council sent 700 ‘military educated’ activists from the city to the collective farms. According to incomplete data that Bohdanov had at the time, there were over 21,000 TSOAviaKhim members protecting the 1933 harvest in Ukraine.<sup>273</sup>

### 5.3 *The Spouses*

There is another role that has escaped the focus of researchers of the Holodomor: those who supported the Holodomor in the private sphere as the spouses of the perpetrators. While there are no known cases of influential wives of the Party leaders in Soviet Ukraine at the time – the equivalents of Mira Markovic, Jiang Qing, Elena Ceausescu, Simone Gbagbo or Eva Perron – some women indeed gained political or economic power through their partners on the village level. Others simply preferred not to interfere with their spouses’ jobs.

The wives and husbands of Party plenipotentiaries rarely lived with their spouses during their deployment in the countryside, and some could have been unaware of the activities in which their partners were involved. Yet when they followed their spouses, they could not avoid witnessing or even participating in the famine. Their reaction to the events varied. One Twenty-Five Thousander wrote to the paper *Radians’ke Selo* in 1930 about his comrade bringing his wife to the village: ‘... the secretary of the RPK said he would not help in such silly matters [arranging for the accommodation]... That night they had to pay 50 rubles for the flat... in three days they saw their landlord being dekulakized. The wife started crying for the loss of 50 rubles... that they stayed with kulaks... all of whom were evicted except for one old disabled man who I had to throw out myself.’<sup>274</sup>

The family members of the village activists, on the other hand, were likely to be fully aware of the spouses’ actions. Very often they played an important role by encouraging the men either to profit or to help the starving. They contributed to crimes by way of silent approval and by providing emotional comfort as well as active support. As in Nazi Germany almost a decade later, they passively supported the regime by actively supporting their spouses. Some survivors even note the wives of the perpetrators participating in the searches, or refusing to help victims when in a position

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<sup>273</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6333, ark. 162.

<sup>274</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3107, ark. 158.

to do so. One peasant woman asked the wife of the collective farm's chairman, Nataalka, for a handful of flour. Nataalka refused saying she had none. When Nataalka died from typhoid some time later, her husband hired the woman to cook for him; she then discovered a trunk full of flour in the kitchen.<sup>275</sup>

Some women disapproved of their husbands' actions but were unable to change anything. Tetiana Tur, whose father was a perpetrator in Luhove (Velyka Bahachka district, Poltava oblast'), recalls how her mother cried in desperation when her husband 'pumped out' all the grain from other families and then procured their own supplies with the words 'The state needs it!' One of their daughters later died from starvation.<sup>276</sup> At times the wives of village officials could halt collectivization in their village, at least for a time. Party plenipotentiary Nekliaev reported on the anti-collectivization rally in the village of Shliakhove near Uman', which was headed by the wives of local officials. When one husband was arrested, the women cooperated with the district officials.<sup>277</sup> Others tried to help the starving peasants: while keeping her activist husband in the dark, Nastia Tkachenko used to give potatoes and lard to the very family that her husband had dekulakized. The girls in that family, out of gratitude, embroidered shirts for Nastia.<sup>278</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

By identifying the rank-and-file perpetrators by their institutional affiliation, I have shown that these local and urban activists included members of various parts of society. They were men and women, rich and poor, young and old, Communists and non-Party members alike. Their previous participation in collectivization tended to serve as a precursor to their involvement in the famine, though it was not always indicative. Only a minority refused to obey or handed in their Party tickets, as revealed in the ODPU report discovered by Martin.<sup>279</sup> There is a variety of explanations for this lack of refusal: fear, deference to authority, obedience to orders, careerism, brutalisation during the post-revolutionary years and collectivization, ideological indoctrination, segmentation and the increasingly routine nature of the tasks, special selection of the perpetrators.

The fact that ordinary people participated in mass violence was reflected in their experience later in life. Some felt compelled to either deny their participation, minimize its significance or present themselves as compromised or ideological participants. Although Soviet propaganda indeed played an important role in motivating particularly young people to participate, most perpetrators were often involved for mundane reasons. They did not regard their perpetration as such, as we see

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<sup>275</sup> Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, pp. 1078-1081.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 924.

<sup>277</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3192, ark. 40.

<sup>278</sup> Bilous'ko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, p. 1082.

<sup>279</sup> Martin, 'Famine Initiators and Directors', p. 70.

from both perpetrator and survivor testimonies. Regardless of their motivation, the rank-and-file perpetrators' role was decisive in the mechanism of the famine and led to the death of millions.

While my typology of the Holodomor perpetrators on the ground can be developed further, even its initial application reveals how significant an inclusive approach is for understanding the Holodomor and its execution on the ground. With the availability of archival material and existing corpora of oral memory, more analysis of the rank-and-file perpetrators has become possible. I now turn to two case studies to develop this analysis further.



## Chapter II

### The Case Studies: Toporyshche and Popivka

In this chapter, I analyse memoirs and testimonies of the perpetrators in two villages in detail and juxtapose them with archival evidence, oral memory and post-memory. These two villages, Toporyshche and Popivka, are located in two distinct historical and geographical regions of Ukraine – the oblast's of Zhytomyr and Poltava. Zhytomyr oblast' has boasted a multiethnic demographic composition, while its natural complexion is very wooded, with relatively less fertile soil than elsewhere. Poltava oblast', by contrast, with its rich black soil, has featured prominently as the land of plenty in the novels of Nikolai Gogol, the famous ethnic Ukrainian writer of the nineteenth century Russian Empire. It also produced one of the 'father of modern Ukrainian literature,' Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi, and one of the leaders of the early twentieth-century Ukrainian national movement, Symon Petliura. While the famine claimed more lives in Poltava oblast', both in proportion and numbers, the mechanism of the famine on the ground and the experience of its rank-and-file perpetrators in both Toporyshche and Popivka are sadly similar.

As a starting point, I establish what constitutes perpetrator testimonies and clarify the other sources used in this chapter, most of which are unpublished. They include personal files at the DPU; minutes from the RPK meetings, the village council, and the collective farm meetings; documents from the republican, provincial, district and private archives, the village museums and the village councils; memoirs, autobiographies, and letters; interviews with the people who knew the perpetrators; newspaper reports and oral memory. While there are no 'smoking gun' documents mapping the entirety of the mechanism of the Holodomor, the evidence is sufficient enough to ascertain the activities of perpetrators in the searches, acts of repressions and other activities. Their own words are used in tandem with other texts.

#### *The Case of Toporyshche*

On the eve of collectivization, the village of Toporyshche in the Khoroshiv district, Zhytomyr oblast', was home to 1,640 inhabitants, many of whom lived in hamlets nearby. Like most villages in Volyn', it was multi-ethnic, largely consisting of four groups: Ukrainians, Germans, Poles and Jews.<sup>280</sup> Toporyshche had three churches (Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic), two schools and hosted monthly fairs. Perhaps what differentiates Toporyshche from other similar villages were its relatively high literacy rates – only 35% of residents were completely

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<sup>280</sup> DAZhO, f. 327, op. 1, spr. 132, ark. 109.

illiterate in 1922.<sup>281</sup> In 1929 two Ukrainian collective farms were created there – *Peremoha* (Victory) and *Lenina* (hamlets-based) – in addition to one German collective farm. Regardless of their fulfillment of grain quotas in 1932-1933 (both Ukrainian farms reached only 60%, while the German one overfulfilled), most residents of Toporyshche endured starvation.

According to oral memory, about 100 residents died from starvation. Though only 22 identities of the victims have been established, demographers at the MAPA project at Harvard University estimate the average direct population loss in this district to be 179 people per 1,000.<sup>282</sup> If this ratio is applied to Toporyshche, the number of victims could have been around 286, though average loss in the district could be explained by the other villages being included on the ‘black lists.’ The German part of the village fared better thanks to the aid from their contacts abroad. While we are unlikely to establish the exact number of victims, the very fact that at least a hundred peasants died from starvation in the village indicates the clear presence of perpetrators whose actions led to their death.

The identities of the perpetrators can be recovered from several sources: personal files of the repressed peasants, protocols of the collective farm and the village council meetings, minutes from the RPK meetings, the village museum, perpetrators’ memoirs, private archives, oral memory and postmemory. For example, the list of 163 Communists and 137 candidates for Communists in Khoroshiv district includes the names of party cell members in Toporyshche and mentions their role in grain procurement.<sup>283</sup> In fact, the total number of the confirmed perpetrators is over a hundred, suggesting that a considerable part of the adult population was involved in starving their neighbours. The key role in all sources is reserved for the Havryliuk brothers – and most notably, Matvii Havryliuk, who was in charge of grain procurement commission in the village in 1932-1933 and appointed to this position by the RVK. He also chaired the local party cell, KNS and held other positions of power. The majority of other activists, however, were responsible for routine tasks like house searches and field protection.

In order to understand how Havryliuk and other Toporyshchans facilitated the destruction of scores of their neighbours, we have to review, once again, the events preceding the famine. In her recent work, Applebaum argues that peasants were effectively divided into two groups in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, when one group was empowered to exploit their neighbours on behalf of the state and was assisted by fervent believers from the cities.<sup>284</sup> The case of Toporyshche, however, demonstrates that these groups were not clearly defined. The motivation of

<sup>281</sup> DAZhO, f. 1657, op. 1, spr. 516, ark. 15.

<sup>282</sup> L. Kopyichenko et al., eds. *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty*, 352; MAPA project <http://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d9d046abd7cd40a287ef3222b7665cf3>

<sup>283</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3219, ark. 14-30.

<sup>284</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, pp. 116, 121.

the perpetrators was multicausal, although a closer inspection of the post-revolutionary period helps elucidate their motives.

In a local government survey conducted in 1924, Toporyshche was predominantly characterised as a ‘middle peasant’ village with a ‘hostile’ attitude towards KNS.<sup>285</sup> While few villagers participated in the military conflicts following the revolution, many did not support the Bolsheviks and took part in the *reikova viina* (‘train track war’) in 1919. The war manifested itself in the partial destruction of train tracks during the Great Peasant Uprising in 1919. This tactic impeded the Red Army’s advance into rural Ukraine beyond major towns. The train track connecting Zhytomyr and Korosten was built in 1916 and ran not far from the village centre. On 7 July 1919, several dozens of men from Toporyshche destroyed a stretch of the track, attacked an armoured train and killed several Red Army soldiers. During the repressions in the late 1930s, when over 80 Toporyshchans were tried and executed as ‘enemies of the people,’ the former perpetrators of the famine – now witnesses in the trial – accused the victims, correctly or not, of the attack on the armoured train in 1919.<sup>286</sup>

Those few Toporyshchans who sided with the Bolsheviks cultivated experience in enforcing violent policies. Hailing from a prosperous peasant family with horses, four cows, a cart and a sleigh among other possessions, the Havryliuk brothers were both respected and feared in the village.<sup>287</sup> In 1920 the family housed a requisitioning campaign instructor from Russia Vasilii P. Timakov who, according to Ivan Havryliuk, convinced them ‘to adhere to Bolshevism.’<sup>288</sup> Matvii, a bell-ringer at the local Orthodox church, worked in the food procurement squad on behalf of the Soviet authorities in 1920-1921. Participation in the newly reinforced requisitioning committees brought peasants like him security and privileges amidst the post-revolutionary devastation. In his own words, he found a lot of grain and helped CheKa and the police detain ‘dangerous kulaks’ in the neighbouring district. The cruelty involved in the work of these committees was not a secret neither to the population, nor to Bolshevik leaders<sup>289</sup>, and Matvii admitted it did not win him many friends:

I beat the grain out of the kulaks in five villages, helped to detain them when they fled ... the kulaks hid their grain and even threatened to kill me and my family... From that time on, I learnt how to work in the village, how to organise the poor peasant masses, how to motivate them to participate in various campaigns. Siding with Soviet power right from the

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<sup>285</sup> DAZhO, f. 327, op. 1, spr. 132, ark. 109.

<sup>286</sup> HDA SBU in Zhytomyr oblast’, f. r-1520/26856-p.

<sup>287</sup> DAZhO, f. 279, op. 1, spr. 117, ark. 18

<sup>288</sup> Interview with Ivan P. Havryliuk, recorded by Zubryts’ka L.V. in 1982.

<sup>289</sup> Andrea Graziosi, *A New, Peculiar State: Explorations in Soviet History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), p. 78.

beginning made me an enemy of the kulaks in the village too.<sup>290</sup>

Until the late 1920s the presence of the Soviet state in the village had been minimal. There were no recorded tensions between supporters of the new state and those opposing it. The situation changed dramatically with the beginning of collectivization, which was not, *pace* Stalin, brought on by a great upswell of peasant enthusiasm.<sup>291</sup> Toporyshche was no exception. As elsewhere, most Toporyshchans resisted giving up their private property, while only some of them organised ‘the red trains’ of carts with grain collected on behalf of the state. Support of collectivization split families. One RPK report described how a man in Toporyshche berated and beat his wife in public after she had been elected onto the village council.<sup>292</sup> Activists were attacked and feared walking alone at night.<sup>293</sup> Following a brawl with activists in May 1929, Ivan Havryliuk’s barn was burnt down in December, while the house of Semen Chervatiuk, Matvii’s father-in-law, was burnt down the following month. The village council head, Kindrats’kyi, was assassinated in 1930.

Yet collectivization also divided supporters of the Soviet state in the village. Members of the local party cell spoke openly of it as a temporary policy not worth the effort.<sup>294</sup> A group of Toporyshchans decided to send to Zhytomyr G. Zubryts’kyi, a founder and the head of the village KNS until 1924 (when Matvii Havryliuk replaced him), in order to complain about the illegal seizure of land by the collective farmers under the guidance of Havryliuk. Zubryts’kyi’s attempt failed, and most of the group was put on trial for anti-Soviet agitation.<sup>295</sup> Neither was there unity on a collectivization drive among the district officials in Volodars’ke (now Khoroshiv). Protocols of the RPK plenums mention one RPK member, Sviders’kyi, criticising the fast pace of the campaign and threatening to kill the RPK secretary, Nikitenko. In 1931 Sviders’kyi was removed from his position and expelled from the party.<sup>296</sup>

Apart from collectivization, it was the grain procurement campaign in 1931 that put potential perpetrators to the test. Two out of thirty six members of the Volodars’ke RPK (or 6%) refused to take part in grain procurement: Rynda handed his party ticket (twice) back to the secretary, Kontsevich simply refused.<sup>297</sup> When procurement rates kept falling, the RPK instructed village officials ‘to order Komsomol and students into the brigades to help the procurement brigades.’ The district newspaper described the behaviour of Toporyshchan activists in detail. In July 1929 they nailed black boards to the gates of farmsteads where the owners ‘had sworn that they

<sup>290</sup> HDA SBU in Zhytomyr oblast’, f. r-1520/4828 (1931), ark. 9-16.

<sup>291</sup> J. Stalin, ‘God velikogo pereloma,’ *Pravda*, 7 November 1929.

<sup>292</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 4657, ark. 47-48.

<sup>293</sup> Ivan Havryliuk, *Pro Toporyshche*. Unpublished manuscript written between 1982-1989.

<sup>294</sup> *Radians’ka Volyn*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1929.

<sup>295</sup> *Radians’ka Volyn*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1929.

<sup>296</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 4825, ark. 3-18.

<sup>297</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 3521, ark. 91.

had no grain.’ The peasants who refused to cooperate were boycotted, and their children expelled from school.<sup>298</sup> Matvii Havryliuk detained those who tried to flee dekulakization and deportation. He also claimed to have been exceptionally good at finding hidden gold and reported other collective farmers for leaving the collectives or hiding in order not to assist with searches or dekulakization.

One of the house searches he organised in 1932 is described by Andrii Chervatiuk’s daughters, Marta and Kateryna:

Our father hid three buckets of barley in the attic, our mother put clay on top of barley and stealthily made porridge in the evening to keep us alive. Then somebody must have reported us, they took everything and brutally beat the father in front of us for trying to hide that barley. There were three of them: Matvii Havryliuk, Stepan Shakhrai and Vasyl’ Zubryts’kyi. They broke his fingers by slamming the door, kicked him on the floor till blood gushed out of his mouth, swore at him. It left us numb to see father beaten and sworn at, we were a proper family, always spoke quietly in our father’s presence...<sup>299</sup>

After the search was over, Andrii Chervatiuk was arrested and spent months in prison. He was released in spring 1933 and died of starvation shortly thereafter.

But not all perpetrators were as enthusiastic as the Havryliuks. In 1931, the secretary of the Party cell Shakhrai openly called procurement quotas ‘unrealistic’ even though they were accepted by a general meeting in the village. The RVK member Holovach and the DPU informer Rudenko reported on Shakhrai. They accused him of not meeting various procurement quotas and of having a defeatist attitude within the leadership of the village.<sup>300</sup> In particular, they claimed that he failed to procure enough grain for the trains of carts. He was reported to have said the following: ‘Let [them] come here from the centre and the district and procure bread. Let them fight the kulaks. What do they want from us!’ Moreover, his colleagues at all three collective farms were reported to be corrupt, ‘lack[ing] enthusiasm in destroying capitalist elements in the village, and establish[ing] a distance between themselves and the masses.’ Despite the fact that Shakhrai apologised for the ‘mistake’ that he made due to ‘difficult conditions he works in,’ the RPK took no chances and replaced him with a district cadre – Savelii Balakov. Meanwhile, Vasyl’ Zubryts’kyi, the head of the village council, received a verbal warning.<sup>301</sup>

The power struggle between Zubryts’kyi and Matvii Havryliuk was central to problems in

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<sup>298</sup> *Radians’ka Volyn*, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1929.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with Nina Chervatiuk in Toporyshche on 05.08.2014.

<sup>300</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 4825, ark. 44.

<sup>301</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 4657, ark. 90.

the village, according to a 33-year-old Balakov, a Communist since 1920. According to Balakov, Havryliuk 'was tsar and God whom everyone feared' who teamed up with his former enemy Dmytro Chovniuk in order to take all the key village positions. In the early winter 1932 Holovach from the RVK once again sought out a candidate to be in charge of the party cell in Toporyshche. Matvii Havryliuk agitated the local peasants at a KNS meeting against the decisions on grain procurement by the village council, calling them 'privileged people from the city.' More importantly, he accused the district officials present of forcing them to conduct the house searches, to confiscate food and possessions from others, and to enforce other unpopular policies. They promised not to follow such people in future and reportedly received overwhelming support from the audience of 250 peasants, although at the end of the meeting Havryliuk advised everyone to support the grain procurement quotas nevertheless.

Balakov called the DPU, and Havryliuk was arrested. Almost immediately Havryliuk sent lengthy letters to the oblast' office of the DPU, the TsK KP(b)U and *Pravda*. He claimed that village officials were corrupt and involved in underground trade and described his experience in grain requisition and other campaigns in the past. He also made mention of his connections in the DPU and, most importantly, of his outstanding ability 'to organise masses of the poor peasants' and to increase the percentage of grain procurement. It is not known which of his arguments convinced the prosecution to acquit Havryliuk's case in January 1932. The DPU was aware of his activities long before the arrest, positive and negative. In 1930 the provincial union of collective farms (Oblkolgospilka) received a letter from a Toporyshchan woman, Fedora Dubyna, who complained about Matvii abusing his power in the village and acting through the 'gang of thugs.' Her family, along with the Havryliuks, were the founding members of the *Peremoha* farm. She argued that he settled scores with her husband and also repeatedly raped her 14-year-old daughter. Yet the district authorities, the DPU and the prosecution seemingly turned a blind eye to Havryliuk's alleged crimes. In 1932 he was once again allowed to control all the key positions in the village and to work on grain procurement with his former competitors.

In local oral memory, most collective farmers who acted on the orders of Havryliuk and Zubryts'kyi are excused as simply dutiful. Their watching of the fields, for instance, is remembered by neighbours or their descendants as a mere 'task at the collective farm' and not interpreted as a facilitation of the famine, at least not openly. For activists to carve themselves into oral memory, they had to act in an extraordinary way. One brigade member, Chervatiuk, was known for his gambling addiction and lost a cow over a game of cards. Though his children survived, his wife starved to death.<sup>302</sup> Another perpetrator, Arsen Dubyna, was remembered for extreme thoroughness

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<sup>302</sup> Interview with Antonina Hryshyna, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2014.

during searches, whereby he palpated hens in the morning to predict how many eggs they would lay that day so that the starving peasants would not eat any.<sup>303</sup>

Establishing a circle of trusted men and women during the famine proved useful for the perpetration of repressions in Toporyshche in 1938. For instance, in the voluminous case against over eighty ‘German spies’ – mostly semi-illiterate German peasant fathers of large families in the village – the Havryliuk brothers and their associates assisted the DPU with the arrests and the searches.<sup>304</sup> Leonard, the son of the arrested Adolf Kremring, recalled how the same Havryliuk brothers and other perpetrators of the famine arrested these German peasants who, coincidentally, sought contact with relations in Germany and received aid during the famine. In 1933 twelve-year-old Leonard helped these German men to write the request for aid. Only in 1989 did their families learn that these so-called ‘spies’ were executed shortly after their arrest.<sup>305</sup>

While there were no Twenty-Five Thousanders in Toporyshche, urban activists arrived to assist the collectivization in various capacities: from village officials to teachers. The lists of key officials in the village museum mention only the last names of chairmen of the collective farms, the heads of the village council, and the school headmasters between 1930-1933: Holovach, Fesenko, Hryban’, Stashkevych, Korolenko. They were appointed from the district and did not stay in the village after 1933. Nor did they remain in local memory. Only one newcomer, a young teacher, Stepan Sh., stayed in Toporyshche for the rest of his life. Sent to the countryside in 1930 as a teacher at the age of eighteen,<sup>306</sup> he came from a Ukrainian working class family in a town in southern Ukraine. Stepan received secondary education in Novo-Myrhorod, joined the Komsomol, and worked as a teacher when he was sent to assist collectivization in Toporyshche. In the village he helped to close down a local church and taught at the school.<sup>307</sup>

After the famine, Stepan married a local girl whose father died in the Holodomor.<sup>308</sup> He continued to teach and became the headmaster in 1938-1939. During the Second World War, Stepan enlisted in the infantry, where he served as a political instructor from 1941 to 1945. His comrades in arms commented on his bravery at the frontline, which brought him three decorations. According to the published memoir of a war veteran from Uzbekistan, who was also a collectivization activist in the early 1930s, Stepan was a brave, enthusiastic and supportive leader whom everyone respected.<sup>309</sup> In late 1944 he was wounded and transferred to a hospital in

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Halyna Sobornyts’ka, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2014.

<sup>304</sup> HDA SBU in Zhytomyr oblast’, f. r-6778-p, 1 vol, ark. 1-67.

<sup>305</sup> Leonard Kremring, ‘Fasova Rudnia’ in *Rodyna Volyn*, ed. N. Arnd, G. Mokrits’kyi (Zhytomyr: Volyn’, 1998), pp. 124-145.

<sup>306</sup> Stepan S. *Autobiography*, from Stepan S.’s family archive, unpublished manuscript (1953).

<sup>307</sup> *1932-1933 – Volodars’kyi raion. Storinkamy holodu* (Novohrad-Volyns’kyi: NOVOhrad, 2008), p. 48.

<sup>308</sup> L. Kopyichenko et al., eds. *Natsional’na Knyga Pam’iati*, p. 352.

<sup>309</sup> Kh. Khamidov, *Odnopolchane* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1981), pp. 61-124.

Leningrad, where he fathered a child with a surgeon who had operated on him. At this time Stepan informed his wife in Toporyshche that he was leaving her. But his wife's sister was married to Ivan Havryliuk, who allegedly made Stepan return home with the threats of possible repercussions. Ostensibly his loyalty to the Havryliuks was rewarded, as he spent the next year taking a course for political instructors in Moscow and two years in East Germany. According to local sources who remember him, Stepan developed an alcohol addiction after war and fathered several children outside his marriage.

The lives and careers of the other perpetrators varied after the famine. The Havryliuk brothers retained their positions of power. While Ivan became headmaster of the village school, Matvii chaired the party cell. Vasyl' Zubryts'kyi became the headmaster of a school in a neighbouring village. After the death of his wife, Matvii moved in with Todos'ka, the widow of Prokhor Zubryts'kyi – a man he reportedly put on the list for repressions in the 1930s. Arsen Dubyna stayed on as a brigade leader at the collective farm, while Anton Chervatiuk continued to build houses for other people. Half of them fought at the front during the Second World War and were decorated for bravery, while the other half, including the Havryliuks, stayed in the village. The Havryliuks later claimed to have been Red partisans, contrary to local oral memories. The granddaughter of Andrii Chervatiuk, Nina, fell in love with Leonid, the son of Matvii Havryliuk, but both families opposed their relationship. In particular, Nina's aunts, Kateryna and Marta, insisted that she could not date someone whose father killed her close relatives.<sup>310</sup> Leonid never married, while Nina married in her sixties to Vasyl' Zubryts'kyi's widowed son-in-law. The relationships are deeply entangled as the memory of the famine.

Crucially, these perpetrators shaped local memory and its manifestations as 'memory makers' after the fact. The mass grave of the Holodomor victims remains unmarked until today: in mixed victim-perpetrator families, the descendants of the victims asked me to interview them individually or remained silent altogether. Even the entry on Toporyshche in the aforementioned *Istoria Mist ta Sel* was written by Ivan Havryliuk, who taught history at the village school. In his manuscript, he follows what Katerina Clark described as the Heroic Ages of Soviet chronology: revolution, collectivization and the Second World War.<sup>311</sup> Considering his active participation in collectivization, Ivan focusses mainly on village activists, mentioning the primitive conditions of the pre-revolutionary village and 'train track war' participants. The lists of activists in his manuscript, however, confirm that most of the perpetrators survived the famine and the purges. In 1945 they were back in their positions of power in the village. Most of them lived ordinary lives

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Nina Chervatiuk in Toporyshche on 05.08.2014.

<sup>311</sup> K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).



well until old age.<sup>312</sup>

## 2. The Case of Popivka

‘All of us here are the soldiers of the grain front.’

*Lev Kopelev*<sup>313</sup>

Arriving in Popivka after the harvest, I noticed that both sides of the road leading to the village were covered in grain. How was it possible for more than 2,000 people to die here during the famine? A 22-year-old peasant, Feodosii Kulish, asked the perpetrators the very same question when they took his grain and threw his young family in the snow in the early spring in 1932.<sup>314</sup> With a population of over 7,000 on the eve of collectivization, Popivka boasted three schools, two churches, a hospital, a veterinarian surgery, a telephone station, numerous workshops and regular markets.<sup>315</sup> Kulish called the grain quotas unrealistic and the famine in the spring of 1932 ‘the harbinger of a greater starvation in spring 1933 that will take thousands of lives of many innocent peasants, poor children and leave many orphaned. The leaders want to enslave us in the collective farms once and for all; the spring will be decisive.’ Kulish also correctly predicted that he would be tried for anti-Soviet agitation, and he was sentenced to 10 years in camps.<sup>316</sup> Approximately 2,050 people died in Popivka in 1932-1933. Four orphanages had to be opened in the village.<sup>317</sup>

Sources of local oral memory blame the famine on the actions of ‘the plenipotentiaries coming from outside and... collaborators among the local activists’ and name the head of the village council, Klym Vereshchaka, as one of the main culprits.<sup>318</sup> This case study will explore the identities of the perpetrators and consider their actions, motives and later life by way of memoirs, oral history, interviews, village council documents, and other texts from the Myrhorod district and Poltava oblast’ archives as well as the archival department at SBU in Poltava and the village museum.

As in Toporyshche, the perpetrators of the Holodomor in Popivka were shaped by the preceding events of revolution and Civil War. As in Toporyshche, most residents of Popivka did not support the Bolsheviks at this time. The members of the revolutionary committee, including a widow Marfa Vereshchaka (mother of Klym), were brutally hacked to death in the local woods. Several Popivkians were part of *Central Rada*, the revolutionary Ukrainian national government,

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<sup>312</sup> Arkhivne Viddilennia Horoshivs’koho raionu, F. 63, Op. 1, Protokoly zasidannia pravlinnia ta zahal’nykh zboriv chleniv kolhospu im. Stalina vid 04.01.1945–01.01.1951.

<sup>313</sup> Kopelev, *I stvoril sebe kumira*, p. 249.

<sup>314</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavs’kii oblasti. F. 20, op. 1, spr. 10143-c, Ark. 16.

<sup>315</sup> Shupyk, Bilan, Osheka, *Doroha do ridnoho domu*, p. 46.

<sup>316</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavs’kii oblasti. F. 20, op. 1, spr. 10143-c, Ark. 16.

<sup>317</sup> Shupyk, Bilan, Osheka, *Doroha do ridnoho domu*, p. 46.

<sup>318</sup> File ‘On Popivka during the Holodomor’ at Myrhorod District Archive, Ark. 3.

while wealthier farmers joined the *Union of Khliborobiv* during *Het'manat* (the Ukrainian state under the protectorate of the Central powers from 29<sup>th</sup> April to 26<sup>th</sup> December 1918). One of these farmers handed over a list of 95 peasants 'sympathising to the Bolsheviks' to Denikin's troops in 1919.<sup>319</sup> Grain requisition in 1921 was accompanied with mass killing on both sides – of those who resisted *prodrazverstka* and of the KNS activists who enforced it. Over 20 people died as a result in the village.<sup>320</sup>

Upon the victory of Bolshevik power, activists founded a collective farm and formed a Party cell, cooperative and credit society in 1923. In 1927, their collectivization efforts were supported by a Twenty-Five Thousander, Andrii Uslavtsev, although few Popivkians had joined the collective by even 1932.<sup>321</sup> In March 1930, based on a list compiled by the head of the village KNS, Tymophii Sereda,<sup>322</sup> 150 male peasants were sent to the northern Russia as 'kulaks'.<sup>323</sup> He himself moved into the house of the dekulakized peasant, Ivan Podoliaka. The victims' families were forced into the dugouts in the ravine, but in the autumn of 1930, they were deported to their fathers and husbands.

The trial of this group of 150 peasants sparked a voluminous collection of testimonies from two groups: activists and wealthier peasants in the village. As in Toporyshche, the attempts of the latter to complain to the village officials about the activists failed, with repressions soon to follow. The grandson of Ivan Podoliaka, Vasyl', was driven to Popivka by the disturbing post-memory of dekulakization, and when he finally visited the village in 1957, he met Sereda who still lived in Podoliaka's house. Having glanced at 'the worst and delapidated' house in the village, which now belonged to Sereda, Vasyl' actually felt sympathetic to the perpetrators: 'Confiscated kulak property did not make them wealthy. They were not used to work, they did not know how [to work]. That is why the famine started in Ukraine – all the hard-working farmers were gone.'<sup>324</sup>

The six collective farms, now enlarged at the expense of the 'kulak' lands and houses, needed tractor drivers. Courses were organised, bringing many young activists from the villages nearby, including the aforementioned Olesia Kulyk. These students also helped to procure grain. But despite a good harvest in 1932, Popivka failed to meet the grain procurement quotas. According to the survivors' testimonies in the exhibition on the famine in Popivka's museum, however, the village council met the original plan but failed the additional plan, whereas the district newspaper

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<sup>319</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltav'skii oblasti. F. 20, op. 1, 9385-c, Ark. 1-94.

<sup>320</sup> Shupyk, Bilan, Osheka, *Dorooha do ridnoho domu*, p. 47.

<sup>321</sup> District newspaper *Chervona Lubenshchyna* on 26.02.1932 reports on the 100% collectivization rate in Popivka.

<sup>322</sup> From the interview with the family of Maksym Podoliaka, 12.07.2015.

<sup>323</sup> Shupyk, Bilan, Osheka, *Dorooha do ridnoho domu*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>324</sup> V. Podoliaka, 'Poterianne korni,' *Pressa Arkhangel'skoi oblasti*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2003.

*Chervona Trybuna* reported Popivka reaching only 19.5% of the original plan by December 1932.<sup>325</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> December Popivka and two other village councils were put on the ‘black list’ by the RPK.

Apart from the standard economic repressions applied to Popivka, the key village officials – the party plenipotentiary, Odai; the secretary of the party cell, Getalo (also a student plenipotentiary); and the head of the village council, Ustylenko – received verbal warnings and an ultimatum to reach 100% within three days. When the men failed, they were removed from their positions. Ustylenko was replaced with Klym Vereshchaka. Several additional brigades, 5 persons in each, were sent to Popivka. The brigades had to work under the supervision of the plenipotentiaries and stay in Popivka until further notice.<sup>326</sup> A 20-year-old Komsomol and aspiring writer Lev Kopelev was in one of these brigades. Here I read his account of the events in tandem with other sources.

Kopelev had already worked in the countryside in late 1929 as a teacher in the village of Okhochaia near Kharkiv. He describes his job at the time as distributing leaflets and papers to convince peasants to join the collectives. While ‘in some villages there were revolts and *volynky*, put out by cavalry police and the DPU military detachments,’ in the villages where Kopelev worked there was ‘not a gunshot was fired or a drop of blood spilt.’<sup>327</sup> He describes watching multiple trains with the deported heading north all the time, with people ‘swarming’ inside and children crying, but he mentions his assistance only once, referring to the ‘non-violent’ eviction of a priest. Despite his involvement in such activities, Kopelev had to flee the village with the chairman of the local collective farm and two district plenipotentiaries during the unrest prompted by the appearance of Stalin’s article on the excesses during collectivization in March 1930.<sup>328</sup> While Kopelev constructs a positive image of his participation in collectivization in Okhochaia, he does not explain the hostility and consequent aggression of the peasants towards him. Indeed, by his own account, some peasants were throwing stones at him as he hastily fled the village. By the summer he was transferred to help collectivization in the villages near Kakhovka, in Kherson oblast’.<sup>329</sup>

What were the activities that Kopelev assisted with during his year on the ground? Why did they lead to such unrest that an armed DPU detachment had to be deployed to ‘pacify’ the village? That he remained an observer during the dispossession and deportation operations seems highly improbable. Memoirs of the other teacher plenipotentiaries indicate they had to do ‘sickening jobs’ – i.e. to procure, to repress and to report.<sup>330</sup> Moreover, in the following year, Kopelev actively

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<sup>325</sup> *Chervona Trybuna*, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1932.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, 205.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> UCRDC, Interview with Kopelev, sound roll 2.

<sup>330</sup> See T. Belaia, ‘Ia tol’ko boius, kak bi serdtse tvoë ne zagrubelo...’, *Sobesednik*, 1988, № 21, pp. 12-13.

participated in the DPU-led project at the factory to dispose of a non-Communist delegate worker to the city council. Although the worker was fired and left to starve, Kopelev did not regret his participation.<sup>331</sup> Despite his young age, Kopelev clearly became accustomed to enforcing violent policies on the ground and to working in close cooperation with the DPU. When Kopelev was sent to the Myrhorod district by the oblast' party committee together with three other young men and a DPU officer in December 1932, Vereshchaka was appointed the head of the village council.

The peasants in Popivka had been starving since the spring of 1932. Their options were limited: either to hide grain and risk being discovered and repressed, or to give up the remaining food voluntarily and face likely death. Kopelev admits that during his agitational work in Popivka he 'threatened, of course... those who did not want to give up their bread.'<sup>332</sup> Many had nothing to hide, so their provisions and valuables were confiscated instead. Kopelev calls it *besspornoie iz'iatie* (indisputable confiscation) in which he personally participates. He provides a long list of what was 'usually' found, thus implying his regular participation in the activity. Despite reducing his role to only 'recording confiscated items to prevent plunder' – more often than not, confiscation was exactly that, plunder, as survivors attest to seeing their possessions being used by activists in Popivka for years after the famine<sup>333</sup> – Kopelev's part is undoubtedly larger. Later he admits to the actual confiscation of the items himself. If exchanged, these possessions could extend or save someone's life. He admits to co-organizing meetings with peasants that lasted for days with victims not allowed to leave or sleep and detaining a girl he believed could have been a spy. Kopelev explains that it was easier to participate than not. Through perpetration he convinced himself that he was doing it 'for the greater good – finding bread for his socialistic Fatherland'<sup>334</sup> and that he did not see anyone starving to death at the time.

Again, such self-representation is at odds with probability. It is highly unlikely that Kopelev did not see peasants in Popivka starving to death. He mentions starvation only obliquely by accusing them of starving the state and their own families.<sup>335</sup> Yet Kopelev knew there was no grain left at the village. In one case he explains how the quotas imposed on individual farmers equalled everything they harvested that year. The village officials argued that keeping anything for consumption (i.e. to sustain one's life) was theft, and Kopelev agreed, harassing peasants at meetings with this line of reasoning.<sup>336</sup> Neither was the girl Kopelev apprehended and held during a humiliating body search a spy. She was in fact a poorly educated farmer's daughter from Popivka

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<sup>331</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 226.

<sup>332</sup> UCRDC, Interview with Kopelev, sound roll 3.

<sup>333</sup> Archival Department at Myrhorod District Administration, File 'On Popivka during the Holodomor', Ark. 6.

<sup>334</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 259.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*, p. 252.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid*, p. 256.

who returned from hospital after having an abortion and could provide little or no information to foreign intelligence services. Nor did she have any means to contact them: Myrhorod was far away from any border, and all means of communication were controlled by the authorities. When the seed reserves were procured during his stay and some activists quit, Kopelev nonetheless carried on.

What motivated Kopelev? Like many perpetrators of mass violence, Kopelev casts himself as ‘a true believer,’ in the same way Eichmann in his testimonies described himself in his early career as an ‘idealist.’<sup>337</sup> Like other perpetrators, Kopelev rationalises his participation by necessity at the time. His words can be compared to the recollections of mass killing by Eugene de Kock.

Kopelev, perpetrator of grain procurement in Popivka where over 2,000 died from starvation	De Kock – one of perpetrators of the state sanctioned mass killing during the Apartheid in South Africa
‘I spoke about German fascists, Japanese troops in Manchuria, insidious Poles. They all wanted to attack us, conquer, enslave and plunder. ... All this threatened my country, hundreds of millions. So hundreds of thousands had to be discriminated.’ <sup>338</sup>	‘... And we had to protect the country from this. The overall and general hue and cry was “Fight, resist, sacrifice, or you will be wiped out by the black man.” Rule by the black man was a sure means of destruction of the country.’ <sup>339</sup>

Like de Kock frantically trying to wash off the ‘smell of death’,<sup>340</sup> Kopelev was ill for two months upon his return from Popivka. Like de Kock, he chose to return to ‘work’ in the village, albeit in a different district. His colleagues, on the other hand, changed irrevocably. According to Kopelev, upon their return to Kharkiv, Frid, Rabizhanovich and Raev together collected emaciated children from the train stations and provided them with shelter and food from their own rations. Their actions were reported to the management of Kharkiv Tractor Factory, but the three of them were not arrested until 14<sup>th</sup> February 1935. David Rabizhanovich and Lev Raev were 20-year-old Komsomols at the time of the famine, working as the editors at *Kharkivs’kyi Parovoznyk*, whereas the slightly older Communist Frid was the chief editor of that newspaper. Frid had been known for cooperating with the DPU. They all were exiled to Ufa and Kazan for several years for anti-Soviet agitation. In 1936-1937 they were arrested again and sent to labour camps for 5 years.

Rabizhanovich was pardoned in 1956, Raev and Frid in 1965.<sup>341</sup>

Kopelev’s claim of *belief* as a ‘true believer’ is also problematic. The main incongruity lies

<sup>337</sup> C. Browning, ‘Perpetrator Testimony. Another Look on Adolph Eichmann’, in *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 2004), p. 9.

<sup>338</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, 137, p. 253.

<sup>339</sup> Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, 2003, p. 73.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>341</sup> I. Baluta, N. Lapchyns’ka et al., eds. *Reabilitovani Istoriiu. Kharkivs’ka oblast’: knyha druha* (Kharkiv: Oryhinal, 2014), pp. 506, 508, 603.

with his profession of humanist ideals, even during the famine. While other perpetrators quit or tried to help the starving peasants, Kopelev chose to continue – despite the fact that he found no grain and that his assumptions about the spies turned out to be implausible. Following a short break after his ‘work’ in Popivka, he returned to the ‘grain front’ in March 1933 – the month of a sharp increase in the number of deaths from starvation.

Ultimately, Kopelev’s perception of the peasants as the Others proves decisive. It originates long before the famine. Kopelev writes about his hatred of wealthy peasants during NEP, when he complains about ‘busy markets, kulak carts with well fed horses, loud sellers’, and as a child, when hostile peasants looked at him with a sense of an ‘insulting, indifferent, disdainful alienation.’ Equally insulting to Kopelev was when ‘a tan peasant with a moustache, in a washed out shirt with sun-bleached embroidery, smelling of sweat, tar and straw, sneered at him.’<sup>342</sup> Unlike the violations against German civilians during the Second World War, against which he protested, the mass killing of Ukrainian peasants provoked no empathy in Kopelev, despite his claims of being loyal to the humanist ideals at the time. His family’s perception of the Germans provides a stark difference to the aforementioned description of Ukrainian peasants: ‘[Germans] work hard, diligently, conscientiously and are the most cultured people in the world.’<sup>343</sup>

The other ‘true believer’ in Popivka, according to Kopelev, is Bubyr – a fanatic Communist from the local landless peasants. Bubyr was the street name of Klym Vereshchaka, a perpetrator carved deep into local oral memory. During the famine, he oversaw the activists who searched the houses in teams of 3-5. The most ruthless of them, according to the survivors, were Klym’s brother Dmytro, Iakiv Avramenko, Fedora Chapliak, Hurzhii, Lida Kriachun, Kryvych, Mykhailo Kurylo, Kuz’menko, Iosyp Lenda, A. Maladyka, Andrii Nesterenko, Sap’ian, I. Sokhats’kyi, Strychka and Voskobiinyk.<sup>344</sup> Each collective farm brigade appointed its member to guard the fields in the summer of 1933. Hanna Kychenko recalls witnessing a woman being beaten to death by the field guards for ‘pilfering.’<sup>345</sup> This list includes hundreds of names: village council employees, Communists, teachers, Komsomol and collective farmers. As Kopelev commented, once all the grain from collective farms was procured on the order of the secretary of the Kharkiv oblast’ party committee, Terekhov, collective farmers joined the activists to search the houses of individual farmers that comprised half of Popivka’s adult population.<sup>346</sup> This group of perpetrators was arguably compromised, as these men, women and children were already starving – despite Kopelev’s assurances of Popivkians not dying until February 1933, that is, after his departure.

<sup>342</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 50.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>344</sup> Myrhorod District Archive, File ‘On Popivka during the Holodomor’, ark. 3, 5, 9, 12.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, ark. 5.

<sup>346</sup> UCRDC, Interview with Kopelev, sound roll 3.

Contrary to Kopelev's portrayal, Red Army veteran Klym was not an orphan in his childhood nor an old bachelor in his mature years. He was a married father of three. Nonetheless, he forced many 'kulak' families to live in the dugouts in the ravine and indeed used their children as hostages.<sup>347</sup> Klym starts his autobiography with the murder of his mother Marfa by the local Petliurites in 1918. In 1920 he joins ChOP, in 1923 he heads the local KNS, and in 1924 joins the party. At various times he chaired the collective farms in Popivka, worked in the village council and as its head – in 1930, 1932 and 1937, that is, during key campaigns like dekulakization, grain procurement and the Great Terror. In 1941 he was evacuated to Voronezh and later mobilised to the army. He feared his wife and their young daughter would be executed by Germans along with two collective farm chairmen in Popivka. In November 1942 he was put on trial for subordination and accused of defeatist and anti-Soviet remarks. He was sentenced to seven years in labour camps.<sup>348</sup> Sources of oral memory speak of retribution: in 1942 two men from Popivka met him in hospital and drowned him in the latrine for the suffering he inflicted.<sup>349</sup>

Unlike his depiction in Kopelev's memoir, Klym was not a fearless fanatic. His superiors in the army characterised him as an undisciplined liar who 'undermines junior and middle-rank officers,' whereas the soldiers were unanimous in concluding that Klym was open and vocal about his fear of dying, panicked during German attacks, and stole food from the kitchen. He repeatedly asked his commanders to send him to courses so that the war would finish while he was away.<sup>350</sup> Klym admitted to saying 'if only we had a shot of vodka each, then we could say we're also for Soviet rule!' as an analogy to Lenin's expression about having 100,000 tractors winning peasantry's loyalty to the authorities.<sup>351</sup> From many interrogations and witness testimonies, it seems his arrest came as a result of the conflict between Klym and junior commanders. After years in power as a village official, he could not and did not want to submit to the authority of the junior officers, most of whom were 20 years younger than him. Both the officers and the soldiers unanimously commented on Klym's reluctance to risk his life and his fear of being killed.<sup>352</sup>

The existing records of trials on Popivkians between 1932-1937 reveal that Klym and his team repressed anyone who criticised Soviet policies, grain procurement or his authority. His family was disliked but feared, not unlike the Havryliuks in Toporyshche. Some cases bear the clichéd accusations of 'anti-Soviet agitation' or 'hostility to the Soviet rule,' yet others reveal the corruption of Klym and his colleagues. Like Havryliuk in Toporyshche, Klym testified against the victims of

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<sup>347</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 262.

<sup>348</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavskii oblasti, f. R, spr. 19254, ark. 10.

<sup>349</sup> From the interview with V. Oshaka, 18.10.2015.

<sup>350</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavskii oblasti, f. R, spr. 19254, ark. 7-89.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, ark. 10.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, ark. 15.

the 1937 purges in Popivka. The victims included even the old Communist and the chairman at one of the collective farms, Cherviachuk.<sup>353</sup> In the 1937 trials, the victims mention people dying in 1933 as an explanation for missing family members, a reference that others are expected to understand by the simple mention of the year.<sup>354</sup> Some also comment on Klym using his position to profit financially and provide details of his elaborated schemes of successfully obtaining consumer goods for himself and his inner circle.<sup>355</sup>

Division, silent but present, continued to affect the lives of Popivka residents long after the famine. As the protocols of the meetings of the collective farm board in 1968-1972 demonstrate, the activists or members of their families kept powerful positions within the village. They still decided on the allocation of holidays, the distribution of the building materials or additional land for the vegetable plots, and the confirmation of the number of employment years needed to receive a state pension. Nothing further is known about the fate of Vereshchaka. It is unlikely that Kulish or his family survived. Nobody enquired about his pardon in 1990 when relatives of the repressed swamped the KGB with requests. After returning home from Popivka, Kopelev was sent to the village Vololahy in a tugboat brigade in March 1933. He volunteered to fight in the Second World War and eventually moved to Germany in 1974 where he stayed for the rest of his life. Kopelev's wife, Raisa Orlova, later commented on the motivations of the rank-and-file perpetrators of mass violence: 'The motives were different, the spiritual attunement was different, yet the objective result ... is exactly the same.'<sup>356</sup> Her words echoed Vasilii Grossman's interpretation of the perpetrators of the famine, which I will explore in Chapter 3.

### ***Conclusion***

In her research on the perpetrators of mass killing during the Apartheid in South Africa, Pumla Gobodo-Madizikela calls ideology or existing violence 'a trick most perpetrators use, especially those sponsored by a powerful government' – from a rationalization of violence, legitimate at the time, to the 'truth' with which they downplay their guilt and agency.<sup>357</sup> From this point of view, if the 'kulaks' resisted collectivization, attacked officials and later 'hoarded' grain, then repressions against them including deportations and executions were justified and necessary.

As these case studies show, the actions of perpetrators can not be explained by ideological indoctrination alone. An interplay of motives accounts for their actions. Indeed, writing about his experience in the 1970s, Kopelev argues against dismissing 'participants in development of the

<sup>353</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavs'kii oblasti, f. R, spr. 15246, ark. 1-20.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Upravlinnia SBU v Poltavs'kii oblasti, f. R, spr. 15140, ark. 8.

<sup>356</sup> R. Orlova, trans. S. Cioran, *Memoirs* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 223.

<sup>357</sup> Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, p. 23.



country' as 'cowards, stupid fanatics, cynical profiteers, bastards, foreigners' but as a complex variety.<sup>358</sup>

We also see a clear division between the activists, who are usually the founding members of collective farms and joined before 1930, and those who were *forced* to join later, in particular during the famine or shortly after. This division ran deep: perpetrators and their families were more likely to receive benefits and privileges allocated by village officials for themselves or their inner circle. The privileges included trips to Moscow to various organised events, the allocation of bonuses or holidays or extra land, and the confirmation of employment record for state pension allocation decades after the famine.<sup>359</sup> Sometimes this pattern persisted for generations, with the grandchildren of perpetrators still present in the village council or the district government. This is the trend that I observed both in Toporyshche and Popivka.

Succeeding in facilitation and advancing their career as village officials, perpetrators like Havryliuk and Vereshchaka were instrumental in executing the purges of 1937 on the village level. It is conceivable to conclude that the key perpetrators on the village level and most of the plenipotentiaries, including Kopelev, sought to accommodate themselves with the regime, collaborated with the DPU and were rewarded, at least for some time, with career opportunities. Their careers were interrupted briefly during the Second World War. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of them were lynched by the survivors, others were executed as Communists by the Germans, whereas some were found collaborating with the Nazis.<sup>360</sup> In the case of Toporyshche and Popivka, approximately half of the former perpetrators were at the front line during the war, others went into hiding and joined the Red Army only in 1944 and, even then, only in the auxiliary roles. While in their own accounts they might be represented as fighters for socialism, archival evidence, oral memory and comparative analysis suggests that they were ordinary people with various motivations.

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<sup>358</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, pp. 230-231.

<sup>359</sup> Khoroshiv District Administration, Archival Department, Protocols of collective farm meeting 1947-1957; Myrhorod District Administration, Archival Department, Protocols of collective farm meeting 1967-1972, 5 books.

<sup>360</sup> Ya. Menakir, 'Zamordovane selianstvo,' *Suchasnist'*, No. 10 (270), 1983, pp. 23-32.

## PART TWO

### Cultural Memory of the Holodomor Perpetrators

The following chapters of the dissertation focus on cultural representations of the perpetrators. While it is generally accepted that most perpetrators of mass violence are ordinary people with rather banal motives,<sup>361</sup> the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor remain on the margins of cultural memory in Ukraine. When they become the focus of artistic expression, perpetrators are often framed according to several distinct modalities based on the vesting of *agency*. Representation of the perpetrators in Soviet prose, for instance, corresponds with the Soviet narrative of collectivization, in which agency is vested in characters who embrace participation. In *samvydav* novels, on the other hand, this agency *dispersed*: some perpetrators are indoctrinated, some settle scores, many simply follow orders. Authors in post-Soviet Ukraine and in the diaspora, by contrast, tend to *displace* agency by locating it with the savage, ethnically different Other or locals influenced by the Other. In the following four chapters, I will be tracing these modalities along with various artistic forms – prose, poetry, drama, film, museum – following a sequential chronological trajectory.

During the first fifty years after the famine, not a single officially published Soviet novel or poem presented the starvation inflicted on the population in 1932-1933 as the result of state policies and their brutal enforcement. Indeed, any public mention of the famine was a criminal offence in the USSR.<sup>362</sup> When Soviet writers did dare address the famine, their works were disseminated only in manuscript copies or published abroad. Soviet authors who did dwell on collectivization mentioned the famine in passing, but cast it as the result of ‘kulak’ resistance to the campaigns enforced by Soviet officials who, as discussed in previous chapters, played a key role in the logistics of the Holodomor. Indeed, official Soviet cultural texts overviewed in this chapter focus either on collectivization or on the events preceding the famine, but not on the famine itself.

This overview cannot possibly include all available works on the subject of the famine, as some of them do not address the subject of the perpetrators. Instead this overview will explore the novels, poems, plays and films included in the advisory collections recommended for

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<sup>361</sup> As argued by Arendt, Hilberg, Browning and other scholars.

<sup>362</sup> Public acknowledgment of the 1932-1933 Famine, if reported, was punished under the Article 54-10 of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (1927 and 1934) ‘for propaganda and agitation that aims to overthrow, undermine or weaken Soviet power or to commit particular counter-revolutionary crimes as well as for spreading or producing or storing literature of similar content – imprisonment for no less than 6 months’ and up to execution. In 1957-58, following changes in the Criminal Code, spreading information on the famine would be persecuted under the article 56 ‘On Criminal Responsibility for State Crimes’ with the same punishment.

commemorative events issued by state institutions – from oblast’ libraries and broadcasting companies to the Institute of National Memory of Ukraine and the Holodomor Memorial Museum – or those that reached the mass audience through broadcast on national channels or large volumes in print.<sup>363</sup> Such an approach is based on an understanding of cultural memory in the framework offered by Kansteiner, in which memory-makers – in this case, state institutions – actively seek to disseminate a produced memory of the perpetrators through the commemorative channels of prose, poetry, drama and film and spatial representation.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> *Zbirka metodychnykh rekomendatsii do vidznachennia pam’iatnykh dat u zahal’noosvitnikh navchal’nykh zakladakh*, ed. H. Baikevych, O. Okhrimchuk (Dnipro: Lira, 2017), pp. 90-107, p. 90; *‘Ukraina pam’iataie – svit vyznaie!’ Den’ Informatsii*. ed. O. Dachkovs’ka (Kam’ianet’s-Podil’s’kyi: Kam’ianet’s-Podil’s’ka MTsBC Metodyko-bibliografichnyi viddil, 2015).

<sup>364</sup> W. Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: a Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,’ *History and Theory* 41, (May 2002), pp. 179-197.

### Chapter III

#### No Novel for the Ordinary Men?

#### Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor in Ukrainian Prose

In this chapter, whose title is a rewording of the opening line to William Butler Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium*,<sup>365</sup> I consider whether Ukrainian novels on the famine reflect the participation of various perpetrator groups or instead offer a reductive reading of the perpetrators. To do so in a comparative frame, I employ Smeulers's overarching typology of perpetrators of mass violence. This typology includes seven groups of perpetrators based on their motivation: trained perpetrators like police or military, fanatics or ideological actors, careerists, profiteers, sadists, conformists and compromised perpetrators (who are forced to participate).<sup>366</sup>

Considering the long history of Ukrainian literature serving both as a public forum and a repository of cultural memory in absence of civil institutions, during the Soviet era writers had once again to use Aesopian language to avoid censorship<sup>367</sup> or to publish abroad or disseminate their works illegally via *samvydav* or *samizdat* (self-published) literature. A large number of literary works on the famine was written by the Ukrainian diaspora, some of which reached a wide readership in Ukraine after 1991.<sup>368</sup> Since then a growing number of novels on the Holodomor have

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The original line 'That is no country for old men' laments the young neglecting the wisdom of the old, which could also relate to the young perpetrators of the famine defying an older generation reluctant to support Soviet policies in the village.

<sup>366</sup> Smeulers, ed., *Supranational criminology: towards a typology*, p. 265.

<sup>367</sup> According to Volodymyr Dibrova, one such work on the famine in Aesopian language is a poem *Marusia Churai* (1979) by Lina Kostenko. It was published in Soviet Ukraine. There is a reference to the perpetrators of the famine: *mozhnovladtsi*, which translates as 'those who have power.' Dibrova, V. 'The Holodomor and the Contemporary Ukrainian Writer,' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1/4 (2008), p. 269.

<sup>368</sup> Although Vasyl' Barka's novel *Zhovtyi Kniaz'* (*The Yellow Prince*) – a visceral account of the Holodomor centred

been produced while older works have been re-published. Many literary critics argue, however, that only few literary works on the Holodomor are widely read and that the number and the public attention do not correspond to the trauma of this man-made famine.<sup>369</sup>

The novels chosen for analysis are the ones that have reached the mass reader in Ukraine and thus became part of cultural memory. They include Soviet novels that were distributed to the public libraries from the 1930s onwards; the novels written by the diaspora that were included in school curricula after 1991 or used as film scripts; post-Soviet works that received literary acclaim; and works recommended for commemoration events by the Institute of National Memory of Ukraine.<sup>370</sup> The novels are split into four groups, based chronologically on the political context in which they were produced: the first group is compiled of Soviet novels, the second group – novels by Soviet dissidents, the third group – novels written in the diaspora, the fourth group – novels composed in post-Soviet Ukraine. This exploratory overview therefore starts with Soviet novels and then moves to works that have become available to the general public in Ukraine after 50 years of the famine's silencing. It includes dissident prose that was first disseminated via *samvydav* or *samizdat*, Ukrainian prose in diaspora and post-Soviet novels.

The novels discussed here approach the perpetrators from various positions. Soviet writers present unflinching activists as heroes and skim over the wider participation of conformists and compromised perpetrators, whereas the novels produced in diaspora and in post-Soviet Ukraine depict these unflinching activists as disillusioned and repentant idealists and focus primarily on the ethnically alien Other, who is a sadist, a profiteer, and usually a trained perpetrator. As we shall see, *samvydav* and *tamvydav* works provide a more complex and nuanced representation.

### ***1. Soviet Novels***

While Ukrainian Soviet literature of the early 1930s was subjected to censorship and was supposed 'to show the most important, positive side of collectivization; to illuminate the key role of village activists and Party cells in the socialistic transformation of the village'<sup>371</sup>, it nevertheless offers an elaborate picture of collectivization in Ukraine and even the occasional mention of the

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on the fictional Katranyk family – appeared in *samizdat* as early as 1962, it was published in Ukraine only in 1991.

<sup>369</sup> V. Dibrova, 'The Holodomor and the Contemporary Ukrainian Writer,' pp. 265-76; I. Dziuba, 'Literatura sotsialistichnoho absurdu: kolektyvizatsiia i Holodomor u tvorakh 30-kh rokiv,' in *Try Holodomory v Ukraini v XX st.: pohliad iz s'ohodennia. Materialy mizhnarodnoi naukovoï konferentsii* (Kyiv, 2003), pp. 163-98; L. Senyk, 'Holodomor v ukraïns'kii prozi.' *Pam'iaty nevyynykh zhertv. Materialy mizhnarodnoi naukovoï konferentsii 'Holodomor v Ukraini v 1932-1933 rokakh'* ed. Ia. Khortiani (Budapest, 2007); N. Stepula, 'Literatura pro Holodomor,' at *Radio Svoboda* on 28/11/2008; <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/1353915.html> accessed 01/04/2016.

<sup>370</sup> *Zbirka metodychnykh rekomendatsii do vidznachennia pam'iatnykh dat u zahal'noosvitnikh navchalnykh zakladakh*, eds. H. Baikienych and Olena Okhrimchuk (Dnipro: Lira, 2017), pp. 90-108. [http://www.memory.gov.ua/sites/default/files/zbirka\\_metodichnih\\_rekomendacij.pdf](http://www.memory.gov.ua/sites/default/files/zbirka_metodichnih_rekomendacij.pdf)

<sup>371</sup> Anatolii Dimarov, *Prozhyty i rozpovisty: povist' pro simdesiat lit. Part III* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1998), p. 181.

famine. Indeed, many Soviet writers were, if not perpetrators themselves, then at least witnesses of the famine offering first-hand accounts of the starvation in the village. Arkadii Liubchenko, the author of the first Soviet short novel about the famine, titled *Kostryha* (1933),<sup>372</sup> based his narrative on his visits to the countryside at the time.<sup>373</sup> The protagonist Matvii Kostryha is a ‘middle peasant’ who hides grain from officials and watches his family starve. Such presentations of peasants hiding grain can also be found in the memoirs of the Holodomor perpetrators.<sup>374</sup> When Kostryha repeatedly refuses to submit grain on requests from ‘a man from the district,’ ‘the commission’ and ‘the village council,’ they take his potatoes and confiscate his property, thus effectively contributing to the starvation of his children. The perpetrators are nameless but omnipresent: ‘All teachers in the district were organised, together with pupils, to ‘pull peasants out of the debt to the state.’<sup>375</sup> These representatives of state ask Kostryha’s son where his father has hidden grain. Eventually the officials find the grain and take his children away: ‘You can do what you like, Matvii, but [you] cannot torture the children. We are taking your boys to a pioneer camp. They will be better off there, and their future will be certain.’<sup>376</sup>

Likewise, Ivan Kyrylenko, the author of a novel about collectivization titled *Avanposty* (*The Outposts*, 1933), had knowledge of the perpetrators on the ground through his position as a personal secretary of the Chairman of the TsVK of Soviet Ukraine, Hryhorii Petrovs’kyi. During the Holodomor, Petrovs’kyi received thousands of letters from the countryside, some of which were from the perpetrators commenting on their colleagues. The author of one letter notes how collective farm management and members of the RPK profit from violence in the village: ‘Binge drinking, threats... even the cases of physical violence ... The dekulakizedd are forced to live in the dugouts. They are sentenced to starvation. The officials say: “we do what we want.” Such facts are not exceptional but common.’<sup>377</sup> As secretary, Kyrylenko was doubtlessly aware of such correspondence, which offered extensive detail on the mechanism of the Holodomor and the various types of its perpetrators.

The protagonists in *Avanposty* are officials involved in grain procurement: a village Komsomol leader Pavlo Matora; a worker from Kharkiv and TsK plenipotentiary Marko Obushnyi; and the head of the village council Dovbnia, among others. It is not a first assignment for Obushnyi,

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<sup>372</sup> *Kostryha* is a surname of a character. The story was published in *Communist* on January 11, 1933.

<sup>373</sup> Liubchenko describes one of his visits in April 1933 in the short novel *Ioho taiemnytsia* (*His Secret*) in 1966.

<sup>374</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 250.

<sup>375</sup> Arkadii Liubchebko, ‘Kostryha,’ in *Zbirka Ukrainiis’kykh novel* (New York: Naukove Tovarystvo im. Shevchenka v Amerytsi, 1955), p. 151.

<sup>376</sup> Liubchebko, ‘Kostryha,’ p. 154.

<sup>377</sup> From the letter from the students of Military Airforce Academy of RSChA to Hryhorii Petrovs’kyi, on their participation in Novopskovs’k district, Luhans’k oblast’. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 7, spr. 145, Ark. 62-67.

who has ‘beautiful intentions to transform the village.’<sup>378</sup> Together with Motora he is determined to find and liquidate class enemies and everyone sympathetic to them. Obushnyi promises village activists to ‘sizzle’ the enemies in order to meet procurement targets. The name of the novel is telling: French ‘avant poste’ means a guarded beacon established during the offensive. Similarly the novel presents perpetrators in militaristic terms, as soldiers in a hostile environment who follow orders, demonstrate vigilance, bravery and firm beliefs. They are contrasted with characters who desert, profit or question the orders. One of these characters is Dovbnia who is reluctant to ‘reveal enemies’<sup>379</sup> in the collective farm, refuses to punish peasants for stealing the grain and calls the grain procurement plan unrealistic. As officious as Dovbnia is, he avoids making any decisions and uses his position to pursue his love interest. Only when the woman refuses Dovbnia does he try to use the law on protection of socialistic property to punish her for ‘pilfering’ in 1932 – which implies she was starving at the time. In other words, the perpetrators in the novel are, based on Smeulers’s typology, either fanatics or profiteers.

Female perpetrators in *Avanposty* are ideological perpetrators too. The two women among the activists – a Komsomol Varvara Nezhurbida and a widow Khrystia – are later joined by another widow Maria. These women complain to Obushnyi that Dovbnia is not involving other women in the campaigns. In fact, most women in the village, according to Kyrylenko, remain ‘backward’ and openly hostile to the female activists. The peasant women spread rumours about Varvara being promiscuous and nearly lynch Khrystia and Maria. General condemnation of Varvara is exacerbated by her defying gender expectations: together with Motora, she ‘fights the neighbourhood, *dosvitky*,<sup>380</sup> perennial peasant passivity ...’<sup>381</sup> and does not sleep at night in hope to catch other peasants milling grain. In the end Khrystia is promoted to the member of the collective farm board, Varvara is engaged to Motora, and other women in the village reconcile with them.

Kyrylenko’s fanatic perpetrators, however, vary in the degree of indoctrination. An episode in *Avanposty* that reads like a document is a speech by the secretary of Central Committee at the orientation for Party plenipotentiaries like Obushnyi: ‘Three hundred Bolsheviks heard the words and dressed them in familiar pictures of class struggle in the village.’<sup>382</sup> Three hundred Bolsheviks, like three hundred Spartans, are outnumbered in their fight in the countryside. Most of them, like Obushnyi, worked in the factories or mines where their lives evoke those in Emile Zola’s *Germinal*

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<sup>378</sup> Ivan Kyrylenko, ‘Avanposty,’ *Molodniak: Molodyi Bil’shovyk*, no. 4-5 (1933), p. 9.

<sup>379</sup> See P. Kapelgorods’kyi collection of stories *Znyshchyty iak klas (To Destroy as a Class)*. The task of revealing was delegated to the local officials, activists and collective farmers.

<sup>380</sup> Traditional meetings of unmarried young men and women during which they danced, sung and courted. These meetings disappeared during collectivization, and were replaced by gatherings in the village clubs.

<sup>381</sup> Ivan Kyrylenko, ‘Avanposty,’ *Molodniak: Molodyi Bil’shovyk*, no 3 (1933), p. 6.

<sup>382</sup> Ivan Kyrylenko, *Avanposty* (Kharkiv: Khudozhnia literatura, 1935), p. 11.

(1885) – i.e. characterised by a struggle for a better future. The wording of the official speech is strikingly similar to the speech of one republican leader recalled by Victor Kravchenko, who was also sent to the countryside in 1932.<sup>383</sup> He remembers feeling inspired by militaristic slogans and anxious to meet expectations, although he had no ‘familiar pictures of class struggle’ and lacked specific instructions. According to Kravchenko, such ideological conditioning was enough to make many workers say that the starving peasants were somehow responsible for the famine and to make them enforce brutal policies on the ground. While Khlevniuk, one of the leading historians of Stalinism, posits that this line of thinking was shared by many Soviet officials and imposed on them from above,<sup>384</sup> General Petro Hryhorenko, himself a participant of those events, argues that these words were what many perpetrators *wanted* to believe as it made their life *safer*.<sup>385</sup> Indeed, such testimonies present perpetrators in a positive light but do not necessarily reflect their actual motivation.

A close reading of *Avanposty* also reveals a number of other perpetrator types. The secretary of the RPK Havrysh explains the lack of local support of the officials to Obushnyi by stating that many peasants did not support Soviet rule when it was established: ‘At that time every fifth [person] here was fighting for Petliura or in gangs. We can count on few.’<sup>386</sup> Coincidentally, the comments of this fictional character echo the words of local perpetrators in Kopelev’s memoir. In late 1932 Kopelev was sent to procure grain in the village of Petrivtsi (the name resembles that of Petrivka in *Avanposty*) in the Poltava oblast’. A local DPU plenipotentiary explained the lack of local support to Kopelev in similar terms: ‘There are counter-revolutionary elements in all villages here. In Petrivtsi there are about 20 of those who took arms against us and spilt our blood. The district is full of those who fought for Petliura, Makhno, Marusia... There were as many gangs in Civil War here as there are fleas on a dog.’<sup>387</sup> In *Avanposty*, Obushnyi remains a cultural Other for many peasants given his standing as a plenipotentiary from the city, so his enemies spread rumours about him seducing Motora’s girlfriend Varvara: ‘All those city folks are fooling us simpletons. They come over, spoil our girls, take our bread and are off ...’<sup>388</sup>

These initially hostile activists eventually come to support Obushnyi. They correspond to another perpetrator type: conformists. They accept the orders from the authorities but do not necessarily approve of them. Upon his arrival, Obushnyi summons Red Army veterans, all members

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<sup>383</sup> Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*.

<sup>384</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk and Marta D. Olynyk, ‘Comments on the Short-Term Consequences of the Holodomor,’ *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1/4 (2008): 150. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611470>.

<sup>385</sup> Petro Hryhorenko, *Spohady* (Detroit: Ukrainiski visti, 1984), p. 109.

<sup>386</sup> Kyrylenko, *Avanposty*, p. 42.

<sup>387</sup> Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira*, p. 248.

<sup>388</sup> Kyrylenko, ‘Avanposty,’ p. 18.



of the village council and collective farm board, poor peasants (members of KNS), and shock collective farmers – approximately 25 people. He notes to himself that only a few of the assembled genuinely embrace the idea of class struggle, whereas the vast majority are indifferent.<sup>389</sup> One of these activists regards his participation in house searches – during which he receives verbal abuse from women and hears repeated denials of hiding grain from men – as an unpleasant job. Having concluded that the ideological education of prospective activists would be futile, Obushnyi threatens them with repression. He reminds them that the Party will punish those who tolerate the enemies even ‘after the battle is over.’ Lastly, to ensure control over the activists, Obushnyi splits the peasants into small search brigades with one trusted comrade in each. He instructs them to ‘shake the grain out’ only when told to and to ‘press harder’ on the individual peasants rather than on the collective farmers.<sup>390</sup> Each search brigade is given a target and a part of the village in which to work and is subsequently assessed on its performance. After a few weeks, the trusted comrades from each brigade merge into one brigade in which all members are either relatives or close friends. Such a brigade, according to the activists, will organise ‘a true devastation.’<sup>391</sup> They abide by the rule, ‘No hesitation at the front. Get an order – follow it!’<sup>392</sup>

Kyrylenko also presents the reader with compromised perpetrators: young ambitious men and women in the Komsomol who follow Communists. They destroy the icons worshipped by their mothers. More innocuously, they play the accordion, an instrument that replaced the traditional kobza or fiddle during collectivization. This generational divide is addressed by other writers of the early 1930s: in *Istoriia radosti* (History of Happiness, 1934) Ivan Le portrays a pioneer Phonia who denounces his father for hiding grain and has a mental breakdown. In the same novel a character named Mykyta Korovainii participates in the dekulakization of his own parents in order to become a chairman of the collective farm. In *Voseny* (*In Autumn*, 1933) by Mykola Dukyn, Komsomol Kyrylo reminds his mother that he might shoot her if she steals even a handful of grain from the collective farm again. He guards the barn and, at one point, shoots a peasant in the back.

In a similar vein, Hryhorii Epik portrays several groups of perpetrators in his novel *Persha Vesna* (The First Spring, 1933). Epik names over thirty people involved in grain procurement and collectivization in the village of Bahva where the head of the village council Khymochka struggles to establish a collective farm. Though he is backed by district officials and local poor peasants, most farmers oppose him. In such a way, Epik argues, the peasants want to minimise their losses. Even when local delegate Pola reassures Komsomol plenipotentiary Lohvyn that the poor peasants will

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<sup>389</sup> Kyrylenko, *Avanposty*, p. 73.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>391</sup> Kyrylenko, ‘Avanposty,’ p. 8.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

follow ‘where you take us,’<sup>393</sup> he backs a local wealthy farmer Lytko who holds real power in the village at the time. Then Lohvyn engages local youth in grain procurement by promising them Komsomol membership if they prove themselves in finding grain. They respond with enthusiasm: ‘We are not new at this! Who collected all the bread but us?’, implying that they are already initiated into the enforcement of violent policies.<sup>394</sup> The antagonist Lytko comments that support of these locals is crucial for grain procurement: ‘If it were not for them, those city commissars would not find anything. They would have walked, sniffed and left. [But the locals] searched all over. They took everything and have not left a thing; they damaged [it all] and lived off on some of it.’<sup>395</sup> In Epik’s representation, most activists are conformists who follow the orders of authorities.

A more fanatical type, represented by Lohvyn, is murdered by a mob. The women in the crowd also sexually assault several activists and destroy the newly created collective farm. Indeed, these were the risks that many perpetrators faced on the ground. In Mykola Dukyn’s short novel *Did Topolia* (Grandpa Topolia, 1933), a plenipotentiary from Moscow named Toporkov who chaired a Party cell and ‘organised the masses’ in a village is shot dead, like Lohvyn, through an open window by ‘kulaks’.<sup>396</sup> Before Lohvyn dies in Epik’s novel, he condemns peasants who do not appreciate the changes that he is fighting for: ‘What bastards! You work for them, and they kill you.’<sup>397</sup>

Some of Lohvyn’s comrades-in-arms, who are brutalised by the events in the Civil War, display traits of sadism. Red Army veterans Vol’ha Bosa and Mykola Chubuk remember local peasantry supporting the Whites during the war and killing Vol’ha’s husband. They now seek revenge: ‘You, comrades-KNS-members, are not KNS until you break a skull of “kulak.”’<sup>398</sup> The presence of perpetrators in the village becomes intimidating: at night they ride from house to house with torches and instantly decide on individual cases of refusals to join the collective farm. Epik even compares the village council to the military headquarters of historic offensives on ‘perennial traditions of peasant backwardness and famines’ – in line with the official interpretation of the aims of collectivization.<sup>399</sup>

In fact, many perpetrators on village and district levels in Epik’s novel see violence as a necessary tool to subjugate the majority in the village who are too backward to be persuaded with words. When the secretary of the RPK Kholod goes to Bahva after a lynching, he has no

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<sup>393</sup> Hryhorii Epik, *Persha vesna* (Kharkiv: Literatura i mystetstvo, 1933), p. 91.

<sup>394</sup> Epik, *Persha vesna*, p. 110.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>396</sup> Mykola Dukyn, ‘Did Topolia,’ in *Chervonyi Shliakh*, no 2 (1933), p. 56.

<sup>397</sup> Epik, *Persha vesna*, p. 201.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

reservations about violence, even against the poor peasants who need to be ‘squashed without mercy... they are dark.’<sup>400</sup> In conversation with the village officials, Kholod dehumanises the peasants further by comparing them to dormant parasites. At the village meeting following the death of Lohvyn, he ignores the questions about helping the starving children of the repressed and announces that the village will be punished further. Likewise Vol’ha and her comrades laugh at the claims that people are dying from hunger and ‘fall dead like flies.’<sup>401</sup>

If Epik mentions the famine only in passing in 1933, Dokia Humenna writes about the conditions laying the groundwork for the devastation to come in her novel *Lysty zi Stepovoi Ukrainy* (*The Letters from Steppe Ukraine*, 1928). In her work, she awkwardly presents Soviet officials as unable to estimate how much ‘excess’ grain would be stored by the individual peasants who refused to join the collectives. As a result, they have to ‘pump out’ all grain and resort to ‘excesses.’<sup>402</sup> Humenna concentrates on the management of one collective farm, highlighting its incompetence in agriculture, dependence on state investments, and even sexual corruption. In short, she presents the concerns of many farmers resisting collectivization at the time, many of which were ridiculed by other Soviet writers. Humenna reveals a foundational connection between these Soviet policies in the countryside and mass famine, portraying the perpetrators as marginal elements of the village community. Her critical depictions of collective farms were enough for Humenna to be refused membership in the Writers Union of Ukraine and all the benefits it brought at the time, including employment, ration cards and accommodation.

### ***Soviet prose during the Thaw***

This sympathetic depiction of collectivization and its perpetrators, which was more or less in line with the official ideology at the time, continued until the death of Stalin. After Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s crimes and the ‘cult of personality’ at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, however, some Ukrainian Soviet writers dared to allude to collectivization and the famine again. As critical as he was of Stalinism in the so-called ‘Secret Speech,’ Khrushchev did not question the official interpretation of collectivization and the role its perpetrators played at the time. Yet a number of Soviet writers did question this interpretation in an attempt to reassess the events of 1932-1933. Famed Ukrainian writer Oles’ Honchar mentions the famine in his novel *Liudyna i Zbroia* (*Man and Arms*, 1958). One of his characters, Reshetnyk, describes his experience of the Holodomor to his comrade-in-arms during the the Second World War. The only survivor in his family, Reshetnyk used to cut the ears of wheat while trying to avoid the field guards, who called

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid, pp. 151-153.

<sup>402</sup> Dokia Humenna, ‘Lysty zi stepovoi Ukrainy,’ in *Pluh*, no 10-11 (1928), pp. 40-41.

children like him ‘kulak hairdressers.’<sup>403</sup> He concludes that they were only hungry people, not ‘kulaks’. While Honchar does not explain who these field guards were or how the famine was organised, his very mention of its perpetrators mistaking the victims for enemies is significant in the cultural memory of the Holodomor, especially given the novel’s reach to a wide readership.

Another novel that overcame the bounds of conventional censorship is Mykhailo Stel’makh’s novel *Chotyry Brody* (*The Four Fords*, 1978), which received the prestigious Shevchenko award in 1980. In the novel, Stel’makh describes many aspects of the famine that censors normally insisted on excluding, thus delaying the novel’s publication. Stel’makh describes how local officials tried to save the starving and blames the famine in the ‘wicked’ year on the poor harvest exacerbated by primitive agriculture, which the Party sought to change. From brief comments, we learn that some bread was taken away from the peasants as taxes or surplus. Stel’makh, coming from a KNS background and a student of agriculture during the Holodomor,<sup>404</sup> was very likely to be involved in grain procurement himself. Therefore he avoids explaining who requisitioned the grain, mentioning house searches only in passing.

The protagonist Bondarenko in *Chotyry Brody* is an ideological perpetrator. Like Stel’makh himself, he returns to his native village as a teacher and confiscates grain in 1932-1933. The author does not delve into the process of house searches but repeatedly stresses Bondarenko’s firm socialist beliefs, his desire to change life for better, and his incompetence in managing the collective farm. Bondarenko is appointed as chairman of a collective farm by district officials Musul’bas and Sahaidak, who are likened to fearless but fair kozaks and who, like other perpetrators in Soviet novels, are Red Army Veterans. Moreover, Sahaidak assigns Bondarenko the task of ‘saving people’ and completing the sowing campaign in 1933 despite having no seeds. Having a *carte blanche* from the superiors who promise to ‘keep their eyes open but not to slap his hands,’ Bondarenko orders his friend and a collective farmer, Vasyl’, to leave some of the procured milk for the newly organised village nursery. When Vasyl’ reminds him that they would face trial for such action, Bondarenko reasons that they might not. Later in the novel Vasyl’ becomes a policeman while Bondarenko stays in his position of the farm chairman.

A group of perpetrator-fanatics, however, compromise their beliefs when they tolerate the profiteers and careerists. Bondarenko believes it is the profiteer Mahazanyk who has exacerbated the famine in the village. Indeed, Mahazanyk uses the famine to his benefit: he sells the grain that he acquires through participation in requisition to desperate peasants at extortionate prices, settles scores with former enemies and pursues various love interests. Mahazanyk is a former Ukrainian

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<sup>403</sup> Oles’ Honchar, *Tvory v 7-y tomakh*, vol. 4, (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1988), p. 122.

<sup>404</sup> Ivan Semenchuk, *Mykhailo Stel’makh: narys tvorchosti* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1982).

national activist and a successful entrepreneur who does not follow any ideology and welcomes the Nazis during the war when it means profit for him. When he approaches Bondarenko with business ideas about how to develop the struggling collective farm, Bondarenko refuses and lets the produce rot.

The careerist district prosecutor Stupach is a convinced Communist, always dressed in military uniform. From short remarks we learn that he is a Jew. Born in a small town, he 'does not know the village and does not want to know it' and 'the early 1920s pushed the soul out of him.' He dislikes peasants who compare him to a vulture despite his handsome appearance. Ambitious, Stupach tends to see conspiracy everywhere and prefers to employ terror in his work 'so that one would be scared of their own.' He insists on taking all of the harvest of 1932 out of the village. Perpetrators Sahaidak and Musulbas comment on the necessity to tolerate people like him while constructing a better future. Stupach matches the description of the Chekist commissar of the post-revolutionary years provided by Bilynkis: 'A typical, rather good-looking man, he had the most unpleasant employment. He was sent, or maybe himself volunteered, whenever there was a need to abuse and insult someone.'<sup>405</sup> Through the words of Bondarenko, Stel'makh explains that executives like Stupach with their hatred towards the peasants are to blame for the 1932-1933 famine. According to Myroslav Shkandrij, Jewish cadres were less visible in the violence of the Holodomor or in the terror of the thirties compared to the early years of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period.<sup>406</sup>

A similar depiction of the perpetrators could be found in other Soviet novels that remained firmly within the canon of social realism, such as *Liudy ne angely* (People Are No Angels, 1962) by Ivan Stadniuk and *Nevmyrushchyi Khib* (Immortal Bread, 1981) by Petro Lanovenko.<sup>407</sup> The famine is explained as a temporary phase in the socialist transformation of the village, caused by poor local management, 'kulak' sabotage or natural causes. Its perpetrators – village activists, workers, teachers, village and district officials – are ideological perpetrators who are concerned about the lives of the peasants. As in *Chotyry Brody*, the famine is blamed on local officials who were either careerists or counter-revolutionaries.

## **2. *Samvydav and Tamvydav Novels of the Soviet Period***

Anatolii Dimarov's *I budut' liudy* (*There Will Be People*, 1964) initially had a chapter on collectivization and the famine, but it was deemed inappropriate by reviewer Mul'tykh from the

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<sup>405</sup> Lazar Bilynkis, 'Hromadianska viina na Ukraini ta ievrei (Fragmenty spohadiv; publikatsiia L. Padun-Luk'ianovoi),' *Khronika 2000*, (1998), p. 237.

<sup>406</sup> Myroslav Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian literature: representation and identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 146.

<sup>407</sup> O. Samiilenko, 'Velykyi Holod u tvorakh radians'kykh pys'mennykiv,' *Suchasnist'*, 1989, no 6 (338), 23.

Institute of the History of Party.<sup>408</sup> Dimarov's own father was dekulakized, and his mother relocated as a teacher to another village with the children and changed their surname. In their new village, she too had to participate in dekulakization so Dimarov knew perpetrators' experience well.<sup>409</sup> But Mulykh's revision of his novel criticised his representation of perpetrators and epitomises the guidance for authors writing about the 1930s: '... completely re-evaluate the events in the village in late 1929 – early 1930 according to the documents and existing historiography ...'<sup>410</sup> The chapter was published as a separate novel *The Hungry Thirties (A Parable About Bread)* abroad in 1989 and in Ukraine in 1990.

In this work Dimarov explores different types of perpetrators of the famine as well as their hierarchy – from village activists to the provincial leaders and Stalin from 1929 to 1933. The events start in Khorol, where Hryhorii Ginzburg, the secretary of the RPK, finds himself under pressure from the oblast' committee to speed up collectivisation in his district. He is also confused with the discrepancy between Stalin's views on collectivization and his own experience.<sup>411</sup> Ginzburg writes a letter to Stalin criticising his policy. He is then summoned to the first secretary of the oblast' Party committee, who expels him from the Party. Ginzburg shoots himself at the meeting. Such incidents indeed took place at the time. Maksudov, for example, notes the increased rates of suicide among Party officials during the famine as the result of their being 'ridden with guilt and full of sympathy for the starving' as well as their inability to change anything.<sup>412</sup>

Following his death, the Khorol district committee is 'reinforced' with the careerist Suslov, who follows orders with the conviction that the transformation of the village requires violence. Most of Ginzburg's former colleagues immediately signal support of Suslov's methods. For instance, another member of the committee, Put'ko, supports Suslov by repeating his words and silently agreeing when he criticises him. He travels to the village of Tarasivka in Khorol district to find like-minded executives. Together with Suslov, Put'ko expels from the Party the head of the village council and Red Army veteran Hanzha, who refuses to use repressions in the village. His partner and fellow Communist Ol'ha solemnly laments his imprisonment and reluctance to conform but testifies against him, together with his nephew Volod'ka. A perpetrator and Red Army veteran like Volod'ka, Ol'ha receives a verbal warning for her lack of vigilance and is distrusted by Put'ko: 'This woman raised her hand herself. Besides, she had been Hanzha's mistress. We won't let you

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<sup>408</sup> Anatolii Dimarov, 'Na Volyni ia stav Ukraintsem,' *Den*, June 26, 2003, <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/cuspilstvo/anatolii-dimarov-na-volyni-ya-stav-ukrayincem>

<sup>409</sup> Dimarov, *Prozhyty i rozpovisty...*, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>410</sup> Dimarov, *Prozhyty i rozpovisty...*, 1998, p. 181.

<sup>411</sup> Reference to Stalin's article 'The Year of the Great Break.'

<sup>412</sup> Sergei Maksudov and Marta D. Olynyk, 'Dehumanization', p. 144.

forget that until the day you die, dearie! You'll remain forever "under suspicion.""<sup>413</sup> At the same time Volod'ka is appointed as a chairman of the collective farm that he is to create. Initially he is enthusiastic and anxious to prove his loyalty to the Party and feels empowered by district backing: 'After having been in town, Volod'ka suddenly felt that he wielded frightening power: he could run whoever he liked out of the village.'<sup>414</sup> Despite his threats, only 12 out of 37 activists join the collective farm 'voluntarily.' Worried that district officials would blame him, he gradually transforms into a committed perpetrator, compiling a list of people to be deported to Siberia and refusing to return food to his father-in-law who dies from the starvation.

Dimarov suggests that ideology alone cannot adequately account for Volod'ka's participation in the Holodomor, given the refusal of convinced Communists Ginzburg and Hanzha to participate. He therefore raises the question of the role of the modern state, and above all the culture of fear, in the vertical structure of the totalitarian state. When Ginzburg waits for a meeting in the reception room of the first secretary of the oblast,' he finds himself in the company of other district officials waiting anxiously to be seen behind the big black leather doors. The material of these doors reminds him of the black leather of the Chekist uniform, which communicates the authority of higher Soviet officials over the rank-and-file officials. While Ginzburg gradually submits to the intimidation of the big black doors, he eventually finds the courage to protest – something most perpetrators in the novel cannot, or do not, do. In other words, Dimarov suggests that it was bureaucracy of the state that made people like Volod'ka dangerous, weaponising their dutiful official conscientiousness to facilitate the famine in his village.

Indeed, Volod'ka is similar to Adolf Eichmann in his motives and his character. He is unaware of the wickedness of his actions: 'Had he wanted people to die like this? Had he thought about this as he swept the grain out of the village? Sweeping it out to the last granule, just to fulfil that forthcoming plan ...'<sup>415</sup> He has neither killed anyone personally, nor has he ordered anyone to be killed. He is not a sadist or psychopath; nor are his subordinates, who take the grain from the families in winter to save it for spring sowing and from 'being fed to your children.'<sup>416</sup> They seem 'terribly and terrifyingly normal.'

Dimarov's character of the teacher Tania is a classic example of a compromised perpetrator. During a meeting on dekulakization, she disapproves of the list for deportation, but remains silent as she fears for herself and her children. Defined through her relations to the men – her father was a priest, her husband is 'kulak,' her brother is repressed – she feels insecure and is

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<sup>413</sup> Anatolii Dimarov, *In Stalin's Shadows* (Melbourne: Bayda Books, 1989), p. 137.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>415</sup> Dimarov, *In Stalin's Shadows*, p. 157.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, p. 152.

grateful not to be included in the dekulakization brigade. Tania lives with her two young sons in the house of the deported; she is swollen from hunger and fears even responding to the school warden who comments on children suffering needlessly in the famine. Tania prefers not to discuss the intentions of the leaders out of the fear of losing her job or being arrested. Vulnerable and alone, Tania is desperate to survive and keeps her silence until her death in the 1980s.

Finally, Dimarov completes the circle of perpetrators by taking a local old man Grandpa Khlypavka to Stalin. While following the orders of Volod'ka to keep the starving away from the village grain store, Khlypavka believes that Stalin is not aware of the dire situation and decides to travel to Moscow to inform him. His son works at the railway and helps Khlypavka travel to Kharkiv in a first-class compartment – something impossible for most starving peasants at the time. His trip is cut short by cordons near Moscow, and he deduces that Stalin is aware of the starving peasants trying to reach the capital and does not want to see them. After the old man dies, he demands God punish Stalin and alleges his complicity in failing to do so: 'You teach us in the Holy Scriptures that all who pass by a crime become criminals themselves, that all who help bandits become bandits themselves. So who can judge us, if You turn from us?'<sup>417</sup> When God asks the victims of the famine who killed them, they all point at Stalin. While God finds no adequate punishment for the 'horrific crimes' of Stalin, Dimarov does not discuss punishment for Suslov, Khlypavka, Volod'ka and others who passed by a crime.

Dimarov's other novel set during the Holodomor, *Samosud* (Lynching, 1990), focusses entirely on careerist Danylo Sokalo and follows his rise from the village level perpetrator to the secretary of the RPK. An ambitious Komsomol, Danylo fights with religion in his village and ironically takes down a giant cross erected by his distant Cossack ancestor, after whom the village was named. To prevent it from being erected again, Danylo defecates on top of it. He also ensures that the village is renamed 'Chervona Kommuna' (Red Commune) to prove his loyalty to the cause. Having secured a gun from district authorities, 'he has already felt important.' Danylo is driven not only by career aspirations, but by jealousy: 'The older he got, the more he hated anyone who dared to live better than him.'<sup>418</sup> When he accidentally shoots his hand, he blames Vasyl' Kovalenko for a failed assassination attempt – simply because Vasyl' had better shoes than Danylo long ago. On advice of a policeman, he accuses four more men from the village, all of whom are executed after a widely publicised trial.

In 1932 Danylo jumps at a chance to advance his career by volunteering to enforce grain procurement. At a key meeting with a member of the TsK KP(b)U, where other village officials

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>418</sup> A. Dimarov, *Samosud: povisti, opovidannia, etiudy* (Kyiv: Ukrainiis'kyi pys'mennyk, 1999), p. 81.



argue grain procurement quotas are impossible, Danylo raises his hand to promise 200% of the target. A careerist and a profiteer who keeps possessions of the deported for personal use, Danylo feels elated with his grand plans: 'I will procure grain! I will do everything, comrade secretary! I will smash myself, but I will do it!' He organises agitation brigades with teenagers, Komsomol, KNS and 'poor teachers who are responsible for everything' and bullies the peasants into the collective by boarding up their houses and deporting those who resisted. While searching for grain, he starts with individual farmers who left the collective in 1930, avenging them for undermining his efforts and achievements in the past. He learns of metal rods to prod the surfaces in the district and orders a local blacksmith to make some for his brigades. During the searches, he brutally kills, directly and indirectly, half the village. This loyalty eventually pays off, and he moves to the district and eventually becomes the secretary of the RPK.

Danylo's life changes quickly during the German invasion in 1941. Having stayed on the occupied territory, he destroys local supplies and accidentally kills his former Komsomol colleague Vustia, a conformist and a diligent worker herself. Now the chairwoman of the collective, she tried to prevent Danylo from burning the barn with hundreds of calves. One more murder later, he is arrested by Vasyl' Kovalenko who returned to the village, and is now in the German police. Kovalenko allows the mob, headed by Vustia's mother, to lynch Danylo. The murder is highly publicised in German newspapers. Once the village is freed from the Germans, it is burnt to the ground by the NKVD as collective reprisal for the lynching of the secretary of the district committee. Its male inhabitants are executed, whilst its surviving women and children are sent to the camps in Siberia.

Another novel set during the famine published abroad and circulated in *samvydav* is Vasili Grossman's *Vse techet* (*Forever Flowing*, 1970). Grossman presents the perpetrator of Stalinist policies according to four types: sadists, conformists, the compromised, and the ideologically driven. Grossman also includes a confession of a Party plenipotentiary deployed in Ukraine to procure grain named Anna Stepanovna Mikhaliova, a war widow living with her nephew in southern Russia. She finds a soulmate in the protagonist of the novel and confides in him. A few weeks later, Anna dies of lung cancer. Her account of the rank-and-file perpetrator is strikingly elaborate.

In an interview, Grossman's daughter, Ekaterina Korotkova, confirmed to me that he based Anna's character on a woman named Pelageia Semenova, who was indeed a perpetrator of the famine in east Ukraine.<sup>419</sup> Yet as opposed to Anna, Pelageia Semenova lived a long life and resided in central Moscow and worked as a maid in the family of the poet Nikolai Zabolots'kii, whom

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Ekaterina Korotkova in Moscow on 12.04.2014.

Grossman knew well. Semenova was born into a peasant family in Likhoslavsk, Tver oblast'; after the famine, she returned to Russia. It is unknown how she reflected upon her participation in the Holodomor or how she explained her motivations. Controversy was not uncommon in her life: Zabolots'kyi, repressed in 1938 and released from the camps after Stalin's death, actually suspected that Semenova was reporting on him to the secret services and eventually asked her to leave. She then came to the Grossmans.<sup>420</sup>

In Grossman's novel, Anna compares her memories of grain procurement to a piece of shrapnel in her heart. At the time of collectivization, Anna was 22 years old; as she puts it, she was beautiful but unkind inside. She worked as a cleaner at the district executive committee in Russia and heard about the famine from the officials. She believed that starvation was caused not by collectivization but by extortionate procurement quotas and the confiscation of all foodstuffs. Later she was sent as a bookkeeper to a local collective farm and then transferred to work in the same capacity in Ukraine, where collectivization was facing more problems because 'private property rules the head of the Khokhol.'<sup>421</sup>

When describing the village activists in Grossman's *Vse techet*, Anna notes that most people were honest or ordinary but that their actions led to exactly the same results as the actions of those who were cruel to the victims. Most of the activists were local, she explains: they were representatives of the RPK and executive committee, Komsomol, the DPU, police and sometimes even the military. During dekulakization, the empowered activists perceived themselves as heroes and stopped seeing the peasants whom they procured grain from, dekulakized or deported as human beings. In Grossman's *Vse techet*, this dehumanization, which was exacerbated by propaganda, is at the root of their excessive violence. As Anna notes, she felt that the victims were 'dirty', 'sick' and 'backward'. She failed to see them as people, especially after regular meetings, special instructions and media messages about resistant peasants being nothing but 'vermin' and 'parasites'.

Anna was also included in a *troika* – as one of three officials with extended rights of executive power. She compiled lists for dekulakization. When it is decided whom to dekulakize at the village level, the principle for putting the list together is presented as far from ideological. In fact, the decision is often made to settle personal scores or to profit. Later Anna comments on her colleagues being ordinary people, some sentimental and few truly bad. She memorises all their conversations when they let down their guard while drunk. From all collected information, Anna concludes that the rank-and-file perpetrators were expected to provide their superiors with optimistic numbers, while the quotas from the top, based on those numbers, were disseminated back

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> V. Grossman, *Forever Flowing* (New York: Harper&Row, 1972), p. 149.

down. In her view, Stalin was aware of the famine but chose not to help the starving and carried on with the confiscation policy, thus killing Soviet citizens deliberately and hiding the truth from the world. What strikes her the most is that perpetrators like her, on all levels of the state machine, made this mass killing possible. This killing of men, women and even children convinces Anna that human life in the Soviet Union is worthless.

When peasants in Anna's village start howling from hunger, she feels that she had to eat her rations in the field. In the field she hears hungry cries from a neighbouring village. None of her colleagues share the rations with the victims. At the time, a plenipotentiary from the city Party organization joked: 'Such parasites! They even search for acorns under the snow to avoid working.'<sup>422</sup> Anna sees people driven by hunger to utter despair; these images stay in her memory for the rest of her life. When the last person in the village dies, the management of the collective farm is transferred to the city. Anna is offered a position of a chairwoman of another collective farm, a proposal she refuses. Instead she leaves Ukraine to work as a cook in Russia.

Grossman's Anna Mikhailiova consistently compares the man-made famine to the mechanism of the Holocaust: it involves a similar dehumanization of the victims, criminal decisions of the leadership against civilians, and local conformity. She attempts to make sense of the trauma by comparison in her confession. Anna gains a vantage point over her experience and looks at it from a distance, an approach similar to that employed by the protagonist of Sartre's short novel *The Wall* (1939).<sup>423</sup> Witnessing the inevitability of death during the famine, like Pablo anticipating the dreaded wall before his execution during the Civil War in Spain, Anna finds that she no longer cares about life. Her death is delayed for 20 years, a punishment that comes despite her repentance, which involves Anna seeing the victims as human beings once again. She expresses empathy for many deported 'kulaks' – women, the old and children who died in the crowded cargo trains even before reaching their final destination.

Another novel set during the famine that offers a nuanced approach in its depiction of perpetrators is *Sl'ozy Bozhoi Materi (The Tears of Our Lady, 1990)* by Ievhen Hutsalo. Like Grossman, Hutsalo avoids the dichotomy of reading perpetrators as either ideological fanatics or profiteers. All of them are local. Hutsalo confronts the violence in a Ukrainian rural community at the time, starting with an episode in which a lynching mob kills a teenager suspected of theft.<sup>424</sup> He then portrays various perpetrators in one village, none of whom win from the tragedy. The first perpetrator, Harkusha, who with his family starves to death, is neither an ideological perpetrator nor

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>423</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. A. Brown, *The Wall* (London: Hesperus, 2005).

<sup>424</sup> A similar incident of lynching before collectivization is described in the memoir by Dmitrii Goichenko, *Krasnyi apokalipsis: skvoz raskulachivanie i Golodomor* (Kyiv: Ababagalamaga, 2013), pp. 20-21.

a sadist. He is simply a neighbour whom the protagonist does not like. The second activist, Vasyl' Hnoiovyi, enjoys the benefits of power and theft but loses his wife. Upon her death on the floor of a manger, Ol'ka asks Vasyl' and her sister to move in together, adding that 'though he is a horrible thug, one can live with him.'<sup>425</sup> While Harkusha explains his participation in mass violence and theft by his will for survival, whereas his colleague Mykola Khashchuvatyi seems to embrace the brutality and does not justify his participation.

Hutsalo then proceeds to a characterisation of officials Matvii Shpytal'nyk, the chairman of the collective farm, and Kindrat Iaremnyi, the head of the village council. Both are careerists who display sadistic traits. In the midst of the famine, they play chess in front of the starving peasants working in the field. They use official language to mask the facts, calling the starving peasants 'saboteurs' and their slave labour 'a holiday'. They question the ability of collective farmers to rise above their basic instincts and appreciate the modern music that they play in the fields. In a word, Shpytal'nyk and Iaremnyi do not see the victims as humans. When a collective farmer receives a bowl of soup in the field without having worked that day, Shpytal'nyk knocks the bowl out of her hands despite knowing that he is sentencing her to death.

No matter how callous their actions, these perpetrators are not subject to Hutsalo's judgement. In the novel, the line between perpetrators and victims is often blurred. One of the activists dies of hunger along with his children, while another is brutalised beyond return to normal life. Perhaps to stress the depth of the tragedy rather than a division between perpetrators and victims, Hutsalo describes an episode of a beautiful woman in a silk dress stopping in the middle of the village where she sees emaciated children. Her face is depicted as the face of Mary in Orthodox icons – with narrow black eyebrows and wide eyes full of empathy. She heads to the train station from the district centre with a partner Dmytro Dmytrovych, an oblique district official, who tells her that it is impossible to help all the starving children. As she gives away white bread to the starving children, she cries, with her tears 'pouring' or 'shedding' as in the novel's title.

### ***3. The Ukrainian Novel in the Diaspora***

Diaspora literature largely offers a different take on the perpetrators – from the position of the victim. While writers in diaspora have produced a number of works set during the famine, only a few have reached the mass reader in Ukraine since 1991. Today *Maria: Khronika odnoho zhyttia* (*Maria: The Chronicle of One Life*, 1934) by Ulas Samchuk<sup>426</sup> and *Plan do dvoru* (*Annihilation*,

<sup>425</sup> Ievhen Hutsalo, *Sliozy Bozhoi Materi, Ie. Hutsalo, Take strashne, take solodke zhyttia* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2014), p. 281.

<sup>426</sup> Samchuk was long an advocate for the cause of independence in his publications in OUN periodicals, although he was not a member of that organization. See Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

1951) by Todos' Os'machka and *Zovtyi Kniaz'* (The Yellow Prince, 1962) by Vasyl' Barka are recommended for reading in school curricula; they now contribute to the work of cultural memory among younger generations of Ukrainians educated after 1991. Moreover, one of few fiction films related to the Holodomor, *Holod-33* (1991), is based on *Zhovtyi Kniaz'*. The depiction of the perpetrators in these novels is predominantly as the ethnically different Other, which is in line with a Ukrainian nationalist ideology focussed on Russian aggression in Ukraine.<sup>427</sup>

*Maria: Khronika odnoho zhyttia* is the story of a Ukrainian peasant woman that starts with her birth and ends with her death in 1933. The events of the famine are depicted through the eyes of characters closely related to Maria. Their stories point to the destructive interference of the outside world with the Ukrainian peasantry. Shkandrij argues that the militarism and imperial power in such novels 'transform a civilized peasant into an uncouth military man'<sup>428</sup> who verbally and physically abuses his family and speaks Russian. In order to escape this influence, one has to till his land and enjoy 'the fullness of existence.' The author Samchuk applauds Maria's second husband Kornii for becoming a farmer again: 'God himself is following you in the fields with a wind, in the sky, with the sun! God himself!'<sup>429</sup> In Samchuk's interpretation, the Ukrainian village before the 1930s is 'a golden country' and 'a country of labour and bread' that the sun loves, warms and protects. That idyll is destroyed by locals who, according to Onats'kyi in his foreword to *Maria's* edition in 1952, 'drown in the waves of evil and corruption of Moscow flooding.'<sup>430</sup>

In such a way, Samchuk gradually constructs an image of the perpetrator as the Other who exploits the Ukrainian population. Most of the Holodomor perpetrators in *Maria* are repeatedly cast as the Other. The attack on the peasantry by Komsomol activists, for instance, is likened to a Tatar invasion; as one of the tortured characters exclaims, 'Our country has not known such a Tatar-like plundering.'<sup>431</sup> The field guards are not collective farmers but 'the soldiers of great and bright future that came here from the distant north' or 'the creatures with high cheekbones.'<sup>432</sup>

Yet the very life of the protagonist Maria defies the existence of such an idyllic village prior to collectivization and the famine. Orphaned at the age of six and neglected by her relatives, Maria starts working at the age of twelve. She is illiterate; despite her hard work, she remains in the lowest social stratum. Her first three children die of infectious diseases that regularly ravage the

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<sup>427</sup> See Natalka Doliak, *Chorna Doshka* (Kharkiv: Klub Simeinoho Dozvillia, 2014); Svitlana Talan, *Rozkolote Nebo* (Kharkiv: Klub Simeinoho Dozvillia, 2015); Halyna Marchuk, *Try Doli* (Kyiv: Prioritytet, 2012); Serhii Loboda, *Vidlunnia* (Lviv; Kal'varia, 2010).

<sup>428</sup> Myroslav Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929-1956* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 232.

<sup>429</sup> Ulas Samchuk, *Maria. Khronika odnoho zhittia* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2014), p. 123.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

countryside. Thus, the village was a place of ‘labour and bread’ as well as a place of violence and premature and infantile death. Likewise, in Samchuk’s novel, it is possible to find behaviour befitting a potential perpetrator among the locals prior to their exposure to the outside world or Communist ideology – i.e. the Other. As a child, Maria’s own son Maksym steals, despises hard work, and tortures animals. His parents explain his character as being ‘born that way’ and call him a ‘bastard’ and ‘buffoon’ in public, convinced he will become nothing but a poor farmer. Therefore the village is neither void of violence nor of violent types who, under the influence of the Other, become the perpetrators of collectivization and the famine.

Maria’s son Maksym turns out to be the key village perpetrator. He represents the perpetrator-profiteer type. While Maria’s first husband Hnat explains Maksym’s participation by being possessed by the devil – he has a dream in which the devil oversees Maksym mutilating his mother – other farmers ridicule Maksym for trying to get rich without hard work. Maksym denounces his brother, disowns and evicts his parents, and sees his sister and infant niece starve to death. While Shkandrij regards him as one of many young fanatics who strip churches and ‘make a mess’ out of farming, Maksym also supports Soviet policies for his own benefit. Indeed, he advocates for collective farming as well as for sexual emancipation and secularization, but at the same time he despises hard work, hires a maid and wants his children to leave the village to seek careers in the city. In the end Maksym is brutally murdered by his father – a premonition Maria had that ‘God will punish [him] not with a bat.’<sup>433</sup> In short, Maksym combines many features of the Holodomor perpetrator: he is a Russian-speaking quisling, Communist, profiteer, sadist, and atheist punished by God. What is important here is that this character, however grotesque, places agency for the Holodomor back in the village. Local perpetrators are not simply ‘unconscious’ accomplices who with ‘demagogical slogans push the village to its moral and physical ruin.’<sup>434</sup>

There are other perpetrators, and millions of them, according to Samchuk: Komsomol members who are ‘strange, very strange young people’<sup>435</sup> but also ‘monsters,’ ‘hyenas’ and ‘children with sold souls’<sup>436</sup> who search houses, destroy everything in sight, and torture the victims. Samchuk also points to the role of the modern state as the prime mover of the mechanism of the Holodomor on the ground: the policies initiated in the Central Committee are leveraged down through various officials and the media with its countless poets, epics and academics and enforced by the Party, the army and the security service. He looks at various links between the *sil’kory* who provided intelligence and the security services and between propaganda brigades and ‘clever-eyed’

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

shock-workers and their brigade leaders.

*Plan do Dvoru* (Annihilation, 1951) by Teodosii Os'machka, which was included in school curriculum on Ukrainian literature in 2002,<sup>437</sup> is an episode in the life of a collectivized village in central Ukraine during the early 1930s. Os'machka was encouraged to write a novel on the man-made famine by Volodymyr Vynnychenko,<sup>438</sup> one of the leaders of Ukrainian national movement following the dissolution of the Russian Empire. In Os'machka's novel, the perpetrators are the ethnically alien Other and diametrically opposed to the victims: 'armed, they [killed] the unarmed; full with food, they killed the starved and cold; smartly dressed, they killed the ragged and patched ... [They] killed without warning or asking questions as they would kill prey.'<sup>439</sup>

This opposition between perpetrator and victim is stressed throughout *Plan do Dvoru*: the antagonists – the conforming chairman of the collective farm Khakhlov and the corrupt chekist Tiurin – are Russians, and the local Komsomol, while dressed like ordinary Ukrainian young men in embroidered shirts, carry *Moscow* rifles. Like other victims in the novel, the protagonist Nerad'ko longs for an independent Ukraine and remarks that the Communists from Russia are enslaving it. While the actual grain requisition is mentioned only in passing, most of the groups instrumental in enforcing the famine are present: the DPU and police as trained perpetrators, village officials and brigade leaders at the collective farm, village Komsomol and the informants among the locals. Additionally, Os'machka mentions the role of education officials in persecuting the victims: when Nerad'ko refuses to cooperate as a teacher, he is reported by a school inspector who, according to the protagonist, is no longer Ukrainian and is 'bought by Moscow.'

Ethnic Ukrainians among the trained perpetrators are habituated to violence by the Other: '[They] got used to arresting their fellow countrymen for nothing, and they take them to the prison in Balakleia day and night before dispatching them to Siberia, Kolyma, Solovky and some to the other world... The policeman shook his humanity off as if it was some awkward prostration.'<sup>440</sup> The local Komsomols vandalise the church, detain the arrested and even serve as prison guards and assist the murders. All of them, according to the narrator, are merely food for the Soviet state, which he compares to a pig: sooner or later everyone is either eaten or chewed up. In such a way Os'machka removes agency from local perpetrators who do not fit the trope of the ethnically alien Other.

The key perpetrator on the ground, Iermilo Tiurin, heads both the district police and the DPU. He epitomises all the qualities of the savage, ethnically alien Other: he is a sadist, profiteer,

<sup>437</sup> Snizhana Cherniuk, 'Obrazna symbolika u tvorakh Todosia Os'machky' (PhD diss., Natsional'na Akademia Nauk Ukrainy, Instytut Literatury, 2002).

<sup>438</sup> Todos' Os'machka, *Plan do dvoru* (Toronto: Vydavnytsvo Ukrainiis'koho Kanadiis'koho Legionu, 1951), p. 7.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, *Plan do dvoru*, p. 36.

careerist, rapist and murderer from Moscow. Tiurin stresses that in order to control countries like Ukraine one needs to use terror. He is feared even by his fellow Red Army veteran Khakhlov. Though Ieshka's surname is a derogatory term for a Ukrainian, he is a Russian worker from Moscow who has met Lenin. While he approves 'all means to speed up the triumph of the working class,' he is tired of torture and murder. After the suicide of one brigade leader, Ieshka is distraught and leaves for the district to report Tiurin but returns to consult with his domineering wife. Indeed, Khakhlov's wife Masha is involved in all her husband's decisions; however, her character might have been included for a different purpose. Os'machka was known for misogynist comments,<sup>441</sup> so it is conceivable that with Masha's domination Os'machka demonstrates Khakhlov's impotence to confront Tiurin.

On the other hand, these antagonists would be helpless without locals who in the novel are the brigade leaders at the collective farm: Buntush, Tymish Klunok, Kopyt'ko and Skakun. In fact, Buntush also works as the secretary of the village council and knows of all planned repressions by Tiurin or Khakhlov, whom he also assists. Although these local perpetrators seem 'like wordless trees' to the victim Shyian during the eviction of his family, he nevertheless appeals to compassion by calling them 'brothers, comrades and parents.'<sup>442</sup> In this poignant scene Shyian reminds them that he is a good person and helped each brigade leader in one way or the other. In his plea, he is joined by his wife and daughter. The sight of the desperate family makes Kopyt'ko move the hat over the eyes of Klunok, who presumably might show sympathy towards the victims: 'Maybe it is better not to look at it.'<sup>443</sup> In private conversations, however, these men express their disapproval of Soviet rule and the Russians policing Ukraine. Although they conform, not all of them survive: Klunok, for example, becomes increasingly paranoid and commits suicide. Such justice also extends to Tiurin, who is murdered, and to Komsomol Dulia, who is blinded while vandalising a church.

During this eviction Tiurin brutally murders Shyian, but it is only Skakun who confronts the DPU officer. In fact, the other three brigade leaders hold Skakun back, with Buntush calling Skakun: 'You whore hydra of counter-revolution.'<sup>444</sup> Skakun was known for his short temper in the village and once tried to take his own life. When he is ordered to assist the eviction, Skakun takes a carving knife with presumable intention to kill Tiurin. On the way to the farmstead he is dissuaded by the girl he loves, and she takes his knife away. In his actions Skakun's character is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's Shatov in *Besy* (The Possessed, 1870-71). Disturbed by the changes from the

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<sup>441</sup> Mykhailo Slaboshpyts'kyi, 'Pys'mennyk bezderzhavnoii natsii ne mih staty Nobelivs'kym laureatom...'  
*Vydavnuche Zhyttia*, No 3 (2001).

<sup>442</sup> Os'machka, *Plan do dvoru*, p. 61.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.



outside, they fail to make sense of the new order or to conform and attempt to establish justice. If Shatov's name resembles a bear roused in the middle of winter – *shatun* – that is either shot by the villagers or dies from starvation, Skakun's names connotes a horse that is not easy to tame. It seems there is no place for either of them. Like Shatov, he is killed (by Tiurin) without hesitation.

In the novel *Zhovtyi Kniaz* (The Yellow Prince, 1962), Vasyl' Barka narrates the story of the Katrannyk family, who endure the famine. In the foreword the author names the perpetrators responsible for the suffering and death: the army, the security services, the police, and workers from Russia. Those who executed the orders on the ground had nothing humane left in them, implies Barka. They were 'devilish cast aways' who shoot children 'pilfering' in the fields and take away the last porridge from a baby. The appearance of the perpetrators is often compared by the victims to such sinister beasts as demons, dragons and snakes. They are also compared to the soldiers even when they come to desecrate the local church. Barka states that Komsomol members felt uneasy before looting the church as they faced the crowd of local people they knew well. The young men tried to avoid direct eye contact and replied to the questions with impatience.

In the novel itself, however, Barka offers the reader a more nuanced presentation. While reiterating the interpretation of the famine as the struggle between evil and good, Myron believes it was enabled by collectivization, when some locals joined the collectives, conformed and followed the new rules, receiving powers and guns. Likewise, the antagonist Party plenipotentiary Otrokhodin is first and foremost a careerist. He walks away from the woman he loves when she faces repressions so that the relationship would not tarnish his membership in the Party. Otrokhodin despises the peasantry but regards deployment in the country as a step to advance his career. He already dreams of the benefits of living in the capital: medals, holidays, money. Otrokhodin believes the Party line can change and prefers to stay loyal to the Party leader rather than to the ideology.

Barka also includes a perpetrator-fanatic in the action of the novel. When the Katrannyks queue for bread in the city, they hear a story of a village perpetrator who died for no apparent reason. Coming from a wealthy farmer family, he was convinced collectivization was needed to transform the peasantry and agriculture. His sudden death, presumably from a heart attack, is interpreted as a poetic justice by Katrannyk. His wife, who had previously supported his Communist beliefs and regarded the starving as guilty, now repents and turns to God.

A glimpse of the perpetrators whose motivation was primarily to follow an order is given in the detailed depiction of a house search. During the search, one of the victims, an old woman, approaches a fellow peasant guarding the finds in the cart. She pleads with him to leave food for the children. At first the man ignores the old woman, recalling to himself the orders of Otrokhodin to

take even crumbs. He also remembers the orders coming from the very top, rendering the old woman's pleas irrelevant. When the woman tries to take food from the cart, he immediately knocks her down. Moreover, when collective farm workers try to chew a few grains while working in the field, the guards, who come from the same village, lash out and threaten them with arrests. They search the clothes of farmers for grain, even those who are Communists. Myron Katrannyk thinks that the fellow villagers who voted in favour of the collective farm are no better than the officials procuring grain. These followers are impersonalised by Luk'ian who always raises his arm, preferring to follow orders rather than defy them. But most victims in the novel name only one type of perpetrators – 'the possessed ones from the capital city' – when explaining who was involved in the house searches.

Barka develops the character of the perpetrator-conformist further in portraying bureaucrats in the city facing starving peasants on the street. The bureaucrats carry on with their daily routines, enjoy their generous rations and make 'speeches on building happiness.'<sup>445</sup> The narrator is dismayed: '... not a single being has ever bathed in lies, like the Red Party. ... Whoever dared to disagree or appeal to conscience is savaged at once.'<sup>446</sup> When a group of civil servants see Myron overhearing them discussing food, they swiftly finish their conversation as he is not one of 'them'. They express a disgust at the starving. Indignant at the sights of bread queues in the city, they blame the peasantry for the famine. Eventually, the bureaucrats become immune to the suffering and death. Myron observes newspaper employees ignoring a corpse of a dead woman in a puddle of mud when they come out to smoke outside their office. The corpse has been lying there for many days.

Finally, Barka also alludes to characters who do not follow orders and try to help the victims. A Party official, Zinchenko, allows peasants to mow hay in the park; he is swiftly replaced by a more vigilant Communist. Likewise, the head of the local collective farm advises artisans to flee the village and fears a tragic end for himself. Like Dimarov, Barka mentions a secretary of the RPK who commits suicide after the orders from Moscow, thus vesting agency back in the Kremlin. Myron and a village accountant happen to be nearby at the time and read the note of the deceased, who viewed the orders as the death sentence for the village and refused to execute them. Together with the accountant, Myron concludes that at least this person was honest 'in their own way'. While he presents various types of perpetrators and their motives, Barka repeatedly underscores throughout the novel that Moscow is the site of a concentration of evil that 'takes blood,'<sup>447</sup> with most perpetrators portrayed in yellow and grey as servants of the Yellow Prince.

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<sup>445</sup> Vasyl' Barka, *Zhovtyi Kniaz*' (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2008), p. 162.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106.

#### 4. Post-Soviet Ukrainian Prose

The number of novels based on the Holodomor in Ukraine has been steadily increasing since 1991. Three novels in particular have received, or were nominated for, prestigious awards in Ukraine: *Chorna Doshka* (The Black Board, 2014) by Natalka Doliak; *Rozkolote Nebo* (The Broken Sky, 2015) by Svitlana Talan<sup>448</sup>; and *Tema dlia Medytatsii* (The Theme for Meditation, 2004) by Leonid Kononovych.<sup>449</sup> Other recent works present readings of the Holodomor perpetrators in line with these three prominent works.<sup>450</sup>

*Chorna Doshka* is a story of a perpetrator-turned-victim Oles' Ternovyi in a village of Veselivka. His diary is re-discovered by his great-grandson Sashko whose name stresses trans-generational connection between the famine and today (both names derive from Oleksandr). Sashko also has nightmares about the starving peasants who his great-grandfather had seen in real life. In the end of the novel it is revealed that Sashko is also the offspring of another perpetrator in Veselivka. The name of the novel highlights the experience of the village on so called 'black board,' when a number of repressive measures were applied until fulfilment of grain procurement quota. These measures included withdrawal of all vital supplies like matches, salt and gas as well as its inhabitants being prevented from leaving the village. At the end of 1933 Veselivka ceased to exist.

Doliak starts with ideological perpetrators: a reporter from the district newspaper Oles' and a head of the local village council Palamarchuk. They both become disillusioned with the state policies, though at first they justify the violence of collectivization. Oles' listens to the instructors from Russia, thinks in Russian, yet persuades his parents to join the collective farm for rather banal reasons: 'you have to do what you are asked to do...The times are such ...'<sup>451</sup> Doliak briefly mentions that Oles' and Palamarchuk are members of the search brigades and dekulakized the peasants, Oles' also keeps the belongings he confiscates on behalf of the state. Deployment to procure grain in his own village becomes a turning point. He stays with his parents, loses his ration as a reporter, confronts local officials and eventually finds himself in a mass grave. In the same time, Palamarchuk writes a letter to the top authorities about the policies leading to the famine for which he is arrested and shot dead. While the narrator refers to them as the initial true believers, they also display the qualities of conformists and profiteers.

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<sup>448</sup> Both novels received special awards 'Publisher's Choice' at the competition *Koronatsiia Slova* in 2014, <http://koronatsiya.com/peremozhci-konkursu-koronaciya-slova-2014/>

<sup>449</sup> This novel was nominated for the prestigious Shevchenko Award in 2006, <http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/611/164/22116/>

<sup>450</sup> H. Marchuk, *Try Doli* (Kyiv, 2012); Loboda, *Vidlunnia* (Lviv, Kal'variia, 2010).

<sup>451</sup> Doliak, *Chorna doshka*, p. 53.

The second type of perpetrator – the sadists and criminals – is represented by the chekist Kaliuzhnyi. He hates peasants, tortures them and rapes a reporter. In his activities he is joined by two DPU servicemen: Mark Mil'man and his Russian colleague Vesna. They are assisted by many locals: a chairman of the collective farm Hil'ko, a head of the local KNS Zabolotnyi and a Russian Party plenipotentiary Vladimir. Doliak also mentions a power thirsty sociopath and drunkard Hrishka. She stresses Russian ethnicity of some perpetrators, poor command of Ukrainian language, previous criminal past and alcohol addiction. In fact, it is only Kaliuzhnyi who speaks Ukrainian fluently. Thus the language becomes a marker for perpetrator. Most of them wear black leather jackets and thus are referred to as *chornoshkuri* (black-skins) by the victims. Shkandrij regards perpetrators wearing black leather jackets as an additional tool to make the violence 'psychologically palatable to perpetrators and observers alike.'<sup>452</sup>

The figure of the ethnically alien Other is further elaborated with the character of Mark Mil'man that had worked in other districts in Kharkiv oblast' before coming to Veselivka. While in the Soviet prose on collectivization Jews are at the background and a similar character could be found only in *Chotyry Brody* (Stupach with his 'Byzantine eyes,' beautiful looks and unflinching ways), post-Soviet prose is abundant with Jews as chief perpetrators on the ground. Doliak's Mark Mil'man is also 'a man with Asian cheek bones'<sup>453</sup> that murders children in front of their parents as a torture and enjoys the benefits his position offers. Mil'man is extremely sadistic: on one occasion he accuses one peasant of anti-semitism for which that person is later tortured to death; on another occasion he throws two women into an enclosure with a bull for entertainment.

This reading of the Chekist is not new. In 1923 Vynnychenko described a typical Chekist as a Jew coming from a traditional milieu of a small town. Jewish petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia joined the Party ranks or the army in their struggle to survive during the post-revolutionary period. He traced the fury of the unflinching Jewish Chekist to his experience of desperate unemployment and pogroms when his family was likely to be brutally murdered and their property stolen. Thus the Chekist took part in grain requisition of the early 1920s which contributed to establishing the link between Jews and Communists in popular perception in the village.<sup>454</sup> While the presence of Jews within the Party and the Cheka and its successors was indeed large in the 1920s,<sup>455</sup> making their participation disproportionate to their part in the general population, the number of Ukrainians in Soviet administration began to increase consistently from late 1920s.<sup>456</sup> Making up about a third of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine and their involvement in less than popular

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<sup>452</sup> M. Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature...*, p. 149.

<sup>453</sup> Doliak, *Chorna doshka*, p. 289.

<sup>454</sup> Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature...*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>455</sup> Leonard Schapiro, *Russian Studies* (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 286.

<sup>456</sup> Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature...*, p. 141.

enforcement policies might explain the impression that Jews were behind collectivisation and the famine that followed. Shkandrij also traces identification of the Bolshevik literary figure with the Jewish commissar to redeployment of the rhetoric of militant Bolshevism in the late 1920s, when these popular perceptions of Jewish-Bolshevism connection were reinforced.<sup>457</sup>

Additionally, there is a group of compromised perpetrators – the local youth: Oktiabryn, Lavryn, Sirozhunia and Maladyk girls who disown their parents; pioneers from a local school who take part in public harassment of individual farmers. As a vulnerable perpetrator Oktiabryn has an emotional breakdown after attacking a former friend. The victims express ambiguity in judging their participation: ‘... scooped children up and stuffed their brains with tales [...] When you take each of them separately, there is nothing wrong with them, boys like boys.’<sup>458</sup> The rest of the perpetrators are mentioned briefly or collectively like ‘groups of chanting pioneers’ that verbally abused dekulakized peasants. While the narrator explains that from 1932 expropriations were done by people sent to the village from all parts of the USSR, the victims in the novel comment on them being local: ‘People are ours [local], yet something changed them in such a way.’<sup>459</sup> None of the perpetrators benefit from their participation. Moreover, all of them, except Oles’, are punished: become insane, repressed by higher authorities, commit suicide or killed like Kaliuzhnyi.

Lastly, Doliak mentions another group of perpetrators, albeit obliquely. This group includes perpetrators who do not display pleasure in participation, nor receive substantial benefit. They follow orders. This group includes a local teacher, Anna Serhiivna, who humiliates children of individual farmers at school and a local doctor, Lanovs’kyi, that does not state starvation in the death certificates. They are joined by a local perpetrator, Kyrylo Perekotypole, who at some point questions local perpetrators’ own safety in the forthcoming events. The surname of Perekotypole translates as ‘tumbleweed’ which could be interpreted as his lack of commitment to the village. According to other characters, Kyrylo travelled the country searching easy fortune and returned home with nothing. He is not directly involved in violence during the searches, but still contributes to the famine by assisting the logistics of the famine.

Another novel in the post-Soviet prose on the Holodomor is *Rozkolote Nebo* by Svitlana Talan, which follows a young woman, Varvara, and her family through collectivization and the famine. *Rozkolote Nebo* is a chronicle of industrious farmers losing their fortunes and lives. Talan draws a striking distinction between antagonists and protagonists, which makes a panoply of perpetrators similar to the one in *Chorna Doshka*. The first type of the perpetrator is that of a repentant ideological perpetrator – Kuz’ma Shcherbak. He is the head of the local Party cell.

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid, pp. 140-142.

<sup>458</sup> Doliak, *Chorna doshka*, p. 145.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

Having worked in the city, he is sent to his native village of Pidkopaivka as a plenipotentiary to set up a collective farm and help grain procurement. Though Kuz'ma is a staunch Communist, he believes in voluntary, non-violent collectivization and questions the orders from above. During dekulakization of Varvara's father he calmly explains that resistance leads to further repressions. Kuz'ma shows pain at seeing peasants suffering and dying; he condemns abuse of power by some officials. Unable to change anything, he distributes food to the peasants which leads to his arrest and death.

The officials working alongside Kuz'ma are two former poor peasants: a Red Army veteran and collective farm chairman, Semen Stupak, and the head of the village council, Maksym Zhab'iak. At first the author characterises them as honest and respectable people based on their reputation in the village. Soon their motives for holding key positions become questionable when they accept a bribe from Varvara's father and profit from dekulakizing their neighbours. For example, Stupak takes a cow from his neighbour Odarka, a widow with six young children whose foodstuffs have been confiscated already. Only one child in that family survived. Though Stupak and Zhab'iak seem to be profiteers, they gain little, Stupak is murdered whereas the new chairman of the collective farm secures food for the farm canteen in order to organise a sowing campaign in early 1933.

The main perpetrators – the DPU servicemen Ivan Lupikov and Hryhorii Bykov – represent several groups: conformists, sadists, profiteers and the savage, the savage, ethnically alien Other. Lupikov believes the ends justify the means and quotes Stalin: 'You cannot make an omelette without breaking the eggs.'<sup>460</sup> Though he is often confused by information disseminated from the top, he never fails to follow orders. In November 1932 Ivan is joined by Bykov. A self-described fanatic, he explains that only tough young people should take part in house searches as organises local Komsomol into search brigades. He also uses metal rods to reveal the grain hidden underground and leverages the orders to confiscate all food. He tortures peasants and is abusive to the activists. Bykov is a link between the district and the village level in the vertical chain of perpetration. He uses extreme violence and benefits personally. Together with Lupikov he represents the Other.

Seemingly there are no ordinary people among the local perpetrators. They are the idle, drunks and local criminals most of whom are known for their deviant behaviour prior to collectivization. One of the search brigade members is Hanna, who used to work for Varvara's family. Now a Komsomol, she resents her previous social inferiority and seeks retribution. Hanna wears a red scarf and a black leather jacket given to her by Bykov. Her attire is the literary vogue

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<sup>460</sup> Talan, *Rozkolote nebo*, p. 62.

for violence and in defiance of gender expectations of the conservative village society. Hanna becomes promiscuous and sexually abusive and even urinates in front of the victims into the food that she cannot confiscate. Once all supplies in the village are exhausted, Bykov takes her jacket back as he leaves the village while Hanna dies from malnutrition.

A special role among the village perpetrators, however, is reserved for a quisling son. In the same way as Maksym in *Maria*, Varvara's brother Mykhailo disowns and evicts his parents. During the eviction his mother commits suicide. Like in *Maria*, his parents question themselves why their son rebels against traditions and does not want to till the land. Mykhailo benefits from participation and hopes his children will move to the city. Like Maksym, Mykhailo is murdered. Clearly a profiteering type of local perpetrator, this character is nevertheless described as alien to the village community and its rules and, therefore, is removed from the village. Nevertheless Mykhailo is just one of the locals that confiscates food and reports their neighbours.

Finally, Talan uses poetic justice for all perpetrators in the novel. Firstly, the travelling musician Danylo claims that those 'without God' will be punished. A similar prophecy was expressed by the local priest shortly before the church is closed down. Some of the antagonists are murdered while others die from illness. Like Doliak, Talan describes the famine in its entirety: dekulakization and deportation of individual peasants, closure of a local church, violent requisition of grain and foodstuffs, various survival strategies, mental breakdown, rape, child abandonment, necrophagy, cannibalism, suicide and murder. In order to produce a novel that encompasses almost all aspects of the famine the post-memory authors need to consult primary sources, secondary works and archival documents. As a result, both Doliak and Talan created examples of cultural memory par excellence but avoided mentioning the largest group of perpetrators – ordinary people.

The novel *Tema dlia medytatsii* by Leonid Kononovych offers a new take on the Holodomor perpetrator – their life after the famine.<sup>461</sup> As the survivors and the perpetrators continue to live in the same village, Kononovych suggests, the past events shape their lives. In particular, the murder of Iur's grandfather during the Holodomor has long-term implications for his family. Orphaned at a young age and raised by his widowed grandmother Chakunka, Iur constantly reminds the local officials of the murder they committed. At university he gets involved with the dissidents, is interrogated by the KGB, loses his love and lives in exile. Upon returning from the Serb-Croat war he is convinced that his family's incompatibility with the local establishment lies in the past. He tracks the surviving and now dying activists only to realise that the problem primarily is the regime rather than with the individual perpetrators.

The novel is written in a form of meditation by the protagonist during which he tries to

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<sup>461</sup> Leonid Kononovych, *Tema dlia medytatsii* (Lviv: Kalvaria, 2004).

make sense of his life. The absence of chronological sequence and the narrator's moving from one episode to another without any warning reveals a trauma in post-memory of the Holodomor. Moreover, gaps in the sentences are the main pointers in such narratives of traumatic past.<sup>462</sup> This new format of the Holodomor novel also resembles that of the French existentialists, which Kononovych has been translating into Ukrainian. In particular, like the protagonist in Sartre's story, *The Wall*, set amidst Spanish Civil War, Iur deals with traumatic experience from temporal and spacial distance. In both cases the main characters rise above the fear of violence and local perpetrators, and the feeling of loss but are unable to resume their previous lives. Before reaching that stage, however, Iur tries to trace the perpetrators – an exercise that becomes a jigsaw puzzle in the 1990s: Iur remembers his family mentioning various names as the victims always spoke of them, albeit in passing. Iur learns about them as a child from Chakunka who constructs his post-memory. She calls them Bolsheviks and 'bad people.' In the 1960s, when Iur randomly asks her who are the 'most important' people while thinking about the lyrics from a famous song, Chakunka names the activists and calls them 'not good people' and 'parasites' who destroyed their family.

First, there are profiteers. It is a local family of Stoians that played a central role in the village during the famine and in Iur's life. The eldest Stoian was a friend of Iur's grandfather; together they joined Petliura's forces during the Civil War. Consequently Stoian switched sides, took part in collectivization and facilitated the murder of Iur senior. His son became the head of the village council and his grandson reported on the dissidents (and Iur) to the KGB in the 1970s. Stoian the grandson argues that the Soviet rule is, in effect, ordinary peoples rule and he urges Iur to conform. The Stoians kept key positions locally long after the Holodomor and the collapse of the USSR.

Secondly, there is a large group of sadists. In the novel these activists are four attractive women – Dziakunka, Bovkunykh, Chykyldykha and Stepa Ivashchenko. They enjoy conducting house searches, humiliating their victims as well as torturing and murdering them. For instance, Stepa burned heels, gauged the eyes out and stabbed the peasants who did not meet the grain quotas. While trying to understand their motives, Iur recalls that Dziakunka is mentally unstable, Bovkunykh was promiscuous and Stepa's sexual frustration developed into psychosis. Based on his observations, Iur concludes that between 30% to 40% of the activists were mentally ill, even before the famine and their aberrant behaviour became the new norm. Iur also posits that young, beautiful women were the cruelest of all because they 'refused to fulfil traditional female roles of housekeeping and childbirth and became the activists instead.'<sup>463</sup> Having compared the female

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<sup>462</sup> Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, 'Trauma, discourse and communicative limits,' *Critical Discourse Studies*, no 6 (2009).

<sup>463</sup> Kononovych, *Tema dlia medytatsii*, p. 220.



activists of the 1930s with female Komsomol members of the 1970s, Iur adds that it was their sexual frustration that eventually made them participate and resulted in their mental breakdown.

This explanation of female perpetrators is not new. Violent women are often portrayed in the media and literature as abnormal, insane maniacs that are often more cruel than their male counterparts. Sjoberg and Gentry argue that the portrayal of female perpetrators in the media and literature is reduced to ‘mothers, monsters or whores.’<sup>464</sup> They either deny their womanhood or abuse their sexuality. As the traditional rural community celebrated nurturing, virtuous and restrained women, female participation in mass violence during the Holodomor did not fit in that worldview. While ordinary women too can commit horrendous crimes and physically or sexually abuse and kill for the same reasons as men,<sup>465</sup> Iur sees them as mentally or sexually disturbed women.

Finally, Iur reveals the largest group of perpetrators – seemingly ordinary people. One of them, Bahrii, was a former plenipotentiary who was in charge of the search brigades and after the famine became the head master in the village school. He has an ordinary house, suffers from age-related illnesses and sees no sense in establishing higher moral ground for either side. Bahrii explains his participation by the circumstances. While we know that he killed at least three people on his own initiative in 1933, he interprets the past as a necessary evil. In fact, his narrative is similar to Iur’s: only the perpetrators are the victims. That is, he recalls Iur’s grandfather killing many Communists who had large families. He stresses that Iur’s grandfather was not popular in the village and over 40 people were involved in rounding him up. Thus he implies a large number of locals among perpetrators. Bahrii quotes other people in the village accusing Iur of causing trouble by looking into the past. Iur understands that with perpetrators entrenched in the state machine and with a silent acceptance of the masses, his country still remains the hostage of its gruesome past.

To compensate for the absence of justice, the author turns to poetic justice as well as the cases of brutal revenge done to the local perpetrators after the famine. While Stoian senior dies of alcoholism, all but one female perpetrator become mentally ill. Bovkunykhya is torn apart by the Soviet partisans when she was fleeing with the retreating Germans during the The Second World War. One of the partisans was Pavlo, who she threw out in the snow with his three siblings in 1933. As all his brothers died from hypothermia, Pavlo thanked God for the chance to exact revenge. Poetic justice extends to the children of the perpetrators too – Dziakunka’s son became a thief and died from drug addiction while Stoian’s grandson dies in a car crash. Other perpetrators are killed or commit suicide like Hordii who buried many starving peasants alive. The author also places the

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<sup>464</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, monsters, whores – women’s violence in global politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 98.

<sup>465</sup> Smeulers, ‘Female perpetrators,’ p. 207.

guilt of perpetrators escaping the justice with the survivors. Eventually Iur argues the village perpetrators do have agency as they were all born in the same small thatched village huts as the victims.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has demonstrated that most Ukrainian novels operate with a narrow understanding of perpetrators of the Holodomor on the ground, characterising agency as either embraced (as fanatics) or displaced (as foreign Others). The militant Bolshevik writing of 1928-1933 focuses on a war in the countryside that demands action and a suspension of compassion and critical thinking. In accordance with the official position on collectivization, the rank-and-file perpetrators are fanatics, eager to transform the countryside at all costs. War is the dominant metaphor; the village is backward; traditionalist ways need to be upturned like the soil in the boundaries between the fields of individual farmers. They are the village Komsomol, KNS members, emancipated village women and Party plenipotentiaries who sometimes come from outside Ukraine but mostly come from within the republic. As we have seen, many characters are based on the actual perpetrators.

At the same time, writers in Ukrainian diaspora and in independent Ukraine stress the Otherness of the perpetrators. They tend to be Russians or Jews. Even if the perpetrators of the Holodomor are locals, they do not truly belong to the village. They are quisling sons, profiteers or people known for their deviant behaviour who later face poetic justice. While source of oral memory describe brigades being drawn mainly from local residents – as we have seen in previous chapters, and especially in the two case studies – in these novels, they speak Russian, have Asian facial features or come from the city.

*Samvydav* and *tamvydav* novels, however, offer a more nuanced picture of the men and women on the ground. Grossman, Dimarov and Hutsalo avoid totalising narratives. All three writers explore various groups of perpetrators within a wider context, examining their motivation and actions and considering the ways that they make sense of their experience. The number of Russian-speaking characters in their novels reflect the number of Russian-speaking Communists among district officials at the time. By and large the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor in the novels of Dimarov, Hutsalo and Grossman are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. In post-Soviet prose, meanwhile, Ukrainian writers continue to grapple with the sensitive issue of local perpetration, offering a prosopographical reading of the perpetrators as the savage Other or village outcasts while mentioning other groups of perpetrators obliquely.

## Chapter IV

### Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor in Poetry

As the Holodomor unfolded, folk verse, proverbs, sayings and epic songs captured its tragedy in real time. More often than not, they were unpublished and confined to sources of oral memory and archival texts. They chiefly focus on the suffering of the victims and blame Lenin and Stalin for the famine, or at times Kaganovich, Molotov or Postyshev. Some focus on local officials and collective farmers who participated in the famine: e.g. 'There's no bread, there's no fat, 'Cause the local authorities took it all'<sup>466</sup> or 'Lentils, peas, potatoes, beets – all was taken by tugboat – let the peasants perish'<sup>467</sup> or 'The brigade leader carries a whip – Drives people to Siberia'.<sup>468</sup> Others allude to local perpetrators, however, stressing that their vigilance leads to devastation and death. A few reflect upon the vertical order of perpetration: e.g. 'Beware woman, the tugboat is coming, led by the plenipotentiary' or 'The plenipotentiary jokes well: with his gun and his fines, you'll give him the last grain.'<sup>469</sup>

Poems cast 'confiscators' as desirable bachelors given that they have 'lots of bread, and butter and cheese'.<sup>470</sup>

Don't despair Hapko,  
That we are Communists,  
Muzhyks will work,  
And we will eat!  
...  
Stalin take a glance  
At how KNS dance.  
They are not at all productive,  
So they signed up for the collective.  
...  
During harvest our street  
Is so quiet and neat  
That you hear easily  
How the mistress snores.<sup>471</sup>

Such verse outlines various groups of perpetrators: young Pioneers with 'cast iron heads' and 'tin

<sup>466</sup> *Chorna knyha Ukrainy*, ed. F. Zubanych (Kyiv: Prosvita, 1998), p. 740.

<sup>467</sup> I. Buhaievych, *Dozhylasia Ukrainina... Narodna tvorchist' chasiv holodomoru i kolektyvizatsii na Ukraini* (Kyiv: Ukrainiys'kyi pys'mennyk, 1993), p. 10.

<sup>468</sup> B. Klid and A. J. Motyl, eds. *The Holodomor Reader. A Sourcebook on the Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine* (Edmonton-Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2012), p. 359.

<sup>469</sup> Buhaievych, *Dozhylasia Ukrainina...*, p. 2.

<sup>470</sup> B. Klid and A. J. Motyl, eds. *The Holodomor Reader*, p. 362.

<sup>471</sup> *Chorna knyha Ukrainy*, pp. 749-753.

eyes' who are compared to devils from hell and 'bandits in power'. They can call for revenge, invoking victims who should rise from their graves and kill *katsapy* (a derogatory word for Russians) who waste food or feed fish with Communists and Komsomols. At the same time, folk verses composed by the perpetrators themselves often elucidate their relationship with the victims. For instance, school children were taught short verses to chant to the 'kulaks' in which they emphasised their position of power: 'watch out kulaks,' 'you are dead kulaks'.<sup>472</sup>

In *Duma pro Holod* (Epic Song About Hunger), recorded from the minstrel Ievhen Movchan in 1967, the perpetrators are placed within a power vertical. When Stalin orders the procurement of more grain even if it means robbing people of their last scrap of food, 'Many people from tugboat lot got used to such work...'<sup>473</sup>

### **1. Soviet Poetry**

One of the first poets to write about village residents who become instrumental in facilitating the famine on the ground was Pavlo Tychyna in 'Chystyla Maty Kartopliu' (Mother Was Peeling Potatoes..., 1926). His earlier poem 'Holod' (Hunger, 1921), often mistakenly attributed to the poetry about the Holodomor, was actually written about the famine in 1921. In 'Chystyla Maty Kartopliu', Tychyna describes the young local Communists who will become the perpetrators of grain procurement in 1932-1933. It centres on a nameless young man whose family disapproves of his loyalty to the 'Anti-Christ' and 'the enemy'. His mother foresees the famine in colloquial language and laments their poverty, comparing herself to the oppressed Ukraine, while his father acts as a messiah whom the son condemns and threatens with sanctions from the village council. The old man calls his son to fight the 'Lenin-Anti-Christ' and confronts him in the end of the poem.<sup>474</sup>

In 1933, at the height of the Holodomor, Tychyna wrote a poem titled 'Pisnia Traktorystky. Abo iak Olesia Kulyk na kursy traktorystiv tikala 1930 r.' (The Song of the Female Tractor Driver. Or How Olesia Kulyk Fled to the Tractor Driving Courses in 1930, 1933).<sup>475</sup> This renowned poem, which was included in the curriculum in Soviet Ukraine as a text to be learnt by heart in the final years of school, was based on the experience of Olesia Kulyk from the village of Popivka in Poltava oblast', who was discussed earlier in this dissertation. The poem is dated 7<sup>th</sup> December 1933 when Tychyna visited the village. Olesia, then working as a chauffeur at the collective farm, drove him to the village. She was likely to be involved in facilitation of the famine in Popivka, where more than

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<sup>472</sup> Buhaievych, *Dozhylasia Ukrainina...*, p. 8.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>474</sup> *Al'manakh VAPLITE*, vol. 1 (Kharkiv, 1926), pp. 7-11.

<sup>475</sup> *Antolohiia ukraiins'koi poezii*, Vol. 3, (Kyiv: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo khudozhn'ioii literatury, 1957).

2,000 people starved to death.

‘Pisnia Traktorystky’ is written as a folk song. It sings of a young Komsomol girl putting her embroidery aside and, despite her disapproving mother, rushes with other Komsomol members to enrol in tractor driving courses. Olesia defies her mother’s religiosity and conservatism and leaves the house before anyone is awake. She longs to be able to drive the tractor herself and joins the collective farm following the example of other girls in the village. On the way to the Popivka Olesia gets into a cart with young men. Here Tychyna writes back to the popular folk song ‘Ikhaly kozaky’ (Kozaks Were Riding), originally recorded in the same Poltava oblast’, which warns of the dangers faced by young girls getting into carts with strangers.<sup>476</sup> But ‘Pisnia Traktorystky’ presents the world as a different place: the young men are Komsomol and therefore safe and unthreatening: ‘All of them are familiar, all of them are ours...’

In the same year Tychyna writes about fighting the bourgeoisie in his (in)famous poem ‘Partiia vede’ (The Party Leads, 1933), which was published in Pravda in late 1933. From the first lines, his lyrical persona insists that the suffering of the enemies does not bother people like him: ‘...let them die.’ The warriors of the Soviet state will kill its enemies, one after another.

This concept of war in the countryside would be developed further by Leonid Pervomais’kyi. Like Epik and Kyrylenko, Pervomais’kyi remembers most peasants being hostile to the Bolsheviks, particularly due to their policies in the countryside. In his ‘Trypils’ka trahediia’ (Trypillian Tragedy, 1929) he describes the killing of a group of Komsomol in 1919, concluding that the Ukrainian village was ‘duped’ into supporting the Greens. He stresses the unflinching ways of the militant Stalinist in ‘Lyst z Kyieva’ (Letter from Kyiv, 1933) in which his lyrical persona claims not to be disturbed by ‘the tedious frog-like wailing.’ These words were written in March 1933, at the peak of the famine; they are aimed at the peasants and showcase the antagonism between the village and trained perpetrators, which stems from the revolutionary years. This theme is developed further in his poem ‘Molodist’ brata: Roman u virshakh’ (Youth of Brother: A novel in Verse, 1933). Shkandrij argues Pervomais’kyi’s articulation of war between Bolsheviks and the peasants is reminiscent of Molotov and Kaganovich, who in November 1932 called to fight with the Petliurites:

... I know your nature—in feeble, farmstead nights  
You have been fashioned by Stolypinites with their cozy, rich peasant women.

And later you grew up and returned to your dark corners,  
Having completed commercial and agro-veterinary institutes.

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<sup>476</sup> Pisennyi vinok: Ukrainiis’ki pisni z notamy, ed. A. Mikhalko (Kyiv: Krynysia, 2009), p. 242.

And then near Trypillia you used to kill my brothers . . .  
But we filled your guts full of devils anyway! . . .  
We know. What we want. We are an Osnaz detachment.  
I am a soldier of poetry in it. A rank-and-file soldier.<sup>477</sup>

Similar to Dukyn, Epik and Kyrylenko, Pervomais'kyi presents the DPU servicemen during the famine – described as ‘the deadly struggle for life, bread’ – as potent heroes who ‘turn over the virgin lands and plough across the boundaries’ in his poem ‘Syn partii’ (Son of the Party, 1933). Here young, strong, militant and progressive Stalinists are juxtaposed with a backward ‘eternal rural idiocy’, as we also see in *Persha Vesna* or *Avanposty*. Shkandrij compares this cult of violent action in Pervomais'ky's poetry with the rhetoric of youthful virility in Italian fascism in the 1920s, which discussed in the research of Barbara Spackman.<sup>478</sup> Knowingly or not, many Soviet writers of collectivization adopted the master trope of Italian fascist writings of potent leaders ‘raping’ the feminized masses, who are described as dark, backward and primitive. Such poetry conditions the reader to accept the perpetrators as heroes and develop contempt rather than compassion for the famine's victims.

Similar in its message is Ivan Molchanov's ‘Prokati nas Petrusha na traktore’ (Give Us a Ride On the Tractor, Petrusha, 1929), which is part of the longer poem ‘Ognennyi Traktorist’ (Fiery Tractor Driver, 1929). The song was widely broadcast on the radio across the USSR in the early 1930s and revived again in the 1950s. It implores Petrusha, a Komsomol tractor driver, to stay strong despite the danger of jealous ‘kulak’ attacking him. It is based on the story of the tractor driver named Piotr Diakov, who was reported by *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* as murdered by a ‘kulak’ in a Siberian village on the eve of collectivization. A journalist investigation in the 1950s by the chief editor of *Izvestia*, Aleksei Adzhubei, revealed that Diakov survived the attack, during which he was set alight. An additional FSB investigation by Aleksandr Petrushin discovered that Diakov accidentally dropped a burning match during inspection of the tractor's fuel reservoir, thus catching fire. The ‘kulaks’ accused in the initial investigation were punished for a crime they did not commit.<sup>479</sup> Regardless of the reality of Diakov's circumstances, Molchanov's song shaped the popular perception of village perpetrators in Soviet society. As Leonid Brezhnev recalled in his memoir, it inspired and motivated young people across the country to fight ‘kulaks’ and be ever vigilant against the ‘kulaks threat’.<sup>480</sup>

## 2. Dissident Poetry

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<sup>477</sup> M. Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature...*, p. 129.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>479</sup> A. Petrushin, ‘Ognennyi traktorist’ in *Korkina sloboda: Kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, No 5, 2003, pp. 26-30.

<sup>480</sup> L. Brezhnev, *Vospominania: Zhizn' po zavodskomu gudku. Chuvstvo Rodiny* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1981).

Poems like 'Khrest' (The Cross, 1976) by Mykola Rudenko – founder of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group – present a radically different perspective on the events of collectivisation and the famine. In the poem, a Bolshevik commissar named Myron returns home during the famine to find his native village nearly deserted. Haunted by the voices of his mother whose grave he cannot find, he meets Jesus Christ who trusts him to carry the cross for Ukraine. Myron is disenchanted with the Communist regime and calls it evil. He is eventually arrested by the DPU and dies. Rudenko dedicates the work to his friend and colleague General Petro Hryhorenko, whose experience in the collectivisation campaign was similar to Myron's own. Both Rudenko and Hryhorenko were examples of Soviet figures of authority who became disillusioned with Soviet power and engaged with dissent. They were stripped of all their awards and privileges, incarcerated and forced into exile. Like Myron, they carried the cross of individual protest.

Myron is burdened with a cognitive dissonance brought on by experience as a Red Army veteran and by the sight of the suffering of his people. He is emotionally devastated during his desperate search for his mother's grave. He accidentally comes across the set of a propaganda film that denies the famine in Ukraine. The Russian actors explain to Myron that they were brought to the village, although do not like the idea of being there. The chairman of the collective farm, meanwhile, is far from being apologetic. He promises to lay those who cannot be 're-educated' into the graves. He professes a lack of guilt for starving men, women and children to death, concluding that 'their deaths, we'll say it straightly, won't bother us one bit.'<sup>481</sup> Rudenko's lyrical persona asserts that the officials 'whose heart has spurned all truth and feeling' and who now ask 'why rub this salt into the wounds congealing' were complicit in the murder of millions and even refused foreign aid to save the starving. Indeed, he compares Ukraine over the last three hundred years to a cow bred for slaughter:

Each next dolt can milk you dry,  
Then from your stalls, that self-same wastrel,  
Will steal your last, remaining child.<sup>482</sup>

Rudenko approaches the whole vertical order of the famine perpetrators through Biblical allegories and comparisons. For instance, the trained perpetrators at the DPU are 'the hellish antipode of Christ', 'mute Judas' or 'the Bible Beast'.<sup>483</sup> The profiteering type, represented by Party officials, stops at nothing to advance career or profit:

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<sup>481</sup> M. Rudenko, *Khrest* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 1996), p. 49.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

The man of malice mouths Hosannahs,  
His liege to praise, extols the five-year plan.  
And meanwhile, to secure his next advancement,  
Murders his mother with his own two hands.<sup>484</sup>

These lines are seemingly aimed at Pavlo Tychyna<sup>485</sup> whose poems are referenced throughout ‘Khrest’. In particular, the song of Christine in ‘Khrest’ is strikingly similar to the lamentation of the starving cannibal mother in Tychyna’s ‘Zahupalo v dveri prykladom’ (Rifle Knocking on the Door, 1921). More strikingly, both the chairman of the collective farm and a famous poet herd the peasants to mass graves, repeating the lines from Tychyna’s poem ‘Partia vede’ included in school textbooks throughout Soviet Ukraine: ‘Stick and kill! Kill and stick!’ Rudenko frames the Holodomor as a profound conflict between Good and Evil, with the latter, at least temporarily, prevailing over the former: ‘a lust for power’ and ‘pride’s subverting bliss’ has ‘silenced Good on Earth.’

### ***3. Poetry in the Diaspora and in Independent Ukraine***

One of the first Ukrainian poets in emigration to address the famine was Iurii Klen in ‘Prokliati roky’ (The Damned Years, 1937) which was published in Ukraine only in 1991, although it was known in Ukraine as early as the 1960s among some members of the intelligentsia.<sup>486</sup> In ‘Prokliati roky’, the poet examines the famine in the historical context of Ukraine losing its chance to become independent some ten years earlier. Here Klen compares the Soviet regime to a one hundred-headed hydra that exploits the antagonism between older and younger generations to its advantage. The ‘monster’ does not have a distinctive face; it tortures people and ‘poisons their souls.’<sup>487</sup> Klen widens historical context even further to Kievan Rus, implying that many of his contemporaries in Ukraine, like Kipchak prisoners centuries earlier, forget their roots and become *yanychary*, ‘janissaries’ who would sooner kill each other:

The time will come when loyal *Malorosy*  
For sugar, bread and fat and other little treasures  
Will chop the heads of their own brothers.<sup>488</sup>

Klen also alludes to the role of Ukrainian Soviet poets in the mechanism of the famine who ‘glorify hell for bread and butter’ and win the trust of many Ukrainians by writing in their native language.

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>485</sup> M. Slaboshpyts’kyi, ‘Mykola Rudenko znanyi i neznanyi,’ M. Rudenko, *Poezii* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1991).

<sup>486</sup> *Iurii Klen odyn z ‘nezdolanykh spivtsiv.’* Interview by Nadiia Stepula with various researchers of Iu. Klen on 20.10.2006 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/953350.html>

<sup>487</sup> Y. Klen, *Prokliati roky* (Lviv: Ukrainiis’ke vydavnytstvo, 1943), pp. 11-12.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid, p. 20.



Nonetheless they ‘put the seed of fight between brothers.’<sup>489</sup> Here, in reflecting on the famine and on the complicity of those who failed to create a Ukrainian state, Klen writes back to official poets like Volodymyr Sosiura, who during collectivization justifies support for the Soviet regime with the following words:

The time of romanticism is gone  
The one that drove us to death  
For some imagined Ukraine  
They fooled us with.<sup>490</sup>

Like Klen, the poet Ievhen Malaniuk casts the Holodomor as the work of evil. Describing the Ukrainian countryside after the famine in ‘Tam vyskhla zhinka kuliamy proshyta’ (There is a Withered Woman Shot With Bullets, 1938), he characterises the perpetrators of the Holodomor in succinct terms: ‘They rule the emptiness of land – Anti-Christ and insatiable Adonai...’. The allusion to ‘Adonai’, a Hebrew name for God, may suggest that the perpetrator should be situated with ethnic Jews; whatever the intention of the reference, Malaniuk frames the perpetrator of the Holodomor as a horrific, frightening Other, a far cry from the ordinary Ukrainians who executed Kremlin policy on the ground.

According to the towering Ukrainian literary critic Ivan Dziuba, the poem ‘Selo’ (The Village, 1960) by Ivan Kachurovs’kyi stands out among works on the Holodomor for its artistic value. In Dziuba’s view, its significance rivals that of Barka’s *Zhovtyi Kniaz*.<sup>491</sup> The poem is a story of a village enduring the Holodomor. Kachurovs’kyi begins by evoking the idyll of the Ukrainian landscape only to contrast it subsequently with antagonisms within the village. Based on the recollections of famine survivors whom he met in his native village, which his family fled in 1933, Kachurovs’kyi retains the names of the victims but changes the names of perpetrators, whom he casts as idle simpletons and fools wracked by envy of others. Not unlike Mak and Os’machka, Kachurovs’kyi argues that the famine was possible because Ukrainians failed to create their own state in 1920:

We are to blame ourselves... in 1920  
We did not fear loss or misfortune,  
We hoped just for a moment,  
That people would raise up.

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>490</sup> V. Sosiura, *Vybrani tvory v dvokh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2000), p. 233.

<sup>491</sup> I. Dziuba, ‘Virmist’ sobi’, *Z krynytsi lit.* vol. 1 (Kyiv: Vydavnychy Dim ‘Kyievo-Mohyliian’ska Akademiia’, 2006), p. 696.

...  
And here our peasant men, like eagles –  
Deserters from all armies they were...  
They did not join us just as well.  
Ten years later those who did not rise  
They said went to Solovki to graze.  
We are to blame. It is a reprisal.  
...  
Because being docile is a crime!<sup>492</sup>

A more recent poem with the wide resonance of ‘Selo’ is ‘The Holodomor’ (2006) by Nina Vynohrads’ka. It has been well received by critics and adapted into a song.<sup>493</sup> The poem paints an idyll of Ukrainian hard-working peasants disrupted by collectivization. In 1933 the activists and Komsomols take everything; they are deaf to people asking them for mercy. Vynohrads’ka intersperses her verses with archival documents of the Soviet leadership’s decisions leading to the Holodomor. We learn that district officials threaten the village council, where the Communist speaks Russian and calls Ukraine *Malorossia*, ‘Little Russia’: ‘Today he lords, today he rules, spares or punishes... and like that everyday.’<sup>494</sup> Vynohrads’ka finishes with a call to arms. Her lyrical persona calls on the reader to speak out and demands historical justice for the perpetrators: the Communists, the DPU and ‘every beast who killed us then.’

Perpetrators in the form of DPU servicemen can be found in many Ukrainian poems written since 1991. In ‘Pam’iati zhertv Holodomoru’ (To the Memory of the Holodomor Victims, 2008), Lesia Sydorovych describes the rank-and-file perpetrators in broad brush strokes:

The beastly faces come to life  
With epaulettes. Holodomor  
Took lives by following the order.  
Without home. With no regret.<sup>495</sup>

Perpetrators in the form of Communists and Russians appear in Ihor Stozhar’s ‘Holod’ (Hunger, 2014), which was published on the social media account of the Holodomor Memorial Museum. Here the survivors call local perpetrators ‘gangs’ that came from nowhere or armed *moskals* (a pejorative term for Russians) with Ukrainian locals as sidekicks.<sup>496</sup> Likewise, in another poem titled ‘The Holodomor’ (2012), Liudmyla Palahniak firmly defines the perpetrators as Russians. The poem is widely available on social media channels and in various online resources of

<sup>492</sup> I. Kachurovs’kyi, *Selo v bezodni* (Kyiv: Vydavnychi Dim ‘Kyievo-Mohylian’ska Akademia’, 2006), p. 85.

<sup>493</sup> B. Andrusiak, Ne Movchimo! Pro poemu Niny Vynohrads’koi, *Literaturna Ukrainia*, 2007 (no 44), p. 6.

<sup>494</sup> N. Vynohrads’ka, *Holodomor* (2006) <http://maysterni.com/publication.php?id=42051>

<sup>495</sup> L. Sydorovych, *Pam’iati zhertv Holodomoru* (2008) <http://maysterni.com/publication.php?id=52938>

<sup>496</sup> I. Stozhar, *Holod* (2014) <http://litclub.org.ua/texts/show/38385/>

contemporary poetry. It is often used in commemorative events in educational institutions.<sup>497</sup>

Holodomor. The years of Moscow in Ukraine.  
The call of distress and desperation.  
The crown of thorns and a noose around neck.  
That *Older Brother* [the Russians] gave us as donation.

Another Holodomor poem adapted as a song is ‘The Communards’ (2012) by Vasyl’ Riabko, a prominent figure during the EuroMaidan in Kharkiv. His poem confronts the perpetrators of grain requisitions during collectivization. They are portrayed as fanatics who come to transform the village. They worship Lenin; they are violent and ready to spill the blood of anyone who opposes them. The Russian poet Valerii Prokoshin deploys even starker, highly disturbing imagery interspersed with biblical references in ‘Russkoe kladbishche’ (Russian Cemetery, 2009), in which the perpetrators – 25 Red Army soldiers – figuratively devour infants alive, whereas their commissar eats a victim’s mother. The local old cook prepares food for them ‘from brothers and sisters.’

### ***Conclusion***

Like official Soviet novels, Soviet poetry often centres on the stories of actual perpetrators of collectivization, such as Olesia Kulyk and Piotr Diakov, who are praised for their courage, strength and determination. And similar to dissident prose, dissident Ukrainian poems like Rudenko’s ‘Khrest’ offer a more nuanced, complex depiction of the perpetrators: they are profiteers, fanatics, repentant fanatics, trained perpetrators, ordinary people. In the diaspora, meanwhile, poets like Kachurovs’kyi and Klen reflect upon their counterparts within Soviet Ukraine – official poets like Tychyna and Sosiura – whose panegyrics to Stalinism helped enable the inhumane policies of the 1930s. When confronting the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor, they tend to cast them as marginal and abnormal elements of the village, emphasizing the role of the Other in organizing the Holodomor and placing the famine in *locus theologicus*,<sup>498</sup> in which the perpetrators act as the agents of evil and the victims represent the martyrs. As we have seen, this trope of the Other, primarily Russian Communists, in facilitating the famine is prevalent in poetry written in Ukraine after 1991.

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<sup>497</sup> L. Palahniak, *Holodomor* (2012) <http://mhp.k.edu.poltava.ua/news/id/905/vn/>

<sup>498</sup> See I. Nabytovych, ‘Ukraiinska proza XX stolittia pro Holodomor’, *Henotsyd Ukrainy v XX stolitti*, (Lviv, 2014).

## Chapter V

### Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor in Drama

The Soviet Ukrainian playwright Mykola Kulish, who was executed by the Stalinist regime in 1937, sought in his work ‘to unravel the national question... but not with kid gloves.’<sup>499</sup> One of his last plays, *Proshchai, selo* (*Good Bye, Village*, 1933), unravels this question with hard-hitting allusions to collectivization and the famine. Following pressure by Soviet censors, Kulish renamed it *Povorot Marka* (*Mark Returns*, 1934) to distract from interpretations of the play as a requiem for a village dying during the famine. It focuses on the return of a Communist, Marko, to his native village after an eleven-year absence. There he finds himself the object of many questions about Soviet policies from village residents. Locals conjecture about his arrival: Marko could be a people’s advocate, a journalist, or a plenipotentiary to enforce collectivization. Indeed, Marko is a Party plenipotentiary and successfully completes collectivization in his native village, pointing out mistakes to his friends and, more importantly, revealing and removing ‘class enemies’.

Each character in Kulish’s play is dynamic and alive, and the perpetrators of collectivization are no exception. A ‘female delegate’ named Oksana is an avid perpetrator of house searches for grain from the onset of collectivization. During her house searches, ‘the yards are dug, and souls are troubled’. Nonetheless Oksana does not let ‘hoarders’ ‘rot bread in pits.’<sup>500</sup> As a mature woman, she is addressed as *baba* and at times ridiculed for being a spinster. Once a religious woman, she told Marko off for laughing in the church when he was a child. Marko comments that she made a holy place out of the farm’s office by decorating it with the embroidered towels that she confiscated from the peasants. At the conclusion of the play, Oksana organizes a collective burning of icons and is paired with her critic in a dance by the fire. What is meant primarily as a comic scene is also poignant, even disturbing. Indeed, the image of perpetrators publicly celebrating the destruction of the icons would stay in local oral memory for generations.

The protagonist Marko, interpreted as a prodigal son by his sister-in-law Motrona, does not see a middle ground during collectivization. In his view, the peasants should either accept the policy or disappear as a class. Having left the village during revolution, Marko loses contact with his family or with neighbours until he volunteers to assist collectivization on the ground. His dialogues

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<sup>499</sup> Mayhill C. Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire’s Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), p. 147. See also L. Zales’ka-Onyshkevych, ‘Holodomor u dramy i tema obvynuvachennia’ in *Holodomor. Dvi piesy* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>500</sup> M. Kulish, *Povorot Marka* (Kyiv: Radians’ka Literatura, 1934), p. 20.

with his family reveal the intimate contradictions that many perpetrators navigated on the ground. Both his father Roman and grandmother Vasylyna urge him to let them work and improve their lot at their own pace: ‘Why disturb people Marko? Why herd everyone into collectives? Once uprooted from the land, will they settle us anew?’<sup>501</sup> Marko patiently explains to them that socialism can only be built on a collective farm system and that individual farmers cannot compete against the efficiency of mechanised labour. In practice, however, Marko divides the village into classes and uses them to repress all enemies, including the village philosopher Zosim.

The character of Marko is similar to Marko Obushnyi in Kyrylenko’s *Avanposty*; he is an unflinching party plenipotentiary assisting collectivization and grain procurement who represents the official Party line in the village. Like Obushnyi with ‘Party spectacles’, Marko uses ‘Party binoculars’ to identify ‘kulaks’ and other alien elements whom he eliminates from the village. He also guides younger perpetrators, including pioneers and Komsomols in the village. Oksana’s adopted daughter, the Komsomol Nadiika, is portrayed as a young fanatic who refuses to let Dmytryk, son of a ‘kulak’, join the Komsomol. To prove his loyalty to the regime, Dmytryk tries to set his parents’ house – the best on the street – on fire. Dmytryk also reports his parents and sister for hiding gold.

Local officials who collaborate with Marko include the local collective’s chairman Petro and Red Army veteran Parkhimcha. They compete against each other in the collectivization efforts, with Parkhimcha feeling unfairly treated by the younger generation of activists who secure various positions and Party membership during collectivization. Marko disapproves of Parkhimcha’s methods in driving everyone, regardless of their background, into the farms and allowing the campaign to be accompanied by alcohol consumption and debauchery. The peasants who join the collective during the ‘alcohol drive,’ as Marko calls it, are seven widows who explain that they were promised ‘a paradise.’ Petro, an old friend of Marko, uses dubious practices in managing the farm: he oversees the theft of wood to build the stables and fails to look after the orchard or to build a school. Kulish’s criticisms of such incompetence are peppered throughout his dramatic corpus; his earlier play *Komuna v stepakh* (Commune in Steppe, 1926), for instance, addresses the question of viability of collective farms, simultaneously portraying perpetrators as genuine believers in socialism and criticising them for incompetence, laziness and promiscuity.

Another Soviet play on the subject is *Potomky* (Offsprings, 1938) by Iurii Ianovs’kyi, in which a repressed ‘kulak’ named Hryts’ko returns in 1938 to his native village, where he faces the hostility of the perpetrators of collectivisation and famine and commits a crime. The famine and its perpetration are mentioned only in passing, with Hryts’ko’s father, buried in the garden, being said

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-34.

to have starved to death. In Ianovs'kyi's play, the peasants did hoard grain and hide it in pits. Meanwhile, the Holodomor perpetrators – Red Army veterans named Holechnyk and Horlytsia, whose surnames speak to humble origins – ‘threw Hryts’ko barefoot in the snow’ during dekulakization. The head of the village council, Odarka Pryimak, is also a Red Army veteran, but does not hold grudges against Hryts’ko, who opposed both the Bolsheviks and collectivization. The play meets all the practical requirements of a Soviet official work of art justifying collectivization: the collective farmers are shown to live well, the dekulakized peasants are shown to have been punished fairly, and the perpetrators are shown defending the farms against potential enemies. The crime Hryts’ko commits shortly after his release only serves to justify the previous repressions against everyone opposing collectivization. In other words, there is no such phenomenon as a ‘reformed kulak’: as Ianovs'kyi suggests, the Red Army veterans were right to harbour low expectations of Hryts’ko. *Potomky* confers higher moral ground to those who facilitated violent Soviet policies in the village during collectivisation and famine.

One of the better known plays related to the famine published in diaspora<sup>502</sup> is *Tysiacha devyatsot trydtsiat tretii rik* (One Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty Third Year, 1942) by Serhii Kokot-Ledians'kyi. There are no village perpetrators; in fact they are not mentioned at all. Instead Kokot-Ledians'kyi presents characters who were likely bystanders to the famine – students in Kyiv in spring 1933. From the start of the play, the students refer to dying peasants on the street, but they react to this knowledge in divergent ways. While the children of Party functionaries condemn the starving peasants and demand that they go back to work at the collective farms, some students from the countryside try to help the starving.

The protagonist, Halia, asks for a day off in order to save her parents in the village. She is refused by the head of the student trade union Iasha, who reminds her that Rector Volin has forbidden students from going to the countryside. In a 1950 edition of the play, Iasha is described as a careerist: ‘one who crossed the line of settlement and cannot quench his thirst for power’.<sup>503</sup> The secretary of the student trade union, Bashlyk, reminds Halia that he too received a letter from his parents in the village asking for help. But he would not ‘compromise Komsomol discipline and risk my Komsomol ticket, my stipend or even the institute – I can’t.’<sup>504</sup> His words are echoed in the public speech of Oktriabrina Pervomaiskaia, a more fanatical student who calls upon his comrades to persecute class enemies who spread rumours about the famine in the countryside. Halia's fellow student Pavlo alludes to Bashlyk and Volin as profiteers who are not necessarily firm believers in

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<sup>502</sup> According L. Zales'ka-Onyshkevych, ‘Holodomor u dramy...’.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>504</sup> S. Serhii Kokot-Ledians'kyi, ‘Tysiacha devyatsot trydtsiat tretii rik Holodomor’ in *Dvi piesy* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2008), p. 37.

socialism. Pavlo also remarks that it is the passivity of bystanders like them that makes such tragedies possible. In effect Kokot-Ledians'kyi examines the question of perpetrators well beyond the village, to places and moments in which profiteers, careerists, fanatics and, crucially, bystanders fail to help victims or to protest when in the position to do so.

Another play written in diaspora, by poet Bohdan Boichuk, is *Holod* (Hunger, 1962). This play is an existential interpretation of the famine, which Boichuk's family endured. As in Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (1953), two characters – a Man and a Woman – search for the meaning of their existence while starving. They engage in a discussion about their lives before the famine and briefly interact with other characters, described as the poet and the baby. Fundamentally, they come to terms with their mortality, the presence (or absence) of God, and the importance of sacrifice. Along the way they affirm the value of their lives and overcome the actions of the perpetrators, who are present in the play as 'those in the uniform.' They are brutal, faceless men in military uniform who take bread, rape and kill. Described schematically and performed in pantomime, they explicitly represent the environment of rot and devastation in which the Man and the Woman find themselves. *Holod* could be placed within a broader literary movement of the Theatre of the Absurd, as it showcases characters who struggle to find purpose in life and confront the absurdity of existence. When the Man and Woman come to terms with this absurdity, however, they in turn discover their purpose: to save the child and defy 'those in uniform.'

Written primarily for British audiences,<sup>505</sup> Natalia Vorozhbit's *The Grain Store* (2009) has been performed in Ukrainian theatres since 2010.<sup>506</sup> It has been very influential in contributing to the cultural memory of the Holodomor on stage over the past decade. While some critics place *The Grain Store* within the long shadow of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939),<sup>507</sup> others see the influence of the didactic approach of Brecht.<sup>508</sup> The play focusses on the traumatic experience of the village during the famine through the story of a young couple named Arsei and Mokryna. Vorozhbit's rank-and-file perpetrators follow the Soviet Ukrainian dramatic tradition; that is, most of them are local people, despite the names of some of them suggesting Russian origin. In fact, they move the play forward: Party plenipotentiary Mortko; agitators Ivan, Masha, Vasilii and Iurko; and local perpetrators Rudenko, Havrilo, Iukhym and Arsei.

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<sup>505</sup> N. Vorozhbit, 'Ukraiina bula b zovsim inshoiu', *Ukraiins'ka Dumka* 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009, p. 6.

<sup>506</sup> I. Iuziuk, 'Kolomyis'kyi teatr rozpochav robotu nad novoiu vystavoiu "Zernoskhovyshche" Natalii Vorozhbit', *Kolomyis'kyi Akademichnyi Oblasnyi Ukrainis'kyi Dramatychnyi Teatr* 21 September 2010. Accessed on 12 May 2018: <http://teatr.kolomyia.org/news/item/31716>

<sup>507</sup> P. Holyman, 'The Grainstore' in *What's On Stage* on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009. Accessed on 12 May 2018: [http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/reviews/09-2009/the-grain-store-rsc\\_15754.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/reviews/09-2009/the-grain-store-rsc_15754.html)

<sup>508</sup> J. Peter, 'The Drunks/The Grain Store at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford upon Avon' in *The Sunday Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2009, Accessed on 12 May 2018: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-drunks-the-grain-store-at-the-royal-shakespeare-company-stratford-upon-avon-pks9jcnlhjd>

Mortko represents the fanatical perpetrator. He is a Party plenipotentiary who in 1931 volunteers to fight a ‘kulak’ uprising that he anticipates would follow mass collectivization in Ukraine. In Poltava he is ‘elected Head of the Savins’kii Agricultural District’ – very likely a reference to the appointed position of the secretary of the RPK or district executive committee. Thus he oversees collectivization and grain procurement on the ground. Before this assignment, Mortko ‘saw action in Kazakhstan,’ but during the peak mortality in March 1933, he nevertheless falls into despair, especially when his efforts to procure grain or turn peasants into collective farmers fail. For a short time this cognitive dissonance drives him insane.

A month later, however, Mortko no longer despairs. He creates, in effect, a Potemkin collective farm for a visiting American journalist with the help of dying peasants. Having dehumanised the peasants – ‘they aren’t people. They’re enemies’<sup>509</sup> – Mortko uses gratuitous violence against the starving despite protestations from his underlings: ‘It’s easy to *seem* kind. Can’t you see I’m doing work here that no one else will do, but without it the next step is impossible? ... no one will appreciate the sacrifice I made for the future of this wretched country of mine.’<sup>510</sup> He also motivates young perpetrators by promising to send them to town to study or work, thus sparing them from grain procurement that none of them enjoy. His role in facilitating the famine on the ground is therefore crucial. As Havrylo comments: ‘I didn’t need that [bloodbath]. But none of the others would get their hands dirty. Not Arsei, not the actors, not even that idiot Iukhym. Mortko had to do it all. Without Mortko, nothing gets done.’<sup>511</sup>

The character of Arsei is more ambivalent. Called a ‘pauper’ by other peasants, Mokryna tells Arsei that he can ‘only work to a master’ and reminds him that his family lost the land and money they possessed in 1919 because of their idleness. In 1931 Arsei joins the perpetrators and warns Mokryna of the imminent destruction of the wealthier farmers, with her survival depending on their relationship. In 1932 Arsei takes part in the dekulakization of his wife’s family and auctions off their possessions. This is the moment Arsei transforms into Mortko; he begins to wear the same greatcoat and a leather cap, whereas the peasants buying the possessions of the ‘kulaks’ transform from bystanders into followers. Mokryna’s brother reminds them that shortly they will follow suit and perish like the ‘kulaks’. He also tries to reason with Arsei, reminding him of their shared childhood, but to no avail. At the same time Arsei refuses to execute the peasants and tries to convince Mortko to spare lives, saves Mokryna and her mother from starvation and, even during his visual transformation, looks ‘slightly embarrassed.’ He is critical of staging the happy life of the collective farm for the American and hopes to start a new life with Mokryna in the city where there

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<sup>509</sup> Vorozhbit, *The Grain Store*, p. 47.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.



will be 'no envying other people.'<sup>512</sup> There is no obvious fanatical or sadist element in Arsei's motivation; he aspires to live a normal, better life.

The circumstances of Arsei's demise, however, are unclear. Mortko sends him to study at the Party school, and Arsei returns with excellent references, telling Mokryna that now they have a chance to move to the city after the famine. Trusted to meet the American guests, he is allowed to keep confiscated goods. He even helps Mokryna obtain food. Moreover, as Arsei's wife, Mokryna is not prosecuted for instigating disobedience at the rehearsal of the film, nor for pushing the heavily pregnant agitator Masha. But in May 1933 Mortko decides to kill Arsei for hiding a sack of grain in Mokryna's house. Since Arsei refused to shoot famine victims, Mortko 'saw the spark of treason in [his] eyes all along'.<sup>513</sup> Arsei admits he is guilty but seizes the moment to murder Mortko.

The rest of the perpetrators fall into the types of the marginal: drunks, good-for-nothing profiteers, promiscuous women. Perpetrators Iukhym and Havrylo are described as drunks by Arsei: 'I've known them since I was a kid. They'd jump off the bell tower for a drop of vodka.'<sup>514</sup> When Havrylo confesses to taking part in a massacre, he also explains, with reverence to the legal, that he was following orders and that the food the peasants ate belonged to the state. Iukhym reluctantly agrees to execute his neighbour Samson whom he asks to turn away so that he doesn't see Samson's face. Iukhym's wife, on the other hand, becomes promiscuous during the famine. So does agitator Masha, who eventually falls pregnant by one of the victims, Samson. Having confronted Samson about his paternity, Masha summarises a prosopographical reading of the female perpetrators as abnormal women juxtaposed with the conservative Mokryna, who needs a wedding in the church to feel as Arsei's wife: 'A Soviet woman doesn't need a husband. I've got all my comrades to look after me.'<sup>515</sup> Ivan, Masha, Vasili and Iurko follow the orders of the superiors and show no sympathy toward the victims, making public performances out of the house searches and the confiscation of foodstuffs. Most hope for promotion and escape to the city, or as Rudenko succinctly puts it: 'Out of this hell.'<sup>516</sup>

Overall, in Vorozhbit's *The Grain Store*, most perpetrators do not benefit from their participation in the famine: Mortko is murdered; Arsei dies along with several of the agitators; Ivan is eaten by a cannibal; Vasili dies from starvation; Masha dies during childbirth; Havrylo and Iukhym's wife each go insane. Mortko is replaced in the office by Lionechka, a young man whose foot had been severed by a wealthy neighbour. Lionechka wears a large greatcoat similar to Morko's, thus following in his footsteps after the famine. Iurko, described in the play only

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

obliquely, saves Mokryna from being buried alive, and the two go on to have a family before Iurko dies at the front during the Second World War. Vorozhbit presents the full spectrum of rank-and-file perpetrators: while some correspond to the clichés of the Other and the abnormal – such as the local drunks and the agitators Masha, Ivan and Vasiliï – the key characters of Mortko, Arsei, Iurko and Rudenko are presented, tragically and poignantly, as ordinary people who become progressively complicit in state-sanctioned mass violence.

### ***Conclusion***

At times circumventing prevalent censorship, a number of Ukrainian plays engage in a coherent reflection on the tragedy of the Holodomor and on the ordinary people who facilitated it. As we have seen, due to the constraints of the genre, some characters are portrayed in broad brush strokes and simplified by way of pantomime, as in Boichuk's *Holod*. Yet these plays largely bear a significant number of similarities in their depictions of the rank-and-file perpetrators of the famine: they foreground the key role of the fanatic type of perpetrator; underscore the importance of previous experience that habituates the perpetrators to violence; allude to brutality on all sides; and feature female perpetrators who tend toward the 'abnormal'. They are single old women or widows; some of them are even village officials (Odarka in *Potomky*, Oktiabryna in *Tysiacha dev'iatsot trydtsiat tretii rik* and Oksana in *Povorot Marka*). They defy gender expectations by having multiple partners (Masha in *The Grain Store*) or by intimidating people who dare to approach them.

As in Soviet Ukrainian prose, the protagonists in the drama of Ianovs'kyi and Kulish are fanatics and 'true believers' who believe they can transform the village for the better through collectivization. They are ready to sacrifice themselves as well as those who oppose collectivization; they are ready to expel and repress class enemies, even if they include their own family members. These perpetrators speak in the language of official Soviet discourse, answering those who challenge them with Party slogans. Nonetheless, like all the playwrights discussed in this chapter, Ianovs'kyi and Kulish still present such characters as 'agentful'; they always have the choice to act or not to act. Indeed, Parkhimcha and Petro in *Povorot Marka*, Odarka in *Potomky*, and Arsei in *The Grain Store* all hesitate before following orders; they express doubt and reveal conflicted emotions. While there are fanatical perpetrators like Marko in *Povorot Marka*, the Red Army veterans in *Potomky*, or Oktiabryna in *Tysiacha dev'iatsot trydtsiat tretii rik* and Mortko in *The Grain Store*, most of perpetrators presented are ordinary local people whose previous experiences only influence their choice to help perpetrate the famine. These experiences do not determine it.

## Chapter VI

### Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor in Film

‘Of all arts, cinema is the most important for us.’

*V. Lenin*<sup>517</sup>

The Soviet Union invested great significance in the reach and impact of film, and arguably no other genre is as widely resonant in shaping the cultural memory of the Holodomor today. I will explore Ukrainian films on the subject chronologically according to two groups: feature films and documentaries. Like other cultural texts related to the Holodomor, the number of films on the famine is constantly growing. The films analysed here have been chosen based on the size of the audience reached via screenings in cinemas or broadcasts on major television channels – and on their acknowledged significance according to use in the sphere of education or to 2017 recommendations by the Institute of National Memory of Ukraine for public commemoration of the Holodomor. I posit that these films are helping Ukrainian audiences translate post-memories of the famine – typically, at the level of the everyday, the domain of proverbs and transmitted stories – into intensely visual forms.

#### *Feature Films*

The first film to portray collectivization activists in Ukraine is Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s classic *Zemlia* (Earth, 1930). This silent film tells a story of young Komsomol Vasyl’ Trubenko, who brings a tractor from Kharkiv to his village, where some peasants still refuse to give up their land for the collective farm. Vasyl’ ploughs the border between the fields of the collective farm and that of ‘kulak’ Arkhyp Bilokin’. In response, Arkhip’s son Khoma kills Vasyl’. Widely considered to be Dovzhenko’s best film as well as one of the best in the history of Soviet cinema, *Zemlia* stands out for its glorious presentation of the Ukrainian countryside and for its ambiguous reading of those who will eventually become the perpetrators of the famine in 1932-33.

The film begins with the peaceful death of Vasyl’s grandfather Semen, who lies among an abundance of apples in his orchard surrounded by his family. Vasyl’ looks at Semen with love, but notes that his grandfather’s ploughing of the land earth oxen for seventy five years is not remarkable. Dovzhenko often under-supplies his silent films with intertitles, leaving the audience to fill in gaps in speech and dialogue. Here Vasyl’ speaks enthusiastically about what ‘is worth of a

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<sup>517</sup> This phrase is attributed to Lenin by Lunacharskii in his letter to Boltianskii on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1925. See *Sovetskoe kino*, No. 1-2 (1933), p. 10.

medal in life,' but without a clear reference to an antecedent. He could be speaking about tractors changing the perennial way of tilling land or about people like him transforming the village despite all the risks. After a triumphant ploughing of the 'kulak' fields, Vasyl' spends emotional moments with his beloved, holding her gently and smiling dreamily. The future looks bright, and Vasyl' cannot keep his feet on the ground, dancing in the twilight on his way home. Svashenko, a veteran of the Berezhil theatre who played Vasyl', recalled Dovzhenko explaining to him what he expected from that dance: 'we do not need an elaborate *hopak* [Ukrainian folk dance performed by men]... it should be a simple dance, clear and straight to the point in its moves. Not like your feet dancing on their own, but as if your soul and happiness are dancing with them.'<sup>518</sup>

Svashenko also reflected on Dovzhenko making him bathe in the local river each morning to keep his thoughts clean and clear, just like Vasyl's thoughts. In the notes on the film that Dovzhenko reconstructed from memory (the original was destroyed during the Second World War), the hardworking nineteen-year-old Vasyl' sees the layout of collective fields as his own life plan, 'from a redneck to a public figure, and maybe to fame.' To fulfil his ambitions, Vasyl' denounces the 'kulak' Bilokin' for hoarding grain and sabotage in a local newspaper, knowing what repercussions it might have for that family. Indeed, 'soon the family of Bilokin' is disappeared without a trace to Siberia'.<sup>519</sup> For the deportation to take place, the family's name had to be presumably added to the list of peasants who were to be executed or re-settled by local perpetrators – Vasyl's comrades. In the film they include Soroka, the chairman of the collective farm; Maksym Prytuliak, an enthusiastic secretary of the Komsomol cell; and Komsomol Shumylo. In the world of *Zemlia*, these are precisely the figures who would facilitate grain procurement that would lead to mass man-made famine in only a few years' time.

These perpetrators appear as different types in Dovzhenko's film. Prytuliak displays the qualities of a careerist. Knowing that the tractor has stalled in its triumphant march to the village, he informs district officials on the phone that it has arrived at the village safely. To the dismayed messenger, Prytuliak responds, 'The tractor can't stop!' He also asks in a letter to higher authorities for permission to confiscate the barns of the wealthier peasants for the needs of his collective farm instead of constructing new premises.

Komsomol Shumylo, meanwhile, is neither an ideologue nor a profiteer. He is resourceful and hardworking when under threat of repression from Chupryna, he fixes the tractor's radiator by urinating in it. Later he becomes a Stakhanovite: his portraits are published in national papers, and journalists write his biography.

<sup>518</sup> S. Svashenko, 'Tak rozhdalsia tanets,' *Dovzhenko v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* ed. L. Plazhitnova, Iu. Solntseva (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982).

<sup>519</sup> A. Dovzhenko, *Zemlia: kniga-film* (Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva, 1966).

Dovzhenko's characterisation of these activists earned criticism on the pages of *Izvestiia* from a certain Dem'ian Bednyi. He saw their urinating into a radiator of the broken tractor to be an unacceptable mockery of collectivization.<sup>520</sup> The office of *Izvestiia* was flooded with letters from the viewers complaining about Bednyi's assessment, and the All-Ukrainian Union of Revolutionary Cinema Workers in Kharkiv on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930 concluded that his criticisms were unfair. In two days the film was returned to the cinemas. A week later, it was again banned despite successful premieres abroad, which eventually help secure its place as an iconic monument to Ukrainian cinematic culture.<sup>521</sup> This success is, however, at times overshadowed by the tragic legacy of the famine. Indeed, *Zemlia* was filmed in the village of Iares'ky in the Poltava oblast', which was hit particularly hard by the famine. Most of the village's inhabitants starred in the film as extras, and untold numbers of them perished during the height of the Holodomor. In fact, in light of a recent discovery made by Ukrainian director Leonid Muzhuk, a child extra whose close-up is featured in the final cut of *Zemlia* was one of the first to die from hunger only three years after filming.<sup>522</sup>

Soviet films that dwell on collective farms after *Zemlia* do not focus on collectivization as such. The comedies directed by Pyriev – such as *Traktoristy* (The Tractor Drivers, 1939) or *Bogataia Nevesta* (The Rich Bride, 1937) – predictably depict a comfortable life on the farms, with an abundance of provisions. There are of course no mentions of the famine or even references to the ways in which villages were collectivized. We only see the collective farm brigades or MTS well established, and village officials only allude to the past when comparing the imminent war with Germany to their victory against kulaks and bandits.

This situation largely persists until the years after Stalin's death, when the novel *Podniataia tselina* (Virgin Land Upturned, 1932-1959) by Nobel prize winner Michail Sholokhov, is adapted into a film with the same title (1959-1961). Though *Podniataia tselina* focuses on collectivization in the Don region, the novel has great relevance to this discussion as a text that installs an image of the perpetrators in cultural memory by way of its inclusion in a compulsory course on Russian literature in the school curriculum across the USSR.

Its plot is simple: Semen Davydov, a plenipotentiary from Leningrad, becomes a chairman of the collective farm that he helps to create in a village in the Don region. Davydov is assisted by Nagul'nov, the secretary of the local party cell, and Razmetnov, the head of the village council. Despite resistance from the 'kulaks', they establish the collective farm and procure grain. Prior to the organisation of the collective farm, Davydov insists on dekulakization. After the first day of this

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<sup>520</sup> D. Bednyi, 'Filosofy,' *Izvestiia*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1930.

<sup>521</sup> O. Shama, 'Zemlia obetovannaia. Triumf i tragediia Gomera ukrainskogo kino Aleksandra Dovzhenko,' *Novoe Vremia*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

<sup>522</sup> See *Ukrains'ka nich 33-oho* (Ukrainian Night '33, 1994-1998 by L. Muzhuk) later in this chapter.

‘work’, which involves deporting families with children to Solovki in the middle of winter without warm clothes, Razmetnov refuses to continue. His remarks to Davydov and Nagul’nov resonate with those of Browning’s policemen during their initiation to mass murder:

Razmetnov’s monologue on dekulakization	Policemen on their first execution of the Jews
I won’t take part in dekulakization again. ... I was not taught it. I... I can’t fight with children! It’s different in war... I won’t do it again! It’s not right. Am I an executioner? Or is my heart made of stone? ... Do you know how many children Lapshinov has? As soon as we arrived, they all stood up, and my hair stood up too. We started kicking them out of the house, and women fell down as if dead. We poured water onto on them. I closed my eyes and ears and fled. <sup>523</sup>	... Buchmann made clear to Hagen that as a Hamburg businessman and reserve lieutenant, he would in no case participate in such an action, in which defenceless women and children are shot. <sup>524</sup> We men were upset about that and said we couldn’t bear [the executions] either. <sup>525</sup> One policeman approached First Sergeant Kammer ... He confessed that the task was ‘repugnant’ to him... <sup>526</sup> They [the policemen] pleaded that they too were fathers with children and could not continue. <sup>527</sup>

Razmetnov’s colleagues, however, are not sympathetic. Davydov echoes Stalin’s response to Sholokhov, who wrote to the Communist leader in 1933 about the excessive violence during collectivization:

Davydov’s response	Stalin’s response
You’re sorry for them ... you feel pity for them. And have they had pity for us? Have our enemies ever wept over the tears of our children? Did they ever weep over the orphans when they killed their parents? Eh? ... You feel sorry that we deport kulak families? Big deal! We deport them so that we can build our life. ... You are the Soviet rule here, and I am supposed to agitate you?! ... You are so tolerant! You are Communist first and then ... It’s a fact! <sup>528</sup>	... Respected peasants ... organised sabotage (!) and were keen to leave the workers and the Red Army without bread. While this sabotage was quiet and seemed to be done without malice (without blood), the fact is that your respected peasants waged a ‘quiet’ war on Soviet rule. A war to starve [the Soviet state]... It is clear as the clear sky that the peasants are not as innocent as they seem from afar. <sup>529</sup>

Davydov and Nagul’nov involve torture and incarceration in the grain procurement campaigns, which Razmetnov later admits contributes to efficiency. During their attempt to take seeds, Razmetnov and Davydov are beaten by a mob of women, which was a popular form of protest (and despair) during the famine. Indeed, one of the characters in the film states that Davydov is taking

<sup>523</sup> M. Sholokhov, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, trans. Stephen Garry (London: W. & J. Mackay, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>524</sup> Browning, *Ordinary men – Reserve Police Battalion 101...*, p. 56

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Sholokhov, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, p. 23.

<sup>529</sup> I. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 18. (Tver: Soiuz, 2006), p. 49.

the seeds with the intent of starving their children and of exporting grain abroad to buy cars that would be later used by 'Party people to cruise around with their short-haired women.' Wounded, Davydov responds with words echoing Epik's plenipotentiary Lohvyn: 'I am doing all this for you damned people, and you, bastards, are killing me?!' Like Vasyl' in Dovzhenko's *Zemlia* he is not afraid to die because he believes that the collective farms constitute his legacy.

In *Podniataia tselina*, however, the perpetrators are reported for their violence. Nagul'nov is expelled from the Party despite his previous service in 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army<sup>530</sup>, 'acting out of best intentions' and his 'life-long contempt for private property'. Acting in line with Stalin's article on the excesses on the ground, the district bureaucrats condemn Nagulnov's violent methods despite their previous tacit approval. During the vote on expulsion, they fear each other and raise their hands only after reading each other's body language. The formal, removed relationship between the district and village officials was also explored in Dimarov's *The Hungry Thirties*. Like Dimarov's character Ginzburg, Nagulnov intends to take his life, which he cannot imagine outside the Party. He reflects on the nature of perpetrators like him: 'The revolution will not suffer. There are plenty of people following it. One less, one more.' After picturing the triumph of his enemies, Nagul'nov decides to live.

Davydov and Nagul'nov are eventually murdered. These fanatics and sociopaths, who are shaped by ideology and previous experience of violence, make regular references to their traumatic past to justify their brutality. They display a misogynistic attitude by insulting women and regarding them as 'evil.' They comment that women are 'not good even at giving birth' and banish Lushka, whom they both presumably love, out of the village. They neglect the non-agricultural needs of the village – education, healthcare and welfare – to the point that peasants complain about being treated like livestock. Their death marks a pivotal moment when the fanatic type of perpetrator is removed, whereas followers like Razmetnov and other collective farmers stay in the village to preserve the memory of the murdered.

Various perpetrators of collectivization can be also found in *Vavylon XX* (Babylon XX, Mykolaichuk, 1979). The film's title was panned by the Soviet critics for mocking the Soviet project, and the film's form was criticised for its excessive 'poetic' 'formalist' form.<sup>531</sup> It is based on a novel by Vasyl' Zemliak titled *Lebedyna Zhraia* (The Flock of Swans, 1971), which tells of the conflict between the collective farmers and the peasants in the village of Babylon in ways both

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<sup>530</sup> I. Babel wrote about violence against civilians perpetrated by the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry in his *1920 Diary* and *The Red Cavalry*.

<sup>531</sup> S. Vasyl'iev, 'Pro te, iak зроблено Vavylon XX' in *Novyny Natsionalnoii Spilky Kinematohrafistiv Ukrainy* on 09.05.2016, last accessed on 17.10.2017. <http://www.ukrkino.com.ua/about/spilkanews/?id=5135>

comic and tragic. The film's grotesquerie, symbolism, and strategic omissions and silences in characterisation allow the audience more freedom of interpretation than *Podniataia tselina*. In *Vavylon XX* the perpetrators of collectivisation are compared to swans known to sacrifice their lives when losing their loved ones. In the case of the perpetrators, their sacrifice is related to their transformation of the village.

A fanatical type of perpetrator is represented by a sailor named Klym Synytsia, a Red Army veteran and the founder of the commune. Facing execution, he shouts to the peasants the slogan, 'Either join the collective farm or live in poverty.' In the film he is followed by a group of nameless young men who walk in a shape of a flock of flying birds dressed in the same clothes. Their march and revolutionary songs are contrasted with the folk dance and songs that the communars can be seen joining. Meanwhile, an ideological perpetrator and young poet named Volodia Iavors'kyi starts a relationship with Mal'va Kozhushna, a widow of another Red Army veteran and comrade in arms of Synytsia. He is killed by 'kulak' Dan'ka, Mal'va's former lover. The murder is symbolic: after all, Volodia is called 'the glory and conscience' of the commune itself.

Mal'va, on the other hand, is not an ideological perpetrator like Volodia. She is a follower. She joins the collective farm to find a feeling of belonging, which she lost when her husband died. As the secretary at the village council, she explicitly says that wealthier farmers deserve to be taxed heavily. In return someone paints 'slut' on her fence, and she is taken to be executed by the 'kulaks.' Some of the peasants feel uneasy about shooting the now heavily pregnant Mal'va with the rest. Unlike Synytsia and the head of the village council Ruban, who is outraged by the peasant rebellion and subordination, Mal'va is silent as she awaits execution.

In the film's symbolic final scene, a mass brawl breaks out at Babylon on a religious holiday. A cavalry detachment saves the perpetrators of collectivization and famine – both fanatics and followers – from being executed by the 'kulaks', who flee. The village philosopher Fabian, meanwhile, shields Mal'va from being shot. He dies as a bystander to collectivization. As prominent film critic Serhii Trymbach points out, this type of character is novel in Soviet cinema.<sup>532</sup> Fabian is neither a fanatic, nor careerist or follower. He is not apprehended by the 'kulaks' with other perpetrators, but he nonetheless joins them to be executed. Fabian is critical of collectivization but does not resist it. He has no land and does not join the collective, but he shares a dinner visually reminiscent of the Last Supper with the perpetrators. He challenges Ruban, the only outsider whom Synytsia has to introduce in the village, about his views that the disciples misinterpreted Jesus Christ. Ruban replies that he and people like him are gods. When Fabian continues to question collectivization, Ruban and Synytsia fail to understand him and respond with clichéd Soviet

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<sup>532</sup> S. Trymbach, 'Vavylon XX' in *Iskusstvo kino* (2011) vol. 6 (April).



slogans. They speak a different language.

The next film depicting perpetrators of the Holodomor appears after the dissolution of the USSR. *Holod-33* (Hunger-33, Ianchuk, 1991) is based on Barka's novel *Yellow Prince*, which is discussed above. The film was produced under consultation with historian James Mace, and the screenplay was written by Serhii Diachenko and Les' Taniuk. It was first shown on UT-1 channel in November 1991, right before the referendum on Ukrainian independence on 1 December.

Unlike Barka's novel, *Holod-33* deals with the perpetrators obliquely, portraying them as 'uniformly monstrous.'<sup>533</sup> They first appear at the church during a service. Accompanied by police, a group of perpetrators enter the premises to confiscate the icons and other valuables. The crowd inside prevents them from doing so. On another occasion, a group of perpetrators searches the house of the protagonist Myron and take all his food. After being denounced by a Komsomol for hiding a silver chalice, Myron is tortured by two DPU servicemen, one of them clearly a sadist. They flaunt the food and grain in storage, which is slowly rotting while peasants die. The armed guards by the mill shoot hundreds of starving men with machine guns. Most perpetrators are armed, some wear military coats. Some are alien to the village, while others are local. As Myron observes, 'many anti-Christ's came from us but did not belong among us.'

*Povodyr* (The Guide, Sanin, 2014) is a story of an American boy whose engineer father is murdered while trying to take documents about the famine from Kharkiv to Moscow. The boy becomes a guide for a blind *kobzar* or minstrel. He escapes abroad. With the famine as an important background, the film proceeds to focus on the fate of the *kobzari* who perished in the repressions of the early 1930s. *Povodyr* broke the box office record in Ukraine in 2015. In the first nine weeks of its screening, it was seen by 360,064 viewers in 150 cinemas in Ukraine.<sup>534</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015 the film was broadcast on the highly popular national channel Inter,<sup>535</sup> thus reaching the mass viewer in Ukraine. It was also Ukraine's 2015 entry into the National Academy Awards in the category 'Foreign Language Film.'<sup>536</sup>

Unlike *Holod-33*, *Povodyr* features perpetrators who are not nameless. The main antagonist, named Volodymyr, is a DPU officer who pursues the American boy and accompanies a *prodotriad* – an armed food detachment – sent to the district to procure grain. Volodymyr follows

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<sup>533</sup> S. Holden, 'A Family's Struggle in Stalin's Man-Made Famine,' *The New York Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1993.

<sup>534</sup> 'Boks ofic 1 2015', *KinoTeatr UA* 6 January 2015. Accessed on 13 June 2018: [https://kino-teatr.ua/uk/main/box\\_article/article\\_id/199.phtml](https://kino-teatr.ua/uk/main/box_article/article_id/199.phtml)

<sup>535</sup> V. Samchenko, 'Slipi ne ti, khto nezriachi', *Ukraina Moloda* 20 February 2015. Accessed on 21 October 2017: <http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/2612/164/91907/>

<sup>536</sup> 'Fil'm "Povodyr" Olesia Sanina predstavliatyme Ukrainiu na premiiu "Oskar"', *Radio Svoboda* 9 September 2014. Accessed on 3 October 2017: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26574991.html>

orders from the DPU commissar Lipets'kyi. On arrival to the village Kalynivka, he is greeted by the chairman of the collective farm whose daughter is celebrating a wedding. The chairman informs Volodymyr that the collective farm has fulfilled 112% of the grain quota. In another shot, we see Volodymyr handing over a document that he signs without reading to a local man, who is a secret informant for the DPU charged with murdering the collective farm's head. While the man looks confused, he nonetheless obeys. Meanwhile, a voice outside the office shouts abuse at the arrivals for not leaving enough bread for people with which to survive until spring. The chairman is indeed ultimately killed by Volodymyr's men.

In *Povodyr* we see the modern state in action: railway station employees reporting to the DPU, a storehouse being emptied by peasant men in civilian clothes, a *kobzar* singing a folk song about the 'commune' taking away all food. A voiceover tells of an order to commanders of Red Army bases to assist the DPU servicemen in tackling 'kulak' revolts and grain procurement sabotage within relevant districts. We see Volodymyr asking a commander of a division stationed locally for a platoon to round up people in Kalynivka. The commander responds: 'We are a regular army! Can't you do it on your own? ... I've got unexperienced young boys. Four had to go to the tribunal. They saw all that filth and tried to flee.' Volodymyr insists on his compliance and adds: 'This is not to be discussed.'

But the perpetrators in *Povodyr* are Ukrainians. They speak Ukrainian. Volodymyr himself is later revealed to be a traitor of the Ukrainian National Army who switched sides and executed his own comrades. He speaks Ukrainian and Russian based on the situation. A trained perpetrator, he is both a careerist and enjoys the benefits his position offers. His wife, a celebrated singer, pleads with him to save the lives of the *kobzari* and even collects the signatures of foreign artists to spare them from repressions. Her actions compromise Volodymyr, who tolerates her. In this sense, he is no ideological perpetrator. At the end of the film he is killed by the protagonist *kobzar*.

*Bitter Harvest* (Hirki Zhnyva, Mendeliuk, 2017) follows the story of the peasants Nataalka and Iurii during collectivization and the famine in a tableaux of crucial moments. While the film received mostly negative reviews abroad and a mixed reception in Ukraine, even reminding the director of the Institute of National Memory of a 'comic book,'<sup>537</sup> the film reached over 131,000 viewers within five weeks of its screening in cinemas alone. In the first minutes of *Bitter Harvest*, surveying scenes of the idyllic Ukrainian village, Iurii addresses the question of perpetrators with mythical language: 'dragons do exist, and there is actual evil out there.' This threat is later compared to a Tatar invasion and associated the Tsar who 'conquered us, stole our freedom.'

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<sup>537</sup> "‘Fil’ m iak komiks’": Vidhuk V'iatrovycha pro hollivuds'yi fil'm pro Holodomor "Hirki zhnyva", *Novynarnia* 23 February 2017. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <https://novynarnia.com/2017/02/23/film-yak-komiks-vidguk-v-yatrovicha-pro-gollivudskiy-film-pro-golodomor-girki-zhniva/>

Agency for the Holodomor perpetration is placed firmly with the ‘evil’ Other, while the village community is homogenous and morally ‘good.’

The perpetrators are depicted according to a binary opposition between reformed Communist Mykola and the DPU officer Sergei, whose excessive portrayal in the film borders on the parodic. Donning a black leather coat, Sergei comes with his troops to the village to establish a collective farm and to confiscate grain and valuables. He speaks Russian, fluent in the language of Bolshevik power.<sup>538</sup> He runs over peasants and shoots them casually. He routinely dehumanizes the victims: while seducing Natalka with a modern gown and food, he does not converse with her in order not to develop emotional attachment. Many critics of the film argued that the characters have little ‘psychological depth.’<sup>539</sup> Indeed, Sergei is an archetype of nearly biblical proportions: he humiliates Natalka by ordering her to wash his feet and wipe them with her hair, in a clear allusion to the figure of the anti-Christ.

Young Communists like Mykola believe the famine to be an ‘illness of growth,’ a temporary and justified detour on route to a better, socialistic state. The editor of the local newspaper, he eventually commits suicide. Iurii sees his death as the result of the incongruence of being a Ukrainian patriot and a Communist at the same time. Other repentant perpetrators, like a worker from the storehouse at the train station, who is also a Red Army veteran, perish. Before helping Iurii, he tells him that the famine ravages in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus but that people like him just follow the orders. Local Red Army veteran Boiko, who returns from fighting to farming and no longer speaks Russian, refuses to join the collective farm, much like Kornii in like Samchuk’s *Maria*. Meanwhile,

the mechanism of the famine – i.e. confiscation of all foodstuffs by the locals and their facilitation of the starvation – is absent in the film. Iurii tells his friends how collectivization is conducted by ‘soldier troops descending onto the villages and herding the peasants into collectives without asking’. Collectivization is therefore conducted by nameless soldiers; there are no village or district officials in sight, not even KNS members or local Komsomol.

### ***Documentaries***

As we have seen, the men and women who facilitated collectivization were often those who perpetrated the famine. In this section, I therefore begin with Soviet documentaries about collectivization before proceeding to documentaries about the Holodomor itself.

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<sup>538</sup> Sergei is seen in the film handing peasants bulky papers each time he orders them to the collective. According to survivor testimonies, no such abundant documentation was used beyond the application they had to sign at the village council or in the office of the collective farm.

<sup>539</sup> “‘Fil’ m iak komiks’”: Ibid.

Most of these Soviet documentaries and chronicles of the first Five Year Plan are aimed primarily at a foreign audience and the younger generations; naturally, they provide images of the collective farms that the ideologues wanted audiences to see – but nonetheless, images offer us views of the early collective farms and, moreover, of the perpetrators of the famine to come.

Dziga Vertov's *Odinadtsiatyi* (The Eleventh Year, 1928) demonstrates a transformed Ukraine eleven years after the revolution. Village activists bring electricity into the village, with a long close up of electricity wires on a thatched roof of a Ukrainian cottage serving as illustration of the drastic changes in the countryside. Later Komsomols meet in the village council in the village of Tyvriv, Vinnytsia oblast', where more than 33 identities of the famine's victims were established.<sup>540</sup> Vertov's

*Enthusiazm. Simfoniia Donbassa* (Enthusiasm. The Donbas Symphony, 1930) presents us with a collection of sounds (and a video chronicle) of a newly industrialised and collectivized Donbas. Collective farmers drive tractors, and harvesters sing songs. Farming brigade number four meets in the field, where they decide to challenge brigade number six at the same gigantic collective farm to harvesting goals. This decision is met with applause, with one farmer dancing the *hopak*. Indeed, the use of this folk dance to celebrate the advent of collective farms is a refrain in Khvylovyi's notes *Po Barvikivskomu raionu* (1931), Dovzhenko's *Zemlia*, and a number of plays discussed above.<sup>541</sup> The film finishes with a large rally in the city hailing collectivization; Kosior greets the rally from a platform with a smile. As the collective farmers go back to work, a slogan on the screen reads: 'To the front with songs'. Similar to *Donbas* in its presentation of 'agentful' perpetrators of collectivization is *Nebuvalyi Pokhid* (An Unprecedented Campaign, Kaufman, 1930), shot by Vertov's brother Mikhail Kaufman. Focusing on enthusiastic Twenty-Five Thousanders working in the villages, a remastered print of the film was screened at various film festivals in Ukraine in 2017, providing contemporary audiences with a rare glimpse into the propaganda collectivization campaign and helping to foster a new visualization of stories circulating in post-memory of the period.

Beyond the Soviet Union, the 1980s witness the appearance of key documentaries produced in the diaspora centring on the famine itself. Here I group these films alongside those produced by state organizations in the wake of glasnost and during the early 1990s and those produced during the term of the former President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko. Moving chronologically to identify

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<sup>540</sup> *Natsional'na knyha pam'iaty zhertv Holodomoru 1932-1933 rr v Ukraini. Vinnyts'ka oblast'* ed. V. Latsyba, V. Vyzha, P. Kravchenko et al. (Vinnytsia: DP 'DFK,' 2008), p. 620. On Vertov's importance to Soviet documentary cinema, see, for instance, J. Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>541</sup> Mykola Khvylovyi, 'Po Barvinkov'skomu raionu' in *Tvory v p'iat'iokh tomakh*, volume III, ed. H. Kostyuk (Ellicott City-Toronto: Smoloskyp, 1982), p. 483.

representational patterns oriented on the rank-and-file perpetrator of the Holodomor, I focus on documentaries broadcast nationally or recommended for screening by the Institute of National Memory of Ukraine.

In Canada, *La Famine Inconnue*

(Neznanyi Holod, Hukalo, 1983) intersperses clips from Soviet documentaries with expert commentary and survivor testimonies. When asked about the identities of the perpetrators of the famine, historian Mace starts with Stalin and his associates in the Kremlin and then mentions the ‘Dnipropetrovsk mafia’, including Brezhnev. He explains that the latter was part of the group that provided Ukraine with all the officials and plenipotentiaries sent to the countryside to confiscate grain. After Mace, Kopelev self-identifies as a perpetrator, claiming that ‘all of us were part of the construction of this system, although I was young and stupid’.

*Harvest of Despair* (Znyva Rozpachu, Novytskyi, 1984), also produced in Canada, follows the format of *La Famine Inconnue*. According to the narrator, young activists from the city were sent to the village to enforce collectivization. Presented as a former Soviet ‘activist’, Kopelev notes that he assisted in the promotion of propaganda in the villages, but ‘thank God, did not kill, imprison or denounce anyone.’ In 1930 Petro Hryhorenko helped grain procurement as a student and recounts how the Komsomol friends in his native village starved to death after giving all the grain they had to the state. Survivor Myroslava Utko from Dnipropetrovs’k oblast’ explains how the perpetrators – ‘a group of people – the activists – if you could call them people’ – evicted her family. They threw young children onto the street in the middle of winter. Another survivor, Motria Dutka, a midwife in the village, concludes that those who went from house to house and who took everything were Russians. The narrator confirms that 112,000 ‘reliable members of the Communist Party were to guard the harvest and livestock from the starving peasants’, and that in 1934 a further 27,000 Russian Communists came to replace purged Ukrainian Party officials. No supporting evidence is provided, however.

The first documentary on the famine produced in Soviet Ukraine is *33-ii. Svidchennia ochevydtsiv* (33rd. Survivor Testimonies, Laktionov-Stezenko, 1989), largely a collection of survivor testimonies that the director and his team began to collect in 1987. The film features many photos of the famine perpetrators, including the ‘shock-workers of grain procurement in 1932’. It also uses chronicle footage of a young man guarding the field. His name is Kovalev, responsible for part of the field. In the footage, he catches a couple of ‘hairdressers’, peasant men with small bags who were cutting ears of wheat for consumption. For his work, Kovalev is given the house of a dekulakized peasant.

The film also includes testimonies from perpetrators themselves. A former female DPU

guard claiming that the DPU people like her were exceptionally polite with the inmates, *even with political ones*, is juxtaposed with an emotional account by a man who witnessed his father, a Red Army veteran, being brutally beaten to death during the search by a DPU officer. A second testimony is given by Marian Malakhovs'kyi (b.1911), who as a Komsomol was 'mobilised' to help collectivization. He recalls an all-night meeting to force individual farmers into collectives which, together with extortionate taxation, destroyed the farmers and helped result in the famine. He concludes that Stalin alone should assume all responsibility for the famine. The last testimony is by a man named Mikhail Petrovich, who dismisses the fact that all foodstuffs were confiscated as 'nonsense' and claims that 'nobody terrorized individual peasants.' In *33-ii. Svidchennia ochevydtsiv*, the perpetrators are locals, some of whom show remorse, while others engage in unrepentant denial.

*O hore, tse zh hosti do mene* (Oh No, The Guests Are Coming To Me, Farenjuk, 1989) features a testimony of an 82-year-old woman named only as Ol'ha Pavlivna. Its title is taken from Tychyna's 1921 poem 'Holod'. As Bohdan Stupka narrates the novel *Ia Romantyka* (Me, the Romantic, 1933) by Mykola Khvylovyi on the radio in the background, Ol'ha starts her story of personal trauma with the arrest of her husband as a 'kulak.' She describes local authorities as 'bandits', 'gang' or 'dogs' who followed orders. Those who were stronger participated and worked hard to demonstrate their loyalty. On their motivation Ol'ha comments tersely: 'If there had been no order, they would not have done it' and 'if some cross themselves, the rest do it as well'. Her story exposes the most populous group of perpetrators of the Holodomor – the followers.

*Pid znakom bidy* (Under the Sign of Misfortune, Krainii, 1990) stands out from other documentaries for two reasons. Firstly, its production team consists of established professionals in the film industry: Iurii Chernichenko wrote the film, while Kost Stepankov narrated it. Chernichenko locates the causes of the famine in the size of the harvest in 1930. In his presentation, the leaders at the top increased grain procurement quotas which, together with 'cruel pressure from the top, obliging zeal in the middle and indifference at the bottom', resulted in the famine. During the famine, as the film explains, tens of thousands of officials were purged from the Party and lost their jobs for sabotaging grain procurement. 'Those who did have conscience and honour were disposed of', Stepankov says in voiceover. He narrates an 'ordinary' episode of grain procurement in 1932 that took place in Otradna in the Tykhoretsk district in Kuban'. The Party cell decided to give collective farmers 800g of grain for labour day instead of 400g. The judge sentenced the whole cell to be executed. When they were headed to their death, the father of the Party cell secretary Kotov, who was himself a Red Army Veteran, addressed his son: 'We fought for the commune and now we will die for the people'. He was executed too. The survivors then tell of brutal murders

committed by the farmers who guarded the fields.

Secondly, *Pid znakom budy* offers a unique perspective on the perpetrators, who are not named but listed alphabetically. The first man starts his story by rationalising collectivization and explaining why it was needed. He asserts that peasants themselves flocked into the collectives without meetings to convince them or without pressure from above. The peasants understood the needs of industrialization, he insists. He admits that ‘life was difficult [then]’ but argues that the famine was not man-made: ‘There was a bad harvest of all agricultural produce.’ In 1932-1933 he was a member of a brigade that searched and confiscated grain. He claims that they used to find bread hidden by the peasants and that ‘a lot of work had been conducted in the villages to convince people to hide bread. How you hid bread and how you supported collectivization defined your political face’ (time code 00:13:30). In Bolshevik language he justifies his participation *for the greater good*. There is no remorse or mention of the starving peasants.

The second perpetrator admits that he knew that the famine was man-made but was afraid to talk with others about it, adding that ‘I felt [the famine] was deliberate damage’. As a member of the Komsomol, he was sent with others to search peasant households. He recalls the most common signs indicating where the starving peasants were hiding bread; usually a woman would stand or lie on the pit with the hidden grain. He used a metal rod to locate it and then remove it all. The last perpetrator, presumably a worker from the city, remembers the hostility of the starving peasants towards plenipotentiaries like him. The peasants openly asked him if he came to see them dying. He claims on one occasion to have walked into a house where a woman was eating a child.

*Ukraiins'ka Nich 33-ho* (Ukrainian Night '33, Heorhienko and Muzhuk, 1994-1998) is a composite of four films: *Strakh* (Fear), *Zhakh* (Horror), *Hilyotyina* (Guillotine) and *Sprava Hrushevs'koho* (The Case of Hrushevs'kyi). The series was produced by the state-owned company *Ukrtelefilm* and broadcast on various TV channels, including national *Novyi Kanal*. The filmmaker's position on the perpetrators is clear: either they were foreign Others from beyond Ukraine; local perpetrators on the margins of the village, devoid of agency; or ordinary people compromised into perpetration.

To develop the first point, filmmaker Muzhuk calls Ukrainians in the leadership of Ukrainian Soviet republic *malorosy*, ‘Little Russians’. ‘Enchanted by brotherly Moscow,’ he explains, ‘they long like mad to put their heads on scaffold, sentencing their duped people to capital punishment’ (*Hilyotyina*, time code 00:57:53). He locates perpetrator agency in Moscow. Together with Postyshev, he claims that 15,000 Communists from Russia were sent to work in Ukraine during the famine, which amounts to 20 in each district – without giving a source, however. The narrator emphasises that these *chuzhi* (alien) people were ‘the occupation corpus that finished

Ukraine'. Muzhuk explains that local perpetrators were the idle in the village who became the vanguard or agrarian proletariat, seizing all power in the village, dekulakizing their neighbours and keeping confiscated possessions. He contends that such people taught their children about 'class sense', which would remain in their genes today. Meanwhile, famine survivors Topchii Stepan and Tretiak Nadia speak of sadists torturing the victims: burning them in ovens, disembowelling them, leaving them to die in the woods, evicting families with young children in the middle of a winter night. They claim that the perpetrators wanted victims to die 'under the fence' to show what could happen to the rest (time code 01:03:58). To sustain this sadistic behaviour, the narrator alleges, Stalin called for an increase in vodka production.

*Ukraiins'ka Nich 33-ho* also showcases compromised perpetrators, including those who fought to survive themselves. Such compromised perpetrators included Soviet youth who were keen to find enemies, even within their own families. Their loyalty to the regime was tested with their readiness 'to throw their father out on the street'. Muzhuk revisits the village of Iares'ky where Dovzhenko filmed his acclaimed *Zemlia*. The chairman of the collective farm there was a local peasant named Makhteï Tarasenko, whom the villagers begged to save their children. He agreed with the appointed Russian official to distribute some food to the starving, but after someone denounced him, he was sentenced to death by the district officials. According to Muzhuk, the Bolsheviks executed almost all its district officials shortly after the famine (time code 00:34:10).

*Chas temriavy* (Time of Darkness, Dudka, 2003) features Ukrainian historian Vasyl' Marochko as its main expert. He states that grain procurement in 1928 was executed by RSChA and the OGPU. Survivor Ol'ha Tsymbaliuk from Velyka Berezka in Khmel'nyts'k oblast' speaks of a search brigade from the village dekulakizing her family and recalls going to the head of the village council who oversaw their eviction. The film uses archival materials, including a letter to Kosior from a perpetrator named Hryhorii Tkachenko, who asserts that Soviet policies were being undermined by the starvation of the peasantry.

In a similar way, *Holodomor. Ukrainina, XX stolittia: Tekhnolohiia henotsydu* (Holodomor. Ukraine in XX century: Technology of the Genocide, Deriugin, 2005), which was commissioned by the charity foundation 'Ukraine-3000', regards perpetrators of the famine on the ground as the alien Other. They are Communists, the DPU and members of tugboat brigades. Nonetheless, one of the experts in the film, Oleh Bozhko, argues that these perpetrators had to rely on local collaboration as party officials and the DPU alone could not locate hidden grain.

*Velykyi Holod* (Great Famine, Ovechkin, 2005), which was broadcast on the 1+1 national channel, frames perpetrators according to the following groups: KNS, tugboat brigades, police and Party plenipotentiaries. Their motivations are varied: some were terrorized into participation, while



others ‘did not have souls and were not human’. The film features an expert medical professional who classifies the perpetrators as mentally healthy people whose consciousness was ‘violated with Communist nonsense’. In fact, the narrator adds, the DPU did not have enough servicemen to do the job. The next generation was thus raised in terror and bred to be obedient.

Eduard Lozovyi, who wrote the screenplay, also examines the role of the field guards who ‘often made choices between the lives of their families and other people. Sometimes they did not have a choice’. He illustrates this point with the story of Kostiantyn Honchar, who let people dig for potatoes in the field. Discovered, he served a year in prison, during which time his family was dekulakized. The narrator concludes that we cannot judge these young people for participating, even though they sentenced their neighbours to a slow death, as their actions were sanctioned by the state. In his concluding words, Lozovyi calls rank-and-file perpetrators – ‘those who killed and those who did not intervene’ – ‘our ancestors too’.

*Khlibna Hilliotyina* (Bread Guillotine, Kobryn, 2008) was also commissioned by 1+1. The film is a monologue of a generic perpetrator of the famine, a fictional recollection of a Twenty-Five Thousander sent to a village to enforce collectivization. He starts his story in 1918 while listening to Lenin speak at a rally and boast that the Bolsheviks realised that bread is the best tool to establish control. The perpetrator explains: ‘I was acting consciously, I was building a new world. Violence was just a means to lead generally dark, backward people, and I had no time to explain, so I had to force people for their own good. I first arrived in Murav’iov’s army in the first Bolshevik offensive against Ukraine.’<sup>542</sup> He elaborates that social stratification was an effective tool to atomise society and justifies such division with the demands of time: ‘I understood that many innocent people would fall victim to the uncompromising battle we are waging. As a human I could empathise, but as a Bolshevik, I did not have such a right. I understood it was not about bread: I went back to a unfinished Civil War which would last for a long time.’ Delivering this monologue, in other words, is an imagined ideological perpetrator.

The story continues in the autumn of 1935 with chronicle footage showing, as the narrator puts it, ‘a playful Marusia Demchenko chatting to Stalin.’ While the narrator claims that ‘new people’ like Demchenko – without honour and independent thinking – lived the rest of their lives trying to forget ‘how it really was,’ Demchenko’s tactile interaction with Stalin does not look like a meeting between a victims and a perpetrator. (Indeed, as I suggest in Chapter One, Demchenko can

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<sup>542</sup> Mykola Kvylovyi described such perpetrators in his notes *Po Barvinkivs'komu raionu* (On Barvinkove District, 1931). According to Kvylovyi, during collectivization, local officials both faced terror and terrorized the peasants who opposed collectivization. They organized the collective burning of icons, dekulakized peasants and confiscated grain during house searches with crowbars for piercing surfaces – activities that become routine during the Holodomor a year later. M. Khvylovyi, ‘Po Barvinkivs'komu raionu. Z bloknotu korrespondenta’ (Kharkiv: DVU, 1930).

be understood as a perpetrator in her village.)

The film's narrator adds that the Bolsheviks used criminals to enforce their policies and established a network of professional informers. Within a year of the Law on Protection of Socialistic Property, the narrator claims, there were 300,000 convictions and 15,000 executions in Soviet Ukraine. This claim is not verified by sources; in fact, historians elsewhere provide numbers for the same period that are considerably lower, about 55,000 and 2,000 respectively.<sup>543</sup> The narrator provides another unverified figure – 200,000 new settlers from Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan who came to live in Ukrainian villages devastated by the famine. Again, archival evidence suggests that the number of settlers were over 100,000 and that most of them returned home within a year. The episode finishes with Demchenko receiving the Land Ownership Act – the first document of its kind in Ukraine – for her collective farm in Starosillia, 'where hundreds died' in the famine.

The narrator also raises the question of a wider complicity that made the famine possible: the participation of teachers in tugboat brigades, the doctors who agreed to hide the facts of starvation in death certificates. He concludes that Ukraine's post-Soviet corruption stems from the mechanism of the Holodomor and from totalitarian ideology in particular. It is ideology, not people, that should be subject to punishment, argue the filmmakers.

*Zhyvi* (The Living, Bukovs'kyi, 2008) is an award-winning film commissioned by the charity foundation 'Ukraine-3000' and financed by private donations. In 2009 Bukovs'kyi received the state award of 'People's Artist' for directing the film.<sup>544</sup> *Zhyvi* is an intertwined story told by several survivors and by entries from the diaries of Welsh journalist Gareth Jones, who witnessed the famine first-hand in 1933. It places the agency of perpetration with a Communist regime that sought to punish Ukrainian peasants and solve the national question. At the same time, the narrator leaves pauses long enough for people to speak for themselves. Victor Yushchenko, the former President of Ukraine, calls the people who facilitated the death of 400-500 people in his village *skoty* (beasts). Bukovs'kyi explains that he included this footage not as homage but for its honesty; here, argues the filmmaker, Yushchenko was 'at his most honest' about the famine.<sup>545</sup>

Some survivors in *Zhyvi* explain the motives of the village and district officials as those simply following the orders from above: 'They were given instructions.' Others call them normal

<sup>543</sup> Yu. Shapoval, 'Povelitelnaia neobkhdimost': god 1932.'

<sup>544</sup> 'Zhyvi. Fil'm Serhiia Bukovs'koho', *UA Pershiy* 20 September 2015. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://1tv.com.ua/news/announces/74209>; 'Tbi pokazhe fil'm Zhyvi Serhiia Bukovs'koho', *BigmirNet* 21 November 2012. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://news.bigmir.net/entertainment/641233-TVi-pokaje-film-Jivi-Serhiya-Bykovskogo>

<sup>545</sup> S. Bukovs'kyi, 'Liudy postupovo zrozumiut, shcho stalosia. Holovne – stroiem nikoho nikudy ne zahaniaty' in *Den* on 17.04.2009 <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/intervyu/sergiy-bukovskiy-lyudi-postupovo-zrozumiyut-shcho-stalosya-golovne-stroiem-nikogo>

people but with ‘the conscience of dogs’: ‘That’s all it takes, a conscience of a dog.’ Ultimately the survivors stress that the perpetrators were *nashi*, locals who committed ‘the greatest sin’ by taking food from the disabled or by refusing to let a child pick discarded grain in the field after the harvest. Jones’s story of the perpetrators is somewhat different: he reports the words of a Party functionary from the Moscow political department who is sent to Ukraine along with 2,700 other ‘best and strongest’ officials (time code 00:39:00). The official declares his intentions to destroy the ‘kulaks’ and the opposition and to ensure advancement of Red Army Veterans on the Party ladder.

A more telling picture of the rank-and-file perpetrators in *Zhyvi* is provided with a chronicle of collective farm brigade leader Ivan Kolesnik, who leaves for a collective farmers’ conference in Kharkiv in March 1933, when the famine reached its peak. He puts on clean clothes, kisses his wife and daughter, puts a *Pravda* newspaper in a small suitcase, and takes a bundle of food from his wife. Outside the house he is cheered by over a dozen of his friends who look as excited as he does. Nobody looks emaciated. These individuals are likely to be perpetrators in the collective farm *Chervonyi Nezamozhnyk* in the Barvinkove district in the Kharkiv oblast’, which delegated Kolesnik to the conference.

*Zhorna* (Stone Mill, Geen, 2008) is a collection of survivor testimonies. The perpetrators are activists who are idle and local drunks. ‘They were lazy and didn’t have much. There was a lot of hatred. Those who had nothing to lose joined the farms at once’ (time code 00:11:07). The film reveals particularly poignant details by way of a ‘report of the Bohodukhiv regional pioneer organization at the fifth district Party conference on the fulfilment of Postyshev’s instructions concerning protection of socialist property and struggle against harvest losses’. Here the role of children in the mechanism of the famine is in evidence: they ‘detected’ the ‘thieves’ in December 1932. The film also explains how brigades of 5-6 perpetrators were split to ‘work’ on 50-70 houses. Those brigades that failed to find bread were dismissed, and new people appointed. One survivor accuses Stalin of organizing the famine (time code 00:58:39), whereas another blames locals, stating that Stalin did not order them to take everything (time code 00:59:16).

*Zakliattia Bezpam’iatstva: Holodomor 1932-1933 rr. na Luhanshchyni* (The Curse of Amnesia: The Holodomor 1932-1933 in Luhans’k Oblast’, Kramarenko, 2009) is another composite of testimonies, produced by Iryna Mahryts’ka. Most of them are vignettes offering insight into survival strategies as well as indelible images of cannibalism. Survivors recount the burial of people alive and whole villages wiped out by starvation. While the survivors reflect on the rank-and-file perpetrators, the narrator concludes that they were same kind of people who take economic advantage of the peasants in Ukraine today: the so-called *Red Barons*.

One survivor calls perpetrators ‘Party people’ sent to the village; they are not local. But all others blame locals. One woman focuses on her neighbours, who seized her family’s cow. She ponders the reasons why this childless couple took the cow from them – a family with five children – and concludes that she can never know.

The film presents other examples of local officials not only refusing to help the starving but purposefully destroying village resources that peasants could use to survive. Some officials tortured peasants in front of their children to reveal where the food is hidden. Ivan Chervenko adds: ‘Activists were from the poor class, and where would you find a clever man from the poor class? If he is clever, even from the poor, he can still become a minister. If he has nothing in his head, he would drink himself to death.’ When the interviewer asks Ivan to confirm that the perpetrators were idle, the interviewer’s assistant exclaims ‘they were drunks’, and Ivan agrees. He gives an example of an idle local man who made a hole in the wall of his house to dispose of rubbish to save him the trouble of walking outside. During collectivization, Ivan claims that this man became a chairman of the collective farm. He confirms that local officials were appointed by the district or KGB who were looking for ‘crueler’ people able to facilitate collectivization.

The narrator argues that in 1932-1933 the Bolshevik leaders confiscated the bread with the help of countless local perpetrators from the idle and marginal elements in society. In such a way, the narrator claims, the leaders provided themselves with an alibi. The narrator cites one of the TsK KP(b)U secretaries, Mendel Khataievich, who instructed party brigades to take grain by all possible means to teach Ukrainian villages the nature of Bolshevik decisiveness: ‘Better do more than less, and Party and Stalin is behind you.’ Almost all secretaries of the district Party committees were replaced with non-Ukrainians in January 1933.

The short documentary *Holod 33 roku. Motoroshnyi fil'm pro trahediiu Ukrainis'koho narodu '19.33'* (1933 Hunger. A Poignant Film About the Tragedy of Ukrainian people ‘19.33,’ Shevchenko, 2016) features personal stories of the survivors with commentary by historians Volodymyr Serhiichuk and Larysa Didkovs’ka. This film is accessible online<sup>546</sup> and is used at schools and colleges during lessons on the Holodomor.<sup>547</sup> The perpetrators’ depiction follows *Prokliattia Bezpam'iatstva*: they are poor peasants who seized the opportunities that the new regime

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<sup>546</sup> ‘Holod 33 roku. Motoroshnyi fil'm pro trahediiu ukrainis'koho narodu “19.33”’, *24Kanal* 26 November 2016. Accessed on 1 October 2017:

[https://24tv.ua/golod\\_33\\_roku\\_motoroshniy\\_film\\_pro\\_tragediyu\\_ukrayinskogo\\_narodu\\_1933\\_n753435](https://24tv.ua/golod_33_roku_motoroshniy_film_pro_tragediyu_ukrayinskogo_narodu_1933_n753435); ‘Holod 33 roku. Motoroshnyi fil'm pro trahediiu ukrainis'koho narodu “19.33”’, *GloriaTV* 25 November 2017. Accessed on 01.12.2017: <https://gloria.tv/video/cREux1BsA3ec1eqVTEctfwuQH>

<sup>547</sup> ‘Holodomor. My pam'iataiemo!’, *VP NUBiP Ukrainy ‘Zalishchyts’kyi ahrarnyi koledzh im. Ie. Khraplyvoho’* 21.12.2013. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://zkol.org.ua/index.php/2013-12-21-10-42-13/vikhovni-zakhodi/882-holodomor-my-pam-iataiemo>

offered. Such films offer survivor testimonies as well as historians' commentary to convey the narrative of the Holodomor as genocide organised along ethnic lines. But survivor testimonies at times deviate from this narrative. In particular, Maria Kornienko has reservations about naming the local perpetrators because their children still live in the same village. Eventually she agrees and names all three perpetrators who searched her house and took away even potato peels. The narrator concludes: they were not 'ephemeral Communists.' They were neighbours who, after the famine, explained their participation by their wanting to survive, to which Maria rhetorically, 'Did she wish to survive as well?'

### ***Conclusion***

In January 2017 Ukraine's Minister of Culture, Ievhen Nyshchuk, announced a screenwriting competition for another feature film on the Holodomor, in which he likened local perpetrators to *mankurty* – people without nationality or identity who forget from whence they come.<sup>548</sup> His reduction is partly due to the feature films discussed above, which present conflicted views of the perpetrators. In Soviet films, they are ideological perpetrators; in some post-Soviet films, they are sadists and the prosopographical Other; in other post-Soviet films, they are ordinary people. Indeed, the Soviet feature films on collectivization largely portray activists on the ground as uncompromising Communists or Komsomols trying to change the village for the better. In *Zemlia* and *Podnitaia Tselina* they effectively dehumanise the 'kulaks' before deporting them. Notably, most of the Soviet-era films foreground ideological perpetrators who eventually disappear from the scene, leaving follower perpetrators to maintain the collective farm system. *Vavylon XX*, on the other hand, demonstrates that this system divides villages, leaving little room for bystanders, and posits, not without controversy, that collectivization failed to be a movement from below. The post-Soviet

feature films produced after 1991, meanwhile, tend to present perpetrators without individuality. The nameless Komsomols and the sadists in *Holod-33*, like the countless soldiers in *Bitter Harvest*, are not sufficient to explain how the starvation of millions of victims in 1932-33 was facilitated on the ground. Only in *Povodyr* does the viewer learn of the decisions that led to the famine, with the Red Army assisting the DPU in grain procurement and combatting 'kulak sabotage' and local collaboration.

In the realm of Soviet documentary film,

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<sup>548</sup> 'Uriad bere na sebe vidpovidal'nist' na uves' svit zaiavyty: Holodomor v Ukraini 1932-33 rokiv buv henotsydom proty ukraiins'koho narodu, – Ievhen Nyshchuk', *Uriadovyi Portal. Iedynyi veb-portal orhaniv vykonavchoii vlady Ukrainy* 19.01.2018. Accessed on 21 January 2018: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/ua/news/uryad-bere-na-sebe-vidpovidalnist-na-uves-svit-zayaviti-golodomor-v-ukrayini-1932-33-rokiv-buv-genocidom-proti-ukrayinskogo-narodu-yevgen-nishuk>

activists are hard-working, enthusiastic people ready to change their lives for better. They work for the greater good, welcome and support state policies. Or at least they seem so. In *Enthuiazm. Simfoniia Donbassa*, a close up of a young beautiful girl working in the field is replaced with a picture of her supposedly from behind. These pictures are of different women entirely. Documentaries produced in the Ukrainian diaspora, by contrast, establish a format that later Ukrainian films will follow: a composite story illustrated with Soviet chronicle or feature film footage and supported by survivors testimonies and historian input, often provided without references. In the main, they also reproduce the image of the perpetrator as nameless, ruthless and ideological figure – or as an alien Other, as demonstrated by Cold War films like *Harvest of Despair*, which place the agency of perpetration with thousands of Communists and Russians.

While documentaries like *Ukraiins'ka Nich 33-ho* produced between 1989-1994 follow the nationalist trope of the Holodomor perpetrator as a savage, aberrant and compromised Other devoid of agency, others let retired local perpetrators speak for themselves. In *33-ii. Svidchennia ochevydtsiv* they deny the famine and show no remorse, not unlike the perpetrators of mass violence in Indonesia in Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*. Meanwhile the former members of the search brigade in *Pid znakom bidy* try to make sense of the violence, with one of the perpetrators accepting the fact that they were to blame. The interview of the repressed official's daughter in Iares'ky presents an excellent example of post-memory of the traumatic past, whereas the survivor in *O hore, tse zh hosti do mene* raises the question of the followers being the main group of perpetrators on the ground.

The more nationalist trope is maintained in the documentaries of mid 2000s and after: the perpetrators were DPU servicemen, Communists from Russia, criminals and compromised locals. Some of these films were commissioned by the charity 'Ukraine-3000,' closely associated with former President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, who lobbied for international recognition of the Holodomor as genocide. Survivor testimonies included in the films, however, mention mass participation of the locals. We see local perpetrators – ordinary people like Demchenko in *Khlibna Hilliotyna* and Kolesnik in *Zhyvi* – but they do not speak. They are represented.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators at National Museum ‘Holodomor Victims Memorial’**

National Museum ‘Holodomor Victims Memorial’ is the largest institution of its kind in Ukraine, dedicated to the victims of the 1932-33 famine as well as to the education of the public about it. Like the majority of Ukrainian museums it is state-run and reports to the Ministry of Culture. Built on the slope of a park in central Kyiv, its memorial part was opened by the then president of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko in 2008. In July 2015 the memorial received its current name: National Museum ‘Holodomor Victims Memorial.’ Its museum section is still to be built and is currently located inside the memorial part. Having acquired its current national status not long ago it therefore holds a monopoly in Ukraine over institutionalised remembrance of the Holodomor in Ukraine. Therefore, the museum’s importance in memory politics in today’s Ukraine would be difficult to overestimate. This chapter will explore how the perpetrators of the famine fit in within the museum’s mission, site and narrative – through current and temporary exhibits and other activities, before drawing conclusion on the museum’s role in cultural memory of the famine’s perpetrators.

Shortly before the museum received its current name, Kyrylenko, Ukraine’s minister of culture at the time, appointed a new director of the museum and declared that one of the key aims of the new management is to ensure general recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people, by all visitors of the museum in particular. His words define the vector for the museum’s narrative precisely: ‘This museum is responsible for enforcing the policy of national memory. And all its visitors must leave the museum with a clear understanding that the events of 1932-1933 were a deliberate destruction of Ukrainian people.’<sup>549</sup> This aim is further elaborated by the museum’s development objective for 2015-2020: ‘the museum strives to become a world-class institution and an influential agency in forming civil society in Ukraine. Through research, education and cultural activity the museum will inform society about the act of genocide of the Ukrainian people and honour everybody who perished or was not born as a result of the tragedy. The museum will also help consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, its historical consciousness and culture as well as the accumulation of regional and local history research of the Holodomor. All this will help us to understand this tragedy better and to develop necessary skills to

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<sup>549</sup> ‘Olesiu Stasiuk pryznacheno novym dyrektorom Natsional’noho muzeiu “Memorial pam’iati zhertv Holodomoriv v Ukraini”’, *Ministerstvo Kul’tury Ukrainy* 26 March 2015. Accessed on 01 October 2017: [http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art\\_id=244921364&cat\\_id=244913751](http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art_id=244921364&cat_id=244913751)

prevent similar crimes taking place in the future.<sup>550</sup> The perpetrators of the famine, therefore, ought to be interpreted as perpetrators of the genocide.

The museum of the Holodomor could not be attached to a central location, nor to a particular site that speaks for itself like the famous memorials of Hiroshima or the Normandy beaches. Neither are there sites specifically associated with the Holodomor perpetrators like the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site, the Topography of Terror and Wewelsburg District Museum with the Final Solution. Neither can the museum silently remind us of the perpetrators like the memorials of Buchenwald and Auschwitz through its premises or exhibits. It is not here that the famine took place, but its location is important. *The site* is dramatic and unusual. The memorial complex itself is deeply metaphorical beyond the symbolism imbued by its designers. The artist Andrii Haidamaka, the architect Iurii Kovaliov and sculptors Mykola Obeziuk and Petro Drozdovs'kyi tried to tell the story of the famine in the facade and sculptures in the park near the museum.<sup>551</sup> Nestled inside a hill in the park of Glory (Park Slavy) over the river Dnipro, its location is rather telling of the complicated history of Ukraine. On one side the museum borders a Soviet monument of Eternal Glory to the soldiers fallen during the Great Patriotic War,<sup>552</sup> while on the other side it borders the Orthodox church of the Saviour at Berestove. This church was a former residence of Kyivan Rus princes and hosts a tomb of Monomakh dynasty, including that of Iurii Dolgorukii who founded Moscow. Therefore, while the Red Army and the Holodomor sites mark the events that took millions of lives, the church emphasises by its presence the Russian influence throughout the history of Ukraine.

An alley leading to the museum from the street through the park of Glory starts with two stone angels – the solemn guardians of the souls of the victims. The alley is paved with black cobble stones which symbolise the black fertile earth of the Ukrainian countryside, also serving as a tilled soil of memory. It also reminds visitors that a devastating famine on the fertile Ukrainian soil is an absurdity. While some symbols might not be obvious to the onlooker, the others are telling. In the beginning of the path one meets a life-size sculpture of a young, emaciated girl holding five ears of wheat. She embodies the famine's youngest and most vulnerable victims. The number of ears is not accidental – the law on the theft of socialistic property, passed in 1932 was widely referred to as 'The law of Five Ears of Wheat.'

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<sup>550</sup> 'Kontsepsiia rozvytku muzeiu', *Memorial zhertv Holodomoru* 23 September 2015. Accessed on 01 April 2016: <http://memorialholodomor.org.ua/uk/aboutthemuseum/2015-09-23-06-07-3>

<sup>551</sup> 'Istoriia Natsional'noho muzeiu "Memorial zhertv Holodomoru"' *Memorial zhertv Holodomoru*. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://memorialholodomor.org.ua/>

<sup>552</sup> The term 'Great Patriotic War' refers to the period in the Second World War between 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 and 9<sup>th</sup> May 1945 used in Soviet historiography. The starting date of 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 marked the German Army crossing the border of then Soviet Union.



At the end of the alley one faces a white-washed 30 meter high bell-tower in the shape of a candle with an intricate gilded flame and steps down to the museum underneath it. The bell tower also features glass crosses of different sizes symbolising the victims – larger crosses for the adult souls and smaller for the children. At the base of the bell there are four black crosses with lead storks trying to fly away. The birds symbolise life and peace in Ukrainian folklore and here in the museum they are intended to mean the rebirth of the Ukrainian people. Adorning the pathways leading to the museum are milling stones. During the famine they were broken by the local officials to prevent peasants from milling grain at home. Here they have also acquired a second meaning – the mills of history. On the first Saturday in November, the official day of the Holodomor commemoration in Ukraine, almost all surfaces around the entrance and the slopes of the hill on its right side are covered by candles.

Inside the museum that serves as a metaphorical tomb to the victims, there is a small room which hosts themed collections of posters occasionally exhibited for a limited amount of time and an interactive audio screen explaining the posters in Ukrainian and in English. After the poster room, the route follows into the Hall of Memory – a large round room underneath the tower with many volumes of the Book of Memory with the names of the victims, current exhibitions and a permanent ethnographic collection in the room. Finally, visitors are reminded of the Holodomor presence: there is a bell they can ring in memory of the victims – similar to the one at the Hiroshima memorial complex.

The perpetrators are absent spatially. They are implied to be the agency behind the removal of provisions from the country with the black fertile soil or who prevented children eating like the one epitomised by the sculpture of the emaciated girl; their actions resulted in the colossal number of victims in many volumes of the Book of Memory. If not spatially, how is their role explained in the narrative?

The museum's *narrative* was clearly defined by Ukraine's minister of culture in 2015 as the story of a genocide against the Ukrainian people. As presented in the texts in the memory hall, the narrative identifies the victims and the aggressors – the famine is the result of the Communist policies designed by Stalin and his close associates. Had Ukrainians defended their own state after the revolution in 1917, the famine would not have occurred. The regime targeted Ukrainian peasants and the current citizens of Ukraine are the offspring of the survivors or those who were murdered, deported or repressed. Ukrainian peasants were not passive victims in the years preceding the famine – they actively resisted collectivization but their resistance was brutally suppressed. Under current circumstances, the tie between the survivors and their descendants is not only personal and historical but political, it bonds all Ukrainians to each other as survivors of a

catastrophe who are still under threat in their country. Now that Ukraine is independent, the memory of the victims should be preserved and their experience retold. The Ukrainian state is the appropriate entity to convey the memory of the famine in the teleological narrative of the victimhood and resistance in the struggle of the Ukrainian people for independence and nation-building. Such narrative can be seen as reductive, based along ethnic lines and dichotomy of interpretation of the past. This is further revealed by close reading of the story provided in the exhibition and online, events organised by the museum and publicity created by these events. While locating an aggressor at the top level is rather straightforward – Stalin and his functionaries in the Kremlin.

When people on the ground are mentioned in the posters and electronic chronicle inside the museums, they are reduced to the poor stratum of the village, Communists from the cities and security services devoid of the agency. Alien to the village, they organised the famine-genocide against the Ukrainians, took all the grain for export and kept the peasants under control. In this way the existing narrative legitimises the discourse of anonymous perpetration on the middle and lower level. So does one leave the museum with a sense of justice when none of the rank-and-file perpetrators have been put on trial since Ukraine became independent, or with a clear understanding of *how* this famine was possible on the ground? The answer is likely to be negative.

The absence of the rank-and-file perpetrators possibly lies in seeking to avoid controversy in the memorial devoted to the victims. Moreover, as with Holocaust memorials in general, there is ‘a universal willingness to commemorate suffering experienced rather than suffering caused,’<sup>553</sup> so including local participation in the narrative could challenge its current premises and prove to be rather sensitive for public discussion. It might also stem from the persistent lack of detailed and nuanced approach in assessment of the past, viewing it still in black and white while appealing to collective suffering. Politicians as well as the general public are still debating who should be designated official heroes and villains<sup>554</sup> as part of the dichotomy in this reductive reading of the past. Yet explaining why people participated in the Holodomor by using the latest research on the perpetrators of mass violence, genocides and crimes against humanity might offer exactly what the museum is trying to achieve – a better understanding so that similar crimes do not take place in the future. Reducing the lower rank perpetrators to outcasts, outsiders or the alien Other is not supported by the latest research, nor does it encourage further studies or a better understanding of the genocide.

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<sup>553</sup> S. Milton, cited in E. T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), p. 199.

<sup>554</sup> See David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains. Creating national history in contemporary Ukraine* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2008); C. J. Levy, ‘Hero of Ukraine’s Splits Nation, Inside and Out,’ *New York Times*, 1 March 2010.

The other challenge for better understanding of the Holodomor in the current narrative is its reliance on the corpora of oral memory and research of rather limited number of historians. The representation of the famine is intrinsically tied with the memory of those who experienced the past, travelled to that foreign country<sup>555</sup> and shared their impressions or post-memory. It also uses the memory of those who experienced the later 1946-1947 famine, like the artist Haidamaka, one of the museum's designers. Thus, this collective narrative is comprised of impressions or a perception<sup>556</sup> of the foreign land, not what that land actually was, even if some of the survivors who participated in the organization of the exhibition or their memories were used as sources. Naturally, visitors might adopt this narrative depending on how effective the message is transmitted, especially if they did not have any, or only limited, prior knowledge of the event. Based on the perceptions offered they can also construct or revise their impression of the Ukrainian history and the state.

A genocidal narrative does not have to be reductive, omissive nor ethnocentric. Neither are its artefacts required to be authentic, but conceptual and thought-provoking.<sup>557</sup> The currently used identification with the victims method<sup>558</sup> in the museum through the ethnographic objects is problematic as more and more visitors might not identify with the life of the victims – the peasants. Today two thirds of Ukraine's population is urban. Research shows that if children are not engaged during museum visits, they do not necessarily visit museums as adults; in particular, if the museum visits are put in place of their lectures on the subject in what school students refer to as 'mausoleum-museums.'<sup>559</sup> Moreover, the museum site, rich with Ukrainian symbolism, tells an independently visiting foreigner less than it does to the Ukrainian one. How will the gap in time and context will be bridged when the distance between firsthand experience and subsequent visitors is only going to increase over time? While symbolism can be explained during a guided tour,<sup>560</sup> with audio guides in several languages already adopted in some of the Ukrainian museums, adopting a dialogue rather than projecting an insulated message might be a possible option.

The state narrative which presents an independent nation-state Ukraine as the ultimate answer to the Holodomor-genocide can still argue in favour of any human life as the highest value and against totalitarian regimes. Genocidal and universalist narratives are not mutually exclusive,

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<sup>555</sup> The reference to the past as a foreign country was made by L. P. Hartley in his work *The Go-Between* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2004).

<sup>556</sup> O. Bartov, Chambers of Horror in *Israel Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 70.

<sup>557</sup> D. Rank, Na vidkryttia museiu Polin u Warshavi, *Ukraina Moderna* 04 December 2014.

<sup>558</sup> J. K. Ochsner, Understanding the Holocaust Through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in *Journal of Architectural Education* 48.4 (1995), pp. 240–249.

<sup>559</sup> L. Norris, Who Are Museums For? in *History News*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn 2010), p. 8.

<sup>560</sup> The following examples are drawn from almost 95 reviews left by the museum's visitors: 'National Museum "The Memorial in Commemoration of Famines" Victims', *Tripadvisor*. Accessed on 1 April 2016: [https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g294474-d3229223-Reviews-National\\_Museum\\_The\\_Memorial\\_in\\_Commemoration\\_of\\_Famines\\_Victims-Kiev.html](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g294474-d3229223-Reviews-National_Museum_The_Memorial_in_Commemoration_of_Famines_Victims-Kiev.html).

though they correspond to the social and intellectual environment in which they tend to be disseminated.<sup>561</sup> Both narratives, Bartov argues, omit such aspects of the mass killing as the political and socio-economic conditions that acted as major factors in generating and perpetuating the killing of millions. Narratives tend to evolve around emotion and mourning, but can still encourage questions and analysis.

This is where its recent exhibits and publicity activities play an important role. In May 2016 it held a temporary exhibition of elaborately embroidered shirts, called *vyshyvanky*, worn in rural Ukraine and exchanged for food during the Famine. The exhibition ‘Vyshyvanka Worth of Life,’<sup>562</sup> featured authentic shirts from private and institutional collections and provided an explanation of how these personal items were exchanged for food by the starving. The power of the shirts as artefacts comes in part from their ordinariness and contemporariness. They are still fashionable and are easily readable as personal items. They look very similar to the shirts worn in Ukraine today. The similarity between the old shirts and the ones worn on the streets of Kyiv today can create a sense of the reality of the victims’ despair, as well as identification with them.

The museum screened a documentary entitled ‘National Heritage’ on the *vyshyvanky*, but the exhibition did not elaborate on the fate of the owners of the shirts. One might ask *how* these shirts were preserved – were these exact garments exchanged for bread by the starving peasants and, if so, who preserved them until they were purchased by the museum or collectors? The descendants of the bystanders or the perpetrators? Moreover, peasants’ personal jewellery such as rings, earrings and crosses can be displayed together with the artefacts from TORHZIN – a state network of stores in 1931-1936 that purchased gold, silver and foreign currency from the Soviet population at considerably lower prices in exchange for foodstuffs. An exhibition on the chain’s activity in Chernigiv oblast’ was presented at the oblast’ historical museum in winter 2016 and featured many authentic artefacts, including jewellery and store equipment.<sup>563</sup> Thus the most ordinary personal items in the museum can be the most powerful in overcoming the sense of otherness, especially if they are put in the context of an understandable human struggle for survival.

Adopting new approaches like identification by the museum is not incidental. Over the last year the museum’s management has been changing the museum dramatically: it became vocal and visible. Its staff participates in international exchange programmes, takes part in programmes on

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<sup>561</sup> Bartov, *Chambers of Horror*, p. 82.

<sup>562</sup> ‘U Kyievi v muzeii Holodomoru vidkryly vystavku “Vyshyvanka vartistiu v zhyttia”’, *Radio Svoboda* 18 May 2016. Accessed on 15 May 2018: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/27743219.html>

<sup>563</sup> ‘Pohrabuvannia po-radians’komu (video): U istorychnomu muzeii vpershe na postradians’komu prostori rozkazaly pro zdyrnytsvo “Torhzinu”’, *Gorod. Portal Chernigova* 3 February 2016. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://www.gorod.cn.ua/news/foto-i-video/69991-pograbuvannja-po-radjanskomu-video.html>; ‘“Pohrabuvannia po-radians’komu” v istorychnomu muzeii’, *Svoboda FM* 2 February 2016. Accessed on 1 October 2017: <http://newvv.net/culture/Culture/243781.html>

TV, radio and online, their presence in social media is towering<sup>564</sup> and their plans for the future are even more ambitious. The museum's current curator, Olesia Stasiuk, puts a lot of effort and enthusiasm in to her daily work by organising exhibitions, seminars, workshops, themed lectures and other events. The museum's media work is outstanding, their ongoing projects like collecting data and family photographs of the victims and the survivors could only be praised. Many reviews left online and in the museum suggest that the museum's representation of the past is what the public expects to experience. Overall, the museum meets memory expectations of the overwhelming majority of visitors.<sup>565</sup>

Some of the museum's exhibits, however, lack accuracy which, in turn, compromises the efforts of the museum in pursuing their agenda. One such instance is the exhibit of the archival documents on re-settlement of over 100,000 peasants from Russia and Belarus in Ukraine after the famine in May 2015.<sup>566</sup> While the museum's researchers commented on this state-organised migration impacting the events in east and south Ukraine,<sup>567</sup> Ukrainian historians from the Institute of History at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine immediately pointed this out as a misleading interpretation of archival documents as later documents demonstrate that most settlers returned to Russia and Belarus.<sup>568</sup> Another crucial point made by the Institute's historians was that almost the same number of settlers to the east and south Ukraine came from the northern oblast's of Ukraine.<sup>569</sup> The other recent instance of inaccurate facts is the data on the demographic loss in the exhibit '163. Art for the Memory' by the artist Rostyslav Bortnyk in September 2016<sup>570</sup>, that in 2017 toured in other cities in Ukraine. The number '163' is the amount of grains in the five ears of wheat for which, according to Bortnyk, people were shot or sentenced to 10 years in camps, whereas the number of victims he used was provided by the museum.<sup>571</sup> The Institute of

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<sup>564</sup> For instance, there are two webpages of the museum on one social network alone, both last accessed on 01.04.2016: <https://www.facebook.com/Національний-музей-Меморіал-жертв-Голодомору-853746961369758/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Holodomor-Famine-Museum-Kyiv-Ukraine/547255545309987>

<sup>565</sup> 'Книга vidhukiv', *Memorial zhertv Holodomoru*. Accessed on 1 April 2016: <http://memorialholodomor.org.ua/uk/visitors/visitors-books>

<sup>566</sup> Ievheniia Oliinyk, 'Ukraiintsi pislia Holodomoru maly zakupyty dlia rosiian-pereselentsiv patefony – istoryk', *Radio Svoboda* 15 May 2015. Accessed on 1 July 2018: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27018943.html>

<sup>567</sup> 'U muzeii Holodomoru pokazaly dokumenty pro zaselennia Donbasu rosiianamy v 1930-ti', *ZN.UA* 15 May 2015. Accessed on 1 September 2017: [https://dt.ua/UKRAINE/u-muzeyi-golodomoru-pokazali-dokumenti-pro-zaselennya-donbasu-rosiyanami-v-1930-ti-172819\\_.html](https://dt.ua/UKRAINE/u-muzeyi-golodomoru-pokazali-dokumenti-pro-zaselennya-donbasu-rosiyanami-v-1930-ti-172819_.html)

<sup>568</sup> A. Zanuda, S. Dorosh, 'Rozkrytiia arkhiviv: iak pislia Holodomoru na Donbas pereselialy rosiian', *BBC News Ukraina* 2 June 2015. Accessed on 1 April 2016: [http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/society/2015/06/150522\\_holodomor\\_donbass\\_russia\\_az](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/society/2015/06/150522_holodomor_donbass_russia_az)

<sup>569</sup> H. Iefimenko, 'Naselennia Donbasu – tse perevazhno nashchadky rosiian, pryvezennykh eshelonamy v 1933-1934 rr. pislia Holodomoru?' *Likbez. Istorychnyi front* 23 April 2015. Accessed on 1 September 2017: [http://likbez.org.ua/ua/russian\\_farmers\\_1933-34.html](http://likbez.org.ua/ua/russian_farmers_1933-34.html)

<sup>570</sup> I. Bortnyk, '163. Mystetstvo zarady pam'iaty', *163*. Accessed on 1 September 2017: <http://163.com.ua/>

<sup>571</sup> The artist's comments: <http://intb.te.ua/2017/03/оригінальну-виставку-присвячену-жер/> last accessed 01.09.2017

Demography at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has repeatedly addressed the ongoing use by the museum of unverified numbers of the victims,<sup>572</sup> and this dispute remains unresolved.

### ***Conclusion***

The museum 'Holodomor Victims Memorial' is a national institution where foreign dignitaries are taken as well as school trips take place. To use Foucauldian analytic to read museums as texts,<sup>573</sup> any museum is a part of discourse formation. Hence the museum responds to the discourse by displacing or effacing perpetrators in the museum's current narrative. This goes inline with the schematic narrative template of victimhood which prevails in the museums in the former Soviet states.<sup>574</sup> Indeed, reducing victims and perpetrators to ethnic groups in the case of the Holodomor risks turning such narrative nationalistic, as pointed out by Wersch: 'Those who insist only on their own memories of the past are condemning the rest of us to avoid it.'<sup>575</sup>

The fundamental moral dilemma for the museum would be to accept the fact that human beings of any race or nationality are capable of everything under certain circumstances. The Holodomor was devastating and this devastation will be felt if visitors can understand how it was possible on the ground. In the last years this museum has demonstrated its ability not only to preserve memory of the famine and raise awareness of it, but also construct collective memory of the past and including universalist understanding of the Holodomor and the latest scholarship in this work might be a possible option.

Similar to the sites of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, the difficulty with explaining the mechanism of the Holodomor lies in conveying the actuality that the perpetrators were in the majority ordinary men and women. Welzer argues that they should be placed within the context in which normality altered to an extent that they perceived themselves as acting in the best interests of the state. So most did not think of themselves as perpetrators, even after the war.<sup>576</sup> Identification with victims ultimately reassures the audience, somewhat ambitiously, of their ontological innocence. This reassurance is unwarranted, according to Ernst van Alphen, and unhelpful in education and preventing genocides and mass killing in future. He suggests partial and temporary

<sup>572</sup> 'Demografy nazvaly tochno chyslo vtrat naselennia Ukraïny pid chas Holodomoru v 1930-kh rokakh', *UNIАН* 23 November 2017. Accessed on 1 February 2018: <https://www.unian.ua/society/2259489-demografi-nazvali-tochne-chislo-vtrat-naselennya-ukrajini-pid-chas-golodomoru-v-1930-h-rokah.html> last accessed 01.09.2017

<sup>573</sup> C. Wright, 'Myth, Rhetoric and Human Tragedy in Lithuanian Museums and Sites of Memory,' *Acta Turistica*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Celebrating 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (December 2013), pp. 191-209.

<sup>574</sup> E. Ivanova, 'Changes in Collective Memory: The Schematic Narrative Template of Victimhood in Kharkiv Museums,' *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Sociocultural Perspectives on Museums Part 1 (Winter, 2003), p. 18.

<sup>575</sup> S. Crane, 'Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,' *History and Theory*, vol. 36, No 4, (Dec. 1997), p. 44.

<sup>576</sup> Quoted in C. Pearce, 'The Role of German Perpetrator Sites in Teaching and Confronting the Nazi Past', *Memorialization in Germany since 1945* ed. B. Niven and C.Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 169.

identification with the perpetrators to make ‘one aware of the ease with which one can slide into a measure of complicity.’<sup>577</sup>

Perhaps the prime example is the House of the Wannsee Conference<sup>578</sup> near Berlin where senior government officials of Nazi Germany and Schutzstaffel (SS) leaders met to discuss the Final Solution and its implementation on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1942. A possible equivalent in the Holodomor’s history is the old building of Kharkiv opera house (now the building of Kharkiv oblast’ Philharmony), where the III KP(b)U conference on grain procurement took place in July 1932. Of course, neither the meeting in Wannsee, nor the conference in Kharkiv were the starting point of the catastrophes that were to unfold. The memorial near Berlin elaborates on the evidence showing the knowledge (and tacit approval) by the senior officials of discrimination of the Jews. Many published collections of the archival documents on the Holodomor show similar, if not better, awareness of the already existing devastation and violence in the countryside by the republican officials in 1932. Yet some district officials found the courage to criticise the quotas leveraged to them in Moscow in front of Molotov and Kaganovich in July 1932. This could be pointed to as alternatives for action the perpetrators on the ground could resort to, rather than explaining their compliance by fear of repression.

The methods in the Wannsee Memorial focus on independent inquiry rather than the museum’s interpretation of the events and its perpetrators. The school classes research a specific theme and then deliver a presentation on their finds – an approach different to a lecture on ‘how it really was.’ Moreover, the House of the Wannsee Conference offers seminars aimed at professional groups like the Bundeswehr or medics that learn how people of their profession responded to the inhumane policies of the Third Reich like mass shootings of the Jews or euthanasia programme.<sup>579</sup> Likewise, the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine could learn how the soldiers of the armed forces at the time participated in the logistics of the famine – rounding up peasants, summary executions, guarding the supplies etc. and consider the scope for action while not at the time of war. The medics, in turn, can examine how the cause of death was forged in death certificates. Like in the first chapter of this work, the approach in the House of the Wannsee Memorial is to analyse one perpetrator group or various roles to establish how perpetrators behaved.

The pedagogical value of including ordinary people as perpetrators in the narrative comes from the principle Adorno’s adage that ‘the roots of perpetration lie with the persecutors, not the

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<sup>577</sup> E. van Alphen, ‘Playing the Holocaust’ in *Mirroring Evil*, ed. N. L. Kleeblatt (New York: The Jewish Museum and Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>578</sup> ‘Educational Work in the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site’, *House of the Wannsee Conference. Memorial and Educational Site*. Accessed on 1 October 2017: [https://www.ghwk.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf-wannsee/bildung/faltblatt-engl.pdf](https://www.ghwk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-wannsee/bildung/faltblatt-engl.pdf)

<sup>579</sup> Pearce, ‘The Role of German Perpetrator Sites...’, p. 172.

persecuted.<sup>580</sup> Including personal stories of field guards, chairmen of the farms and collective farmers that proceeded with orders and led ordinary lives after the famine will individualise them; juxtaposing their stories with a number of victims in their respective villages would stress the magnitude of their actions: such an approach will help to avoid reductiveness in explaining the motivation of the perpetrators or how the famine was possible by drawing attention to perpetrators belonging to society, no matter how difficult it is to accept. Placing them within the context of other examples of mass killing could prevent us from dismissing them as deviant elements of Ukrainian society or the Other. It is the evidence of ordinary people capable of starving their neighbours to death, albeit on someone else's orders, that might have a large impact and stimulate reflection.

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid, p. 175.



## Conclusion

Who were the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor, and how is their participation represented in cultural memory? These are the central questions that I sought to answer by using a criminological framework in my examination of archival texts, sources of oral memory, and cultural works. My approach has been interdisciplinary: firstly, I identified the perpetrators by institutional affiliation and explicated located perpetration more closely by way of two case studies, showing how the rank-and-file perpetrators of the famine were predominantly ordinary Ukrainian men and women who, under certain circumstances, facilitated the famine for a variety of rather banal motives.

I then contrasted these findings against the largely prosopographical representations of the perpetrators in the nationalist and Soviet narratives, which predominate in most cultural texts created after the famine. Yekelchik argues that a new historical memory in Ukraine ‘relied on the tropes inherited from the Soviet discourse of national identity’.<sup>581</sup> Indeed, dogmatic blueprints of Socialist Realism and ethnic nationalism – which Grabowicz likens to ‘national realism’<sup>582</sup> – can be found in the most recent cultural works oriented on the event of the famine. I have analysed the perpetrators of the famine in a deconstructive vein similar to the one employed in a study of Soviet texts by Katerina Clark.<sup>583</sup> If in Soviet literary works related to collectivisation and the famine, activists are fighting for the socialist cause under the tutelage of more experienced Communists, in the nationalist narrative they are villains who are ‘influenced’ by the Other.

The constituent components of the nationalist narrative, according to Tsvetan Todorov, adopt the theme of good and evil<sup>584</sup>, a dichotomy observed in the discussion of what I term embraced and displaced agency. Todorov also adds to this mix the division between us and them, which in this case manifests itself either as Soviet versus ‘kulak’ or as Ukrainian versus foreign Other. The ethnicisation evident in the latter can be found in the majority of uses and expressions of traumatic collective memory. What is Ukrainian is romanticised: the pre-modern Ukrainian village, for example, is celebrated for its strong social bonds and high moral values. This conventional reduction inevitably affects the quality of the texts themselves, as such schematic representations leave little room for the development of complex human characters as ‘the good and the evil flow from the same source’. As Todorov observes, ‘in the world’s best narratives they are not neatly

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<sup>581</sup> S. Yekelchik, ‘National Heroes for a New Ukraine: Merging the Vocabularies of the Diaspora, Revolution, and Mass Culture,’ *Ab Imperio*, 3/2015, p. 99.

<sup>582</sup> Hryhorii Hrabovych, ‘U poshukakh velykoi literatury,’ *Do istorii Ukrainiskoi literatury* (Kyiv, 2003), pp. 535-574.

<sup>583</sup> Using this analytical approach to nationalist narrative is suggested by Yekelchik in ‘National Heroes for a New Ukraine ...’, p. 108.

<sup>584</sup> T. Todorov, *Memory as a Remedy for Evil* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), p. 8.

divided.<sup>585</sup>

At the same time, I seek to do more than deconstruct Soviet and nationalist narratives in my analysis of the perpetrators of the Holodomor in cultural memory. What I term dispersed agency in the texts by dissident writers is evidence of a concerted attempt to understand the perpetrators and their actions from social psychological and historical perspectives. As Adorno argues in the case of the Holocaust – and Grossman repeatedly draws parallels between the Holocaust and the Holodomor – the old power structures of the *Kaiserreich*, after being toppled, failed to prepare people for democracy.<sup>586</sup> Authoritarian structures fill such voids. Taught to obey orders in the parochial patriarchal society, people accommodate themselves and at times prostrate themselves before authorities. Such accommodation and prostration is at the centre of the novels by Dimarov, Grossman and Hutsalo, which feature all the types of perpetrators whom Alette Smeulers enumerates in her typology.

Ideological perpetrators loom large in cultural memory, but only a few could be found in archival sources, including some of the accused in Orikhiv's case. Adorno calls them 'manipulative characters' who treat others as an amorphous mass.<sup>587</sup> Such perpetrators are unable to feel and long to belong to an agency. They pursue action to change and shape the world to their expectations, regardless of the means. They are exemplified in many characters in preceding chapters – Obushnyi in *Avanposty*, Lohvyn in *Persha Vesna*, Danylo in *Chotyry Brody*, Davidov in *Podniataia Tselina*, Marko in *Povorot Marka*, or Mortko in *The Grain Store*. They blindly identify themselves with the collective. Todorov describes how the Khmer Rouge were once seen in France as young people who would modernize their country. In fact, the depiction of the Duch by French anthropologist Bizot could fit a portrayal of a party plenipotentiary from a Soviet film or novel: 'a serious young man, looking for truth, deeply concerned with justice, and ready to sacrifice his life for the goals of the Revolution.'<sup>588</sup> Despite their devotion to the cause, they could still act like a normal people. Their 'normality' was often precisely what entrapped them in the cycle of violence: a perception of danger to their family's well-being or a fear of being killed that justified the suffering and deaths inflicted on the 'kulaks'.

As we have seen, compromised perpetrators with little power to resist are also present in cultural texts. Adorno warns that fear or silence under condition of terror is only a consequence of participation in violence, not a reason for it. Only a few people object to the authorities before the initiation of violence, and fewer still object afterwards. Here we can see the characters of Phonia in

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid, p. 83

<sup>586</sup> T. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 191.

<sup>587</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford. *The Authoritarian Personality, Studies in Prejudice Series, Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

<sup>588</sup> T. Todorov, *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*, p. 26.

Le's *Istoriia radosti*; Tania, Ol'ha and Tverdokhlib in Dimarov's *The Hungry Thirties*; Oktiabryn in Doliak's *Chorna doshka*; Volodymyr in the film *Povodyr*; and countless officials in Muzhuk's documentary *Ukrains'ka Nich 33-ho*. Such individuals 'forfeit those [eternal] qualities by virtue of which they are able to pit themselves against [the established authorities] what at some moment might lure them again to commit atrocity... so long as it is in the name of some ideal in which they half or not at all believe.'<sup>589</sup>

Perpetrators with what I term displaced agency in Ukrainian cultural memory tend to be more prominent in cultural discourse. They are either monsters or passive figures coerced into sociopathic violence: Bykov in *Rozkolote Nebo*; Tiurin in *Plan do dvoru*; Maksym in *Maria*; Kaliuzhnyi in *Chorna doshka*; or Davidov in *Podniataia Tselina*. In constructing images of perpetrators as abnormal characters, writers, poets, playwrights, film-makers, and other 'memory makers' seem to struggle to accept the possibility of a similarity between the perpetrators and their audience – or the possibility of our equal capacity for good and evil. These characters are all removed from the village; at least in a fair world, it seems, they must be cast out. But this cultural representation is not in line with the sad historical reality. Like the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or the perpetrators of mass killing of Communists in Indonesia, the perpetrators of the Holodomor lived for decades alongside the people they tortured and whose loved ones they killed. Todorov therefore advocates for restorative justice over legal justice, arguing that any stigmatization of perpetrators of mass violence should be aimed more at their crimes rather than the individuals themselves. After all, the memory of heroes and innocent victims and 'the agents of evil' serves no constructive purpose. But this is 'precisely what we usually do', as he concludes. In this respect, Ukrainian cultural memory of the Holodomor is no exception.

Indeed, in cultural texts related to the Holodomor, we see little condemnation of the crimes themselves. Kononovych's *Tema dlia medytatsii* is one such example. Iur uses his post-memory to bring the perpetrators to justice who, he concludes, are inhuman bloodthirsty profiteering Communists. He conflates the crimes with the criminals. His enemies, former activists, plead a collective amnesia, but Iur insists on establishing the truth, which is not legally confirmed but subject to 'an agreement between the two parties.'<sup>590</sup> Yet Iur refuses to accept the fact of his grandfather's murder of perpetrators, nor does Bahrii see the crimes of starving people in his village as atrocities. The reason they both fail to reconcile is that neither is guided by a pursuit of the welfare of the community. Iur seeks revenge; Bahrii pursues concealment.

This task of this restoration is impeded by another prominent obstacle – the salacious

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<sup>589</sup> T. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchworlds*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>590</sup> T. Todorov, p. 57.

figuration of the DPU officer and the witch-like female perpetrator. In the cinematic representation of the Holodomor, with the exception of Olexandr Kobzar as Volodymyr in *Povodyr*, the schematic portrayal of the DPU officer as ethnically Other man in black leather jacket is ubiquitous. Indeed, the cinematic representation by Tamer Hassan of the DPU officer Sergej in *Bitter Harvest* reinforces the cliché of the unflinching, almost robotic Bolshevik. Similarly, despite their capacity to engage in perpetration in the Holodomor, women are often reduced in cultural texts to titillating examples of ‘the deadlier of the species’ – to ‘mothers, monsters or whores’.<sup>591</sup> They are the female activists in, for instances, Kononovych’s *Tema dlia Medytatsii*, who can be compared to the account of Ilse Koch in *Fiasco* by Imre Kertesz.

There was no single ‘perpetrator’ of the famine. Some enthusiastically procured grain and confiscated foodstuffs from starving families; others refused and risked repressions; but most acquiesced and followed orders from above. As in Browning’s study of the men of Unit 101, most perpetrators participated out of an obedience to authority and out of peer pressure, not out of sadism or class hatred. While the specifics of Browning’s study were performed by otherwise ordinary men, perpetrators of the Holodomor also included women and children in a variety of roles. The famine shows, again, that when placed in a coherent group setting, most people will adhere to instructions, even if they are aware that their actions will lead to the death of others.

Such a study of the rank-and-file perpetrators of Holodomor does nothing to downplay the role of Stalin and the Kremlin in the deaths of millions of Ukrainian and Soviet citizens, nor does it reject the pivotal role of decision-making in the centre that deliberately sought to subjugate the peasantry through violent repression and mass killing. It merely focuses attention on the execution of these catastrophic orders on the ground. As Lynne Viola makes clear in her latest book on the perpetrators of the Great Terror in Ukraine, there was a broader complicity in the mass violence of the 1930s beyond the action of trained perpetrators. Rural activists played vital roles as state witnesses in the 1937-1938 repressions<sup>592</sup> and remained in Ukraine afterwards. Their families mixed with families of the victims, whom taught at school, or with whom they worked at collective farms, or for whom they wrote recommendations to conduct their studies or to leave the village. Inevitably, these perpetrators proceeded to shape cultural memory, displacing, embracing or effacing their agency. In fact, some of them, like Ivan Havryliuk, became local amateur historians. To examine and confront their actions is, in part, to interrupt and dismantle this legacy, which has tormented Ukrainians for generations.

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<sup>591</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, monsters, whores*, p. 98.

<sup>592</sup> Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial*, p. 176.

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