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**From private memory  
to the collective image  
of the Ukrainian Holodomor**

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During the past two decades, the image of The Great Famine 1932–1933 experienced major transformations in Ukraine and underwent evolution from an event deliberately marginalized to the crucial one in the new culture of the memory of the communist totalitarianism experience arising in Ukraine. Reviving the memory of the Holodomor was seen as a chance for the consolidation of Ukrainian society. The image of a communism-victim nation allowed, in the narrow perspective, to distance oneself from the heritage of the past age and in the wider perspective – to dissociate completely from that heritage.

The term Great Famine (*Holodomor*, *Great Famine 1932–1933*) is used in historiography to describe the famine disaster of the years 1932–1933 in the Soviet Union<sup>1</sup>, which was especially intense in the territory of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (today's eastern and central part

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars and politicians from Ukraine and Ukrainian Diaspora using the word “Holodomor” say the man-made aspects of the famine, was a genocide; some consider the huge loss of life comparable to the Holocaust. They argue that the Soviet policies were an attack on the rise of Ukrainian nationalism and therefore is a genocide. It thus focuses on its national and exclusive character as it is an egotism, transcription of Ukrainian name (holod + mor = sickness of hunger).

of Ukraine). The Holodomor was a result of the policy of collectivization of the agricultural sector enforced by the directorate of the Communist Party and national authorities of the Soviet Union and an unconditional execution of quotas for deliveries of free agricultural products imposed on peasants which exceeded the country's production capabilities at that time<sup>2</sup>.

These events became one of the biggest taboos in Soviet Union during the communist times and were utterly ignored in historiography and social discussion. Ukrainian diaspora communities in the USA and Canada made several attempts to commemorate this event and bring it to the public eye, considering that the Soviets left it unsaid. Once Ukraine reclaimed its independence, the issue was present in public space to a smaller or larger extent. Initially it caught a lot of interest of intelligentsia of clearly right-wing views, subsequently it became a part of policy aiming at so called "new Ukrainization" of the society, in order to eventually become the key event of the formation of the new Ukrainian society.

Indeed, the policy regarding commemorating the Holodomor in Ukraine was neither unvarying nor unambiguous. Subsequent presidents of Ukraine (and in particular Viktor Yushchenko) attempted to create an image of Ukraine as a communism-victim nation on the basis of the Holodomor events<sup>3</sup>. Steps undertaken in relation to commemorating the Holodomor, as well as public debate on the issue, which revealed the internal divisions in Ukrainian society, became a matter of academic discussion a peak of which is considered to be the publishing of the controversial book by Georgiy Kasianov *Danse macabre*<sup>4</sup>. The author set himself a goal of analyzing the process of how the Ukrainian public and academic discussion on The Great Famine started. When indicating the political nature of the remembrance of Holodomor, Kasianov distinguished between Holodomor understood as

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<sup>2</sup> R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, Oxford 1986.

<sup>3</sup> W. Jilge, *Competing Victimhoods – Post-Soviet Ukrainian Narratives on World War II*, [in:] *Shared History – Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, ed. by E. Barkan, E. A. Cole, K. Struve, Leipzig 2008, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> G. Kas'ánov, *Danse macabre. Golod 1932–1933 rokiv u političi, masovij svidomosti ta istoriografii (1980-ti – počatok 2000-h)*, Kiiv 2010. At that time his article written in English was launched, presenting the key assumptions of the monograph. See: G. Kas'ánov, *The Holodomor and the Building of a Nation*, "Russian Politics and Law", Vol. 48 (2010), p. 25–47.

a historiographic, or even a political concept (thus he suggested writing it down using quotation marks in this context – “Holodomor”) and a famine disaster – a historic event from the 1930s.

The principal purpose of my considerations will be to examine more closely the creation process of a collective idea/image of a ground-breaking event, with The Great Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933 serving as an example, in the context of maintaining the memory of the generation of the victims of that event<sup>5</sup>. I will focus on the role played by the individual memories of the Holodomor survivors in the creation process of the collective image of the Holodomor. In other words, I will focus on the role that the generation of the victims and The Holodomor survivors played in the process of social symbolization of that occurrence. It feels to me that those memories were politicized and conventionalized to a significant degree and, therefore, they may seem as not genuine and as nonsensical to contemporary people and as a result they are unable to perform their essential function which, according to the documentalists and researchers, they should perform – to pass on the truth about Stalinism in the Soviet Ukraine.

Witnesses’ stories, posing as historical folklore have been treated instrumentally by politicians and intellectuals; the stories were to a lesser degree an object of academic deliberation. Discussing social initiatives aiming at the documentation of this experience through the diaspora and in the Ukraine will indicate the existing paradox that the Ukrainian documentalists are facing: when trying to save The Great Famine from oblivion – they failed to contribute to a complex process of reminiscence and working this trauma through, but managed to replace it with a substitute in the form of a public version of the story instead. I will take a closer look at the chosen oral testimonies collections and their publications within the documentation projects from various years<sup>6</sup>.

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- <sup>5</sup> Previously the topic of politicization of the instrumental treatment of memories of the survivors of the Holodomor has already been discussed within my monograph. See: W. Kudela-Świątek, *Miejsca (nie)pamięci. O upamiętnianiu ukraińskiego Wielkiego Głodu z lat 1932–1933*, Kraków 2014.
- <sup>6</sup> *Oral History Project of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine*, ed. by J. Mace, L. Heretz, Washington 1990; V. Manâk, L. Kovalenko-Manâk, *33-ij: Golod. Narodna Kniga-Memorial*, Kiiiv 1991; *Velikij golod v Ukraïni 1932–1933 rokiv*, ed. by Dž. Mejs, 4 vol., Kiiiv 2008; V. Borysenko, *A Candle in Remembrance: An Oral History of the Ukrainian Genocide of 1932–1933*, New York 2010.

It will be essential as well to demonstrate the significance that the memories of The Great Famine 1932–1933 previous decades has for the Ukrainian identity in order to consider the necessity and possibility of working The Great Famine trauma through, unchain Ukrainian society from the post-communist myths and reach a new stage of both policy of remembrance and social awareness that we would be able to call Ukrainian and not post-communist or post-colonial.

**“Community/ies of memory” of the Holodomor**

Volodymyr Viatrovych, in one of his recent essays, stated that the Holodomor created the Ukrainians as a nation<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps the wording is quite unfortunate, as the author himself admits, but it in fact reflects the state of the affairs. In his view, in modern Ukraine the memory of the Holodomor – regardless of the authorities’ indifferent attitude – bonds more and more Ukrainians just like it bonded the diverse Ukrainian diaspora communities in the West. In fact, since the Holodomor was placed in the centre of the politics of memory created in the post-Soviet Ukraine after 1991, the “places of memory” connected with it have become the over efficient way to fight with the Soviet symbolic domain in the Ukraine, here understood – according to Lech Nijakowski – as a territory where a particular group rules symbolically. This is the reason why the “places of memory” connected with the milestones of the Soviet culture of memory (monuments to battles and martyrdom of the Soviet nation during the Great Patriotic War) were removed where it was possible. Where it was impossible, the monuments and museums which commemorated the survivors of the Holodomor 1932–1933 were created. So, when the status of the Soviet “places of memory” becomes weaker and the “places of memory” of the new Ukrainian culture of memory are dominating, it will be possible to declare the creation of the Ukrainian symbolic domain in this country. It is crucial that the Communist past of the Ukrainian nation is (re)interpreted in the newly emergent “places of memory” according to a certain key. The Holodomor becomes here the key event in the shaping of the Ukrainian identity as at the same time it connects the nation and separates it from the Communist

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<sup>7</sup> V. V`atrovič, *Ák Golodomor zrobiv nas naciêú*, <http://holodomor33.org.ua/volodymyr-vyatrovych-yak-holodomor-zrobiv-nas-natsijeyu/> (accessed November 26, 2013).

inheritance of the Soviet Ukraine. As a matter of fact, The Great Famine is the event in a collective history experience that unites the Ukrainians in one “community of memory” which remains beyond the rivalry of many minorities’ memories in the country. As a traumatic event it has an integrating effect on representatives of one nation even when it is divided so significantly as in the Ukraine today. It took place, however, at the expense of losing an opportunity to work the Holodomor trauma through.

In order to grasp the essence of the matter it is worth taking a look at the discussion on how the so-called “community of memory” is currently perceived in “memory studies”. This term is usually defined with the use of intuition, mostly based on the generic term “community”<sup>8</sup>. A “community” is understood as being a type of social group based on a powerful bond within the group of a rather informal structure. Therefore, the “community of memory” is a community determined by its past and the memory about it<sup>9</sup>. A belief of the group’s members about the exceptionality of their experience with regard to other groups among whom they live is a deciding factor in the “community of memory” creation<sup>10</sup>. In this meaning, it is a kind of an enclave of a certain lifestyle. Its members also participate in the so-called “practices of commitment”, which are memory rituals developed and accepted in a given community as a proof of its stability. A ritual then becomes a way to manifest the cherished values<sup>11</sup>. Creating a narrative about the common past and individuals set as examples constitutes a significant part of the tradition, which is crucial for “communities of memory”. For such a society reminiscing, maintaining and ritualizing the common past is its primary goal and not just determining the features that connect its members.

Within the works of Jan Assmann we encounter the term *Erinnerungsgemeinschaft*, which is a “community remembering/reminiscing”<sup>12</sup>. In his view, a social group defining itself as a “community of memory” concentrates on two aspects of its existence: specific nature and permanence. When

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<sup>8</sup> L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Warszawa 2008, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> R. N. Bellah [et al.], *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, New York 1985, p. 152.

<sup>10</sup> J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, New York 2011, p. 15–17.

<sup>11</sup> R. N. Bellah [et al.], *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> In translated into English the works of Assmann translator used the term “memory community”.

building up its internal image it emphasizes its unique character whereas inside the group there are attempts to blur the differences which inevitably exist within it. If a group realized the inner transformation or if the differentiation became unbearable it would cease to exist. “Communities of memory” are, however, groups focused on lasting; therefore, they try to blur the inner differences through a certain selection of remembered facts, which ensures the feeling of permanence<sup>13</sup>. Within each community unique collective memories which maintain memories important only for them tend to develop. The less indirect witnesses of given events there are, the more this memory grows in importance. Each person belongs to several “memory communities” at the same time or they do so one after another. On top of that, each group increases and dwindles in time and space.

In the view of Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, a “community of memory” is a common denominator for groups bonded together by a common experience of the past. She believes that common suffering or belonging to the same generational group helps the bearers of individual stories describe themselves as “we” and has a bond-forming effect. In this case we are concerned with a group bonded by an experience of an extraordinary event mostly of a traumatic nature<sup>14</sup>. In accordance with this definition, individuals united by a common experience of suffering, a sensation of social exclusion and stigmatized and marginalized in public discussion unite in “communities of memory”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, New Brunswick–New Jersey 2009, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Similar opinions on “communities of memory” of trauma can be found in works of Charles S. Maier. Within the definitions included therein, trauma is a foundation of identity of both individual and a community which impedes the empathy towards other “communities of memory” built upon similar experience of suffering. In the opinion of both scientists, Irwin-Zarecka and Maier, it is impossible to comprehend someone else’s suffering empathically even if it’s alike (for instance victims of communist repressions towards victims of Nazism and vice versa). It is more of an intellectual comprehension rather than actual belief. “Community of memory” constitutes therefore closed communities consisting of a limited number of people who experienced almost an identical traumatic event. For instance a “community of memory” of former prisoners of extermination camps can be divided into much smaller “communities of memory” of those who survived the Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz extermination camps. See: Ch. S. Maier, *Hot Memory... Cold Memo-*

One of the concepts of “community of memory” has been developed on the Polish scene as well; its author being Lech M. Nijakowski. The scientist initially specified “community of memory” as an aggregate – a number of people bonded by a specific biographical experience, not necessarily of a traumatic nature, and their descendants who acquired the family remembrance<sup>16</sup>. “Community of memory” rejects not only the distinct “objective” history of some of its representatives but also an individual perspective of its members. Furthermore Nijakowski elaborates on the primary conception of “community of memory” offered by predecessors. In his view these are communities which comprise of direct witnesses and participants of the formative event as well as everyone who identifies themselves with it<sup>17</sup>.

“Community of memory” becomes then built as a result of a social process of symbolization which develops around the members and witnesses of the formation event<sup>18</sup>. It is restricted to a certain territory and identifies itself with a local or regional group but can also connect people from completely different ethnic groups spread all over the country<sup>19</sup>. In this meaning when talking about the “community of memory” of a group we imply that it is being built on the basis of categories and patterns characteristic for its cultural universe<sup>20</sup>. The foundation for “communities of memory” creation (perceived as communities of people of identical biographic experiences and – which is more important – people who develop identical images of those experiences) is a sense of unity of biographical experiences existing between the members of such a group. “Communities of memory” exist as they were beyond generational, social, ethnic or racial division. People of various social identities may belong to the same “community of memory”. It’s essential for them to identify with a formative experience and with ways of its remembrance, developed and maintained by a certain community.

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ry. *On the Political Half-Life of Fascist and Communist Memory*, <http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/hot-memory-cold-memory-on-the-political-half-life-of-fascist-and-communist-memory/> (accessed November 26, 2013); I. Irwin-Zarecka, *op. cit.*, p. 47–52.

<sup>16</sup> L. Nijakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> K. Kaźmierska, *Biografia i pamięć. Na przykładzie pokoleniowego doświadczenia ocalonych z zagłady*, Kraków 2008, p. 88–89.



When analyzing the Holodomor as a formative event it is also worth taking a closer look at the communities which at least potentially can be treated as its “communities of memory”. An essential question that arises almost instinctively is the one about the number of such communities. The memory about The Great Famine is a common heritage of Ukrainian emigration (in particular the post-war emigration to the United States and Canada) and many of the eldest in today’s Ukraine. Those communities – in reference to the suggested definition – may be seen both as forms of the very same community varying only in terms of the country of residence and as utterly different communities formed by reminiscing. Perhaps there exists one community, dynamic and diverse, the members of which, regardless of their country of residence, have been connected by the idea of the necessity of fostering the memory of The Great Famine and the belief about its uniqueness in the history of mankind. In the latter case, the country boundaries wouldn’t determine the range of community of memory. A sensation of belonging to this group would assume the idea of the genocidal nature of this event and the acceptance of memory rituals related to fostering this memory as a national trend (or even a nationalist one).

Logic suggests that the core of a community of memory should comprise of representatives of the survivor generation and their descendants and only then the initiatives of people deliberately accepting the memory of The Great Famine can become the driving force. That is exactly what happened in the emigration circles. The emigrants were following the example of ways of commemorating the Jewish Holocaust in their activities for cultivating the Holodomor memory in western communities, in the Ukraine however the example of Soviet commemorative practices was followed for a long time even though the patterns developed by diaspora were appealed to.

In the country however, this core constituted people consciously accepting the memory pattern suggested by the Ukrainian diaspora (and most frequently those who were becoming the successors of this pattern were those living in western Ukraine) and only they needed the memory of survivor generation to justify their belonging to the community of memory. Truth be told, an opinion prevailed that The Great Famine was commonly known in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, however, no one raised that subject, as well as other controversial issues. Stanislav Kulchytsky recalls 1960s–1970s as follows:



As a historian I associated the inability to remember The Great Famine with reasons unknown to historical sciences at that time. I knew however that it is deeply rooted in the conscience of every human being<sup>21</sup>.

Along with that, the events meticulously renounced from the historical discussion in its generalized interpretation constituted a foundation for a different Soviet history that each USSR citizen learned about from his parents' and grandparents' stories<sup>22</sup>. These stories, based on private experience, didn't at all describe the numerous successes and victories of the soviet periodicals, but the suffering of people due to famine and violence inflicted on the citizens by their own homeland. Thanks to such an underground circulation, The Great Famine could survive in the memory of the Ukrainians in a very sparse state. In those circumstances it's difficult to confront the opinion of Kulchytsky on the underground memory. Nevertheless, I am aware how limited the version of events that survived the times of communism which came to light in the 1990s was and that the Ukrainian Holodomor community was shaped by the policy of memories instead of family stories of generations that survived the Holodomor.

Initially both communities of The Great Famine memory (in the country and in the diaspora) were living in close cooperation since one couldn't exist without the other. Moreover, actions taken in the diaspora were setting the tone for the discussion on The Great Famine. It was only the Orange Revolution that was a breakthrough for the evolution of the Great Famine memory community in the country. Yushchenko, as a president of Ukraine was, through his actions, justifying the Holodomor as the "Ukrainian Holocaust" – a version cultivated by the western emigration for a long time. Enthralled by the power of Jewish memory of the Holocaust he assumed that The Great Famine as the "Ukrainian Holocaust" would unite all the Ukrainians from all parts of the country in one nation just like the memory of the Shoah unites various Jewish communities. It seems then that those two kinds of memory joined into one, however diverse, changeable and varying "community of memory" of the Holodomor. What is the common denominator is not the fact of fostering the memory of the Great Famine itself, but recognizing it as a genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

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<sup>21</sup> S. Kulczycki, *Hołodomor. Wielki głód na Ukrainie w latach 1932–1933 jako ludobójstwo – problem świadomości*, Warszawa 2008, p. 13–14.

<sup>22</sup> Ů. Micik, *Z dosvidu zboru svidčen' pro golodomor 1933 r.*, [in:] *Golod – genocid 1933 roku v Ukraïni...*, p. 390.

Nevertheless, we can speak about the ultimate formation of the Great Famine “community of memory” now that the emotions related to the clear politicization of the issue in the public space have worn off which influences the high-level political decisions. The change of memory policy course in the specific case of Viktor Yanukovych on one hand intensified the diversity and ambiguousness of interpretations of the event among various social groups (at the time defining the Holodomor as genocide also determined the political views of the citizen that was speaking), on the other hand however, it fostered a clear need of the society to reconsider post-communist political myths raised during the first years of the independent Ukraine.

The “community of memory” of the Holodomor has recently been present in a very large part of Ukraine’s society (although, importantly, it still refers to just a part of it), which feels the connection with the survivors of famine or sees the Ukrainian nation as a nation of victims. It is worth mentioning that the current shape of the “community of memory” of the Holodomor was influenced not only by originating in the areas formerly affected by famine, but also by emigrants and by Western Ukraine, where the described attitude is an “invented tradition”<sup>23</sup>. The driving force of the community, or in fact its core, is made up of members of the intelligentsia, who share a belief that Ukraine’s culture, unlike Russia’s, belongs to the Western tradition. As a result, the genocide that came from their Eastern neighbour naturally separates Ukrainians from the Soviet heritage. The community of memory of the Holodomor is a community in which the memory of the formative event is not inherited from generation to generation, but taken up consciously by members of the group. The memories of witnesses legitimize and justify the existence of such a communal memory. The community memory of the Holodomor in this case, because of their nature, also act as so-called “guardians

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<sup>23</sup> In one of his works Yaroslav Hrytsak compared two types of Ukrainian memory of two separate exterminations that the Ukrainians were witnesses and victims of – The Holocaust and The Holodomor. At that time, when he reflected on the specific nature of Galician type of the Ukrainian memory he summarized: “The Ukrainians here exactly recall what they have never experienced and do not recall what they are culpable of”. In his opinion this extraordinary involvement in the Holodomor memory cultivation in western parts of the country, which were incorporated during World War II to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, results from the fact that this part of Ukraine feels the bond with the Ukrainian diaspora (in the USA and Canada in particular). See: A. Gricak, *op. cit.*, p. 159–160.

of memory” about this historical event. With their initiative oral testimonies of Holodomor survivors are collected, published in the form of memory books or made available on the Internet. Although they are an example of the aforementioned “loyalty practices” in relation to their own “community of memory”. These are examples of affirmative oral history of Holodomor.

### **Recording memories as a political action**

Allan Megill believes that memory acquires a special meaning to the communities whose identity is threatened. In order to preserve the community’s unity, memory can be transformed in a suitable way<sup>24</sup>. Maybe in that way, the Ukrainian diaspora circles made several attempts to record the memories of the Holodomor witnesses residing outside the Soviet Ukraine. Given that, most importantly, one should not forget the works printed by the diaspora on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holodomor<sup>25</sup>. The research results of the International Commission of Inquiry on The Great Famine 1932–1933 in Ukraine which operated during the years 1986–1990 under the command of James Mace also proved to be significant. In the final stage of the work the commission brought special attention to writing down the memoirs of victims. A collection of memoirs of 206 people who survived The Great Famine was published in Washington in 1990<sup>26</sup>.

Stanislav Kulchytsky, quoting some fragments of the famine victim’s memories, collected by the already mentioned Commission, treated the opinions as a means to achieve a certain goal:

[...] the stories quoted here were chosen in such a way that the most important issue is emphasized: that under the pretence of storing crops, all food was taken away or destroyed, with the sole purpose of starving people to death. Although there are none (there can be none) official documents that would prove such intention, the annihilation of Ukrainians [...] was nationwide<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> A. Megill, *History, Memory, Identity*, “History of the Human Sciences”, Vol. 11 (1998), p. 40–42.

<sup>25</sup> More on this subject: O. Veselova, *Svidčennâ očevidciv golodu-genocidu 1932–1933 rr. v Ukraïni âk džerelo doslidžennâ jogo pričîn ta naslidkiv*, “Istoričnij žurnal”, No. 5 (2009), p. 3–17.

<sup>26</sup> *Oral History Project of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine*, ed. by J. Mace, L. Hertz, Washington 1990.

<sup>27</sup> S. Kulczycki, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

This way the generation of the Holodomor survivors had the opportunity to take the floor and come into existence in public space. At that time, private memoirs were gaining a significant political and propaganda value. Being reprinted in emigrational periodicals and newspapers they allowed looking at the history of the past century from a point of view of a simple man. In their perspective the image of the regime took a completely new shape, encouraged reflection, formed whole generations of Ukrainians in diaspora.

These actions have also been taken later in Ukraine after the collapse of communism system. With the declaration of Ukraine as an independent country in August, 1991, a new stage of life for the Ukrainian nation began. New opportunities for research and informing the public of the truth behind the Great Famine 1932–1933 arose, although they were not fully seized. The hardest part is changing the mentality of a society and subordinating it to the requirements of a life in a different economic reality. What diverted the attention of both the society and the newly formed government from the issue of famine was on the one hand the fall of the Communist party, the temporary ban on its activity in Ukraine's territory, the almost immediate removal of literary heritage of the Communist era and, on the other hand, a deepening economic crisis. Quiet commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the starvation in 1993 was a predictable result of this phenomenon. However, praising the survivors during the commemoration of the 65th anniversary indicated a renewed interest in the problem<sup>28</sup>. With time, the studies on the Great Famine began to inspire more and more Soviet researchers, who in June, 1992 were brought together to form the Association of Holodomor Researchers in Ukraine by its founder, Volodymyr Maniak<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, those initiatives not only didn't prevent the politicisation of the Holodomor in Ukraine, they couldn't even exist without it. Moreover, the evaluation of the Great Famine as a historical event still depended on the poli-

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<sup>28</sup> *Pro vstanovlennâ Dnâ pam'âti žertv golodomoriv. Ukaz Prezidenta Ukraïni vid 26 listopada 1998 roku №1310/98, "Urâdovij Kur'ěr"* from November 28, 1998, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Olexandr Ushinsky is the current leader of the Association. Its members, with the constant help of the American Dispersion, are conducting researches and run publishing activity and also organize the commemorations of each anniversary of Holodomor. The merits of the work of M. Koc should be particularly underlined. He's a researcher of the Holodomor from New York, thanks to whom the works of Ukrainian scholars are allowed to be published abroad, and who also does charity work.

tical views of the person speaking. As an example, the Ukrainian left wing politicians insisted that the Holodomor itself was just a pure invention of the Ukrainian nationalists<sup>30</sup>. On the other hand, those who were interested in popularizing the issue of the Holodomor had to somehow impose this knowledge on Soviet society. The essence of the problem was very well captured by one of the most committed researchers of the Great Famine, Stanislav Kulchytsky:

A society which survived a genocide does not always realize the importance of the violence inflicted on them. The fact that the victims came from a generation that no longer exists makes the case even more complicated. Those who survived Stalin's repression failed to pass onto their children the hate and revulsion towards the regime, fearing for the safety of their children and their own. Those children, raised in the Soviet spirit, did not have the opportunity to confront Soviet values that were planted in their minds with universal values. With time, the regime changed its attitude towards its children (although, at its core it remained the same) just enough for the new generation of citizens to be unable to make a connection between the Soviet rule and the crimes of Stalin's era.

Ukrainian scholars and ethnologists managed to familiarize the nation with external symptoms of the Great Famine and they paid attention to all the horrible details. It seems, however, that the scholars were not as convincing in explaining the logic of the chain of events which followed the mass collectivisation of agriculture<sup>31</sup>.

When the Holodomor became an official issue, even before the end of the Ukrainian SSR, it started a social movement aiming at saving the survivors from oblivion. Attempts were made to record the lists of those, who starved to death<sup>32</sup>. In 1989, a newspaper called "Silsky visty" was the first one to print on the local level the memories of the famine victims. By doing so, about a hundred such stories came to light<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> S. Kostil'eva, *Visvitlennâ vitčiznânoû presou 70-ï ričnici golodu 1932–1933 rr.*, <http://www.history.org.ua/zbirnyk/problems12/5.pdf> (accessed February 16, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> S. Kulczycki, *op. cit.*, p. 13–14.

<sup>32</sup> In the years 1932–1933, 360 people died in this village, while during World War II – 52 people. See: O. Veselova, *Uvikopomnennâ zagiblih vid golodnogo moru*, [in:] *Golod – genocid 1933 roku v Ukraïni...*, p. 230.

<sup>33</sup> L. Stahors'ka, *Golodomor očima sučasnikiv*, [in:] *Golodomor 1932–1933 rokiv...*, p. 209.

What is more, in the spring of 1990, thanks to the initiative of a writer, Volodymyr Maniak, the National Week to Commemorate the Victims of the Great Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933 and the Victims of Repression under Stalin's rule took place, and September 1991 saw the release of a memorial book called *33-yi: Holod*. This work is worth mentioning because it attempts to bring together memories, archival documents, historians' commentaries, documentary photographs and various works of art<sup>34</sup>.

Implementing the oral history methods during the first studies on the Great Famine created new possibilities not only for historians, but mostly for social activists and journalists. Carrying out such interviews, writing down testimonies and publishing them allowed to recover the memory and therefore to recover the historical consciousness that had once been lost. The methods of collecting the Holodomor victims' memories aimed at fulfilling two crucial tasks: firstly, to prove the murderous character of the Communist government, seen as a completely alien driving force that resulted in the genocide of Ukrainians; secondly, to show Ukraine as a victim of the system. This process had therefore nothing to do with working through or getting back the memory of the Great Famine in the Soviet era. It was common to thoroughly select and edit, according to an imposed key, the memories which were just the remainders of the projects. According to Georgiy Kasyanov, those actions were carried out on purpose, as they aimed at promoting a certain picture of the past<sup>35</sup>.

It is worth remembering that all these projects were focused on proving the fact that the Holodomor was genocide. These were not academic projects, aiming to explore the human experience of the past. At this point the sake of accuracy, it is worth mentioning one of the Canadian oral history projects, which had meanwhile been realized in Ukraine. In 1993–1995, a group of Ukrainian scholars led by Dr. William Noll, undertook a large-scale research project on the transformation of civil society in rural Ukraine that resulted from the aggressive Soviet collectivization campaign of Ukraine's agricultural communities conducted in the late 1920s early 1930s. The goal of the project was to collect first-hand accounts of village life and community organization from before, during, and after the

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<sup>34</sup> V. Maniak, L. Kovalenko-Maniak, *33-ij: Golod. Narodna Kniga-Memorial*, Kiiiv 1991.

<sup>35</sup> G. Kas'ánov, *Danse macabre...*, p. 252.

collectivization of the Ukrainian farmers. Using an elaborate and carefully crafted questionnaire, the researchers recorded 429 interviews with elderly Ukrainian villagers across the country. The collected testimonies served as primary data for the analysis of dramatic sociocultural changes the Ukrainian rural communities were forced to undergo in the 1920s and 1930s. Noll's project came to an end with the publication of the above monograph in 1999<sup>36</sup>. The author started with the idea that only oral sources are sources to learn about the history of rural culture on Ukraine and changes that have occurred in the Soviet era. He does not analyze these stories as oral history of the Holodomor. However, it turned out that the Holodomor is a central element of the rural oral history in Ukraine. In this respect, Noll's project is the exception rather against a number of other social initiatives.

Collecting memories of the famine victims, that was inspired by a passing need, visibly lessened during Leonid Kuchma's presidency, as Kuchma implemented the policy of making compromises with Russia. Nevertheless, researchers of local lore and members of academic communities were recording and publishing people's stories. It was they who brought to life burgeoning initiatives, despite having no support of the government.

Yet again, the generation of survivors came under the spotlight of the social life, thanks to the "Ukraine 3000" project, created by the wife of the next president – Kateryna Yushchenko<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, another massive literary work was published: four volumes edited by James Mace, which

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<sup>36</sup> Selected interviews were eventually profiled, in part, in a monograph, that came out in 1999 in Rodovid Publishing House. See: V. Noll, *Transformaciâ gromadâns'kogo suspil'stva: Usna istoriâ ukraïns'koï selâns'koï kul'turi 1920–1930-h rokiv*, Kiïv 1999. Given general inaccessibility of the project data to the researchers and general public and deterioration of project audio recordings, in 2012 the Oral History program in the Prairie Centre for the Study of Ukrainian Heritage (St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan) approached Rodovid Publishing House with the proposal to initiate a fully-fledged digitization of the oral history collection in order to develop the project's web exhibit, <http://drc.usask.ca/projects/pcuh/transformation/eng/about.php> (accessed February 16, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> "Ukraine 3000" – a project by Kateryna and Victor Yushchenko aimed at promoting the Ukrainian cultural and behavioural standards, cultivating the memories of Ukraine's history and at charity work. Read more on the goals and activities that are a part of the project on its website: *Mižnarodnij blagodijnij fond „Ukraïna 3000”*, <http://www.ukraine3000.org.ua/> (accessed May 13, 2005). The website is available in Ukrainian, Russian and English.



became the legacy of his long-term project on collecting the Holodomor victims' testimonies<sup>38</sup>. Today there are published oral testimonies collections, brochures and monographs about the famine in almost every region and district of Ukraine which have survived hard times. The Association of researchers of Holodomor in Ukraine, members of the Ukrainian Republican Historical and Educational Society "Memorial", scientists of the Institute of History of the Ukraine Academy of Science, students of the National University "Kyiv Mohyla Academy", NGOs from many Ukrainian cities, many Ukraine universities have collected a lot of evidence of people who were witnesses of the tragedy<sup>39</sup>. These initiatives were different in nature. Some of them were large-scale and others were only a part of documenting local history. Therefore, their level of expertise and information is very uneven.

However, they are all similar in one of the documentary intentions: to commemorate and preserve the past in the written version, leave thick volumes of memories for future generations. As if the researchers assumed that the oral tradition of The Great Famine, which could discovery by William Noll had passed into oblivion with the passing of the generation of victims and survivors of the Holodomor. According to Ukrainian Historian, Vasyl Marochko, to "save the memories is more like school essays and may be useful only in patriotic upbringing. What we need is a reliable database, like ones used in legal cases"<sup>40</sup>. This opinion emphasizes two important problems of the mentioned publication. First, the authors' intentions may appear as inconsistent: they were driven not so much by a thirst for knowledge as by a desire to legitimize the Holodomor as genocide. As a result, only some aspects were emphasized, while others were ignored. The result was to shape the remembrance in such a way that it would prove the canonical, which is the accepted by the government vision of events. In reality, it only pushed the Holodomor more into oblivion and downplayed the value of the memories, consciously replacing them with cliché stories about the trauma of starvation. Second, Marochko points out the

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<sup>38</sup> *Velikij golod v Ukraïni 1932–1933 rokiv*, ed. by Dž. Mejs, 4 vol., Kiïv 2008.

<sup>39</sup> V. Borysenko, *A Candle in Remembrance: An Oral History of the Ukrainian Genocide of 1932–1933*, New York 2010, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> V. Maročko, *Sens "Knigi pam'âti" ne u pomstî, a nasampered u spravedlivostî*, <http://www.kreschatic.kiev.ua/ua/3321/art/1213308755.html> (accessed December 12, 2013).

instrumental approach towards those, who witnessed the tragedy, as if they were talking about their biographical experience like witnesses testifying in court. The reasoning is that the researchers did not wish to present human experiences of the past as something unique, they in fact wanted to endorse the horrific tales of a suffering Ukrainian nation under Soviet occupation.

### **From oral history to oral tradition of Holodomor**

After the analysis of the linear meters of recorded memories of famine survivors that we possess, one may arrive at a few interesting conclusions. First, the researchers did not care which generations were affected by the phenomenon. We might say that it is a most crucial aspect, although it was not given much attention in published works. It is true that much time has passed since the Holodomor, so it is very hard to establish which generations suffered its consequences and to accurately determine who belongs to said generations. According to Pierre Nora, a “generation” is an imaginary and controversial concept, having nothing to do with the biological age of a person. It is known that each of us belongs to several generations throughout the same period of time. We feel more or less connected with each of them and we may not be a part of the generation that our date of birth would suggest. Right now, what influences our sense of belonging to a certain generation is mass media<sup>41</sup>. Bearing that in mind, should everybody born before 1932 and identifying themselves with that generation be considered a “witnesses to history”, even when in the time of the Holodomor they were only babies? Or should the ones allowed to speak be only those, who are actually able to remember the events that they witnessed? Without giving some consideration to these questions, the issue of the memory and post-memory of the Great Famine is left out in the academic discussion. Second, the memories of the famine survivors are a demanding source of information. They are of the most psychological importance to their bearers, for they refer to something that had repercussions throughout all their subsequent lives. It might be this desire to not forget this which leads to a situation in which similar key events undergo various transformations, being filled in and standardized. They are shaped into a uniform format, which allows “the public” to remember them. Because every time a memory is evoked – for example, in storytelling – it

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<sup>41</sup> P. Nora, *Generations*, [in:] *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, ed. by P. Nora, New York 1996, p. 499–531.

then has to sink in once more. A psychologist, Tomasz Maruszewski, points out that when a memory is learned for the second time, the last situational context remains untouched and the original memory is improved and enriched with new details and its focus is switched to other aspects and finally, it sinks in once more in the narrator's mind<sup>42</sup>. A memory always combines an account of an event and how it was remembered, that is why talking about events which were shared by many and are important to all, result in having such a strong influence on the private memories of an individual. When we speak of such life-changing events as the Great Famine, we observe a phenomenon of unification of the set of memories that is shared by the entire society, as if all its members at a given time shared the same experience. However, it is a fact that famine was perceived differently by the government and differently by those who opposed it<sup>43</sup>.

Even in the 1930s, Maurice Halbwachs, claimed that a memory of an individual is not an isolated thought, but because a person belongs to a certain group or a community, they interact with its members and thus their perception of the past becomes a part of a communicative memory<sup>44</sup>. This allows us to define different types of memory, not only individual, but also collective. In a given society, as Halbwachs writes, there will be as many collective memories as there are social groups and institutions (e.g. families, religious groups, cities, regions, parties etc.)<sup>45</sup>. Because there are no two identical human beings, there are no two completely identical memories, just as there are no two identical glances.

In the course of social communication inside communities with identical experiences (e.g. people from the same village), sharing stories lasts until every person believes in an almost identical version of an event (in

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<sup>42</sup> T. Maruszewski, *Psychologia poznania*, Gdańsk 2001, p. 242–250.

<sup>43</sup> A. Gracioso, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> According to him, a collective memory differs from a historical reasoning in that it simplifies the event, focuses on one (biased) point of view and mythologises the phenomena that it stores. Historical consciousness focuses on the "historicality" of events; on the fact that they happened in the past and are no longer taking place; on the difference between present and past backgrounds they were set against. Collective memory, however, does not take into account the time that has passed, it rejects the thought of its elements being outdated and insists on describing them as if they were still valid today. It expresses the eternal or primal truths of a community. See: M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago–London 1992, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52–53.

which process the narration is modified and transformed). All those stories are based on (somewhat) similar foundations of personal experience, but after closer examination they often turn out to be hoaxes, created as a result of sharing stories between members of a community and not as an actual experience. As David Lowenthal writes, we always need other people's memory to confirm our own<sup>46</sup>. It helps to place our individual biographical experience in the past and to strengthen or lessen our sense of identity with a group. It is because a vision of an individual may relate to or differ from a collective "concept"<sup>47</sup>. The events that are pushed out from the political discourse and kept quiet by their beholders are distorted and changed in order to fit a standardized version, due to which we are at risk of even questioning the authenticity of such memories by their bearers themselves.

In the case discussed here, we are dealing with a memory of an event that was momentarily retrieved from oblivion and suddenly came under the spotlight of a society. What follows is that we might speak of a different perception and way of recalling such momentous events. They are, however, used in a public discourse and the narrators replace their individual approach with a socially acceptable one. Each narrator who belongs to a certain community tends to interpret the ongoing events as individually defined micro-stories, constituting a certain macro-story, with which they identify. On this level of abstraction the narrator is fighting an internal battle, projecting in their mind a vision of their own history. There exists, however, a constant need for setting their individual memories against a much more complex background of local, or even national history. In this moment, the narrator starts to participate in a clash between many opinions on the history of the internal life of a community to which they belong<sup>48</sup>. But their choice is limited: they can either accept the social concept of the past events or reject it and create their own.

Michael Foucault wrote in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, that no statement is made for the first time. They are always influenced by the abundance of stories that are at our disposal, that are known and recognized in a given culture and that are at the same time evolving and transforming<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> D. Lowenthal, *The Past as a Foreign Country*, Cambridge 1985, p. 196.

<sup>47</sup> A. Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different?*, [in:] *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by R. Perks, A. Thomson, London 1998, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Monach 2013, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London–New York, p. 110–111.

Therefore nobody is able to incorporate in the history of their life the news, the episodes or whole sets of events that do not come from their own experience, but instead from completely different sources, like other people's stories, documentaries and works of fiction or dreams and imagination<sup>50</sup>. It is crucial for the integrity of those borrowed memories with one's own history to fall in with the emotions that are associated with the era which they refer to. In other words, the memories of the crucial historical events are in a way collages that have many sources, are subject to change during the process of communication, but have their own emotional qualities<sup>51</sup>. With time their memories fade and contain fewer details. As they are passed on to many generations, they start to resemble well-known anecdotes rather than a story based on real events. Individual memory feeds on family stories. Parents and grandparents are given the benefit of the doubt; it is a tradition to believe in their stories. Nonetheless, the "censored" family tales often require some stylistic corrections, because a family history has to be perceived as coherent and relevant. Media images then become the replacement which the narrator uses to fill in the gaps in their fragile biographical construction. Importing narrative schemes changes the narrator from an ordinary kolkhoz worker to somebody who "lived through something", whose tale is fascinating and absorbing. This is why a collective and an individual memory cannot function separately. What is more, if an outsider wanted to learn more details, they would not satisfy their curiosity, because in many cases they do not give them any thought. Their memories lack authenticity and spontaneity. These are the stories that replaced the true memories of the past experiences of their authors<sup>52</sup>.

Moreover, the story of the Holodomor survivors makes the historical narration even more credible than any other testimony of the epoch (archives or artifacts). The memories of the survivors which are placed in the book of testimonies have the purely human dimension; they are able to

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<sup>50</sup> D. Schacter, *Searching for Memory. The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*, New York 1996; H. Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*, München 2002.

<sup>51</sup> H. Welzer, *Materiał, z którego zbudowane są biografie*, [in:] *Pamięć zbiorowa i kultura*, ed. by M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2009, p. 37–57.

<sup>52</sup> O. Bricina, *XX storiččâ v usnij istorii ukraïnciv. (Notatki do pitannâ pro istorizm fol'kloru)*, [in:] *U pošukah vlasnogo golosu. Usna istoriâ âk teoriâ, metod ta džerelo*, ed. by G. Grinčenko, N. Hanenko-Frizen, Harkiv 2010, p. 13–144.

evoke empathy and sympathy in the readers. The role of such oral narrations is the “humanizing” of the victims, giving the human dimension to the suffering in a neutral way to the narration based on the documents and clips from the reports of the foreign journalists or diplomats who have their residences in the Soviet Union. These are the memories which were written down at different times and to a different degree of specificity.

They are traditionally presented in a written form. They happen less often to be more or less detailed transcriptions of the records of the oral history<sup>53</sup>. From among the plethora of the existing and available memories of the Holodomor victims, only those which emphatically illustrate the theses of the oral historians have been selected. They were organized so that the readers could be persuaded about the genocidal character of the Holodomor in 1932–1933 even when the numbers, facts or documents from other books did not convinced them. In this way, the survivors stop being only the numbers, the list made by the officials – they become particular people, with names and surnames, who lived some time ago and died during the Holodomor.

It began in the year 1932. A brigade was going around to all the homesteads and confiscating grain. It took everything away, even food standing in pots. They would also remove buried seed potatoes. The famine began. Already by the winter of 1932–1933 people were dying. My neighbor Vasyl Krasnoholovy’s two sons and two daughters, Tania and Vera, died. All of Pavlo Krasnoholovy’s children died: his daughter Vera and two sons, Ivan and Petro. People came from the village soviet; they put them on a cart, dug a pit, and tossed them in.

The members of the Committee of Poor Peasants confiscated all the grain, but later they, too, starved to death. An activist named Zina was placed inside the pit above the corpses and told: sit here and carry out the state grain deliveries.

My cousin Dunka was very poor. In 1933 she gave birth to a child. She went out to work because they were issuing 200–300 grams of flour. She would put her eighteen-month-old baby outside in the yard all day, and it would graze there, eating knotgrass.

Nine or ten people died every day.

At the time my husband Lukian was working on road construction with a horse. Every day he was issued two loaves of bread and bran. He told me

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<sup>53</sup> There are also video oral history collections of the Holodomor witnesses, e.g. <http://www.holodomorsurvivors.ca/Survivors.html> (accessed February 16, 2016).

to come to him, because he could not stop himself from eating up all the bread; there were our children at home. On top it, strangers would come lamenting and begging for help, and we had to share with them.

Harvest time came. People pressed out the ears and hid the grain in their shirts or bodices so that it wouldn't be taken away from them. At home we quickly ground it in a hand-mill and boiled up a cauldron of soup. The children would eat it up, but they were weak from hunger and wanted more. They would scratch at the bottom of the cauldron.

People ripped apart dead horses. They took sackcloth and carried the horsemeat home and ate it. Vegetable leaves and grass were used as food. Vasyl, the son of Stepan Krasnoholovy, went to the heaps at Vesela for some bran. He was beaten there and he died as a result. He was a fine young fellow. His sister also starved to death.

Kharyton and his wife died in our corner of the village. They left behind two children, a girl and a boy. The boy died. By the time people arrived, she had eaten him.

Vasyl Bondaruk married a woman from Cherniatyn. She recounted how she had killed her own child: "I put the child in a small basin, and he asks: «What are you going to do, Mummy?» I replied: «Nothing, nothing.»" Through the window a male neighbour saw her frying something. When some people arrived, she was panting and eating. They sentenced her to three years. When she told her husband what she had done, he wanted nothing more to do with her.<sup>54</sup>

It is enough to mention the language of the published memories. We observe as the vivid, colourful, unique language used by the authors to give a detailed account of their childhood in the Ukrainian countryside and of the life marked by famine, changes into clichés borrowed from a newspaper during every attempt of generalization or analysis. It is common even for the respondents to switch from Ukrainian to Russian in this very moment. Although this variant should be rather classified as Soviet jargon – simple and concisely describing all the controversies and collisions in the course of history<sup>55</sup>.

The Communist power is present, on the other hand, in the memories about the famine and is not concerned with either legal or even political

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<sup>54</sup> The account of Hanna Lukianivna Mykhalchuk (born 1913), originally published in: *Golod 33: Narodna knyha-memorial...*, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> V. Kudelâ, *Dolâ podil's'kij ditej pid čas Golodomoru 1932–1933 rr.*, [in:] *Narodna kul'tura Podillâ u kontekstî nacional'nogo vihovannâ*, ed. by N. İvanic'ka, Vinnicâ 2004, p. 85–91.



context. It is similar to a spontaneous power which is capable of creating both the good and the total evil.

I was then a fifteen-year-old girl, and I remember well Romanko, the five-year-old son of Illia Haidamaka. His parents, little sisters, and brother had already died, and he would drag himself on his poor little swollen legs from house to house, to his relatives and neighbors, begging for whatever he could get. Looking up at the lofty sky, he would say:

“I could eat a piece of bread as big as a cloud.”

Romanko, the son of Uncle Andrii Hrynychuk, would also have liked to fortify himself with just a crumb of something.

The little boy couldn't stand it any longer, so he went to the house of Semen Pshestemsky, where he saw several loaves of bread. At that time Semen was employed by the collective farm administration. Romanko took one of the loaves and went home.

The next day his father was summoned to the village soviet.

“Tell us, Andrii, how is it possible that you've lived to see the day that your son has turned into a thief?”

What was there to explain, since Romanko had definitely taken that unfortunate bread from Pshestemsky?

They knocked Andrii to the floor, laid a wide board on his painful chest, and hammered away at him with a sledgehammer weighing nearly twenty kilograms. All his insides were turned to pulp. Then they threw him into the yard, and no one paid any attention to the fact that Uncle Andrii was twisted with pain and dying.

At this very moment my mother was heading to the market.

As she was approaching the gates of the village soviet, she heard:

“Hapa, is that you?”

“Is that you, Andrii?” asked my startled mother.

“I'll tell you about it later”, said Andrii through his bloodied lips. “Give me some water instead.”

My mother dashed to the nearest well. Shvydkov, the head of the village executive committee, was standing in the doorway of the village soviet.

“Who do you think you are, showing your mercy here?” he shouted at my mother.

“I am a human being, Comrade Shvydkov. And it's a sin not to offer help to someone who is unwell.”

“Get out of here! Your tongue will get you into trouble! This is what awaits an enemy of the people!”

Afraid that they would chase my mother away from him, Uncle Andrii quickly whispered to her:

“Hapa, tell my wife to take me away from here, because I’m going to die here, hounded to death by people, who are like dogs.”

On the third day Uncle Andrii died, followed shortly afterwards by his swollen son Romanko.

Uncle Andrii was a hard worker, like no other, like that pair of mighty oxen that he had handed over the collective farm<sup>56</sup>.

Any narrator discusses neither the reasons of terror nor its social or political aspects<sup>57</sup>. For the majority of them it was just very difficult life conditions which a person should stand.

But neither can I forget this catastrophe: who created the famine? Who ordered the surplus to be confiscated? They were taking everything away to the last crumb! Five or six or even ten of them would get together. When they entered a house, they would turn everything upside down, probing in every nook and cranny until nothing was left, not even a potato peel – not a thing. After those commissions swept through, people would be left standing naked, hungry, barefoot, with their heads uncovered. How can I forget those “inspectors”, who would come into a house and say: “Haven’t you croaked yet?” One time my mother and I picked some beans that we found lying in the dust on a hill: about two cups’ worth. Through the window my mother saw those “commissars” coming. Quickly, she put the beans into a little pot, poured some water over them, and put the pot in the oven, to make it look as though she were cooking them. She thought that maybe this way she could save the beans. But, no sir, you couldn’t keep anything from them. He took the pot from the oven, poured off the water, and took away the beans. I live and think about this. No matter how many years have passed, I cannot forget this<sup>58</sup>.

Sometimes, the narrators point certain culprits of their misery: neighbor-informers, the unmerciful leader of the kolkhoz, ruthless arrangements – it

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<sup>56</sup> The account of Lida Dmytrivna Vazhynska (born 1918), originally published in: *God 33: Narodna knyha-memorial...*, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> O. Bricina, *XX storiččâ v usnij istorii Ukraïnciv. (Notatki do pitannâ pro istorizm fol'kloru)*, [in:] *U pošukah vlasnogo golosu. Usna istoriâ âk teoriâ, metod ta džerelo*, ed. by G. Grinčenko, N. Hanenko-Frizen, Harkiv 2010, p. 135–144.

<sup>58</sup> The account of Liuba Andriivna Chervatiuk (born n.n.), originally published in: *God 33: Narodna knyha-memorial...*, p. 65.

is like in an epos in which the evil is faceless and omnipotent. Even the national officials are eventually the subordinate small people who were afraid of the authorities. This is the reason why the utterances towards the people who supported the evil country policy (neighbors, informers, and officials – ready for everything to achieve the plan) are specific, vivid and deprived of the critical assessment.

Disaster struck our family the day after Easter: our cow Zirka was stolen. At that time the skinny little cows were being put out to pasture. The evening before Mama had gone to Mahdalynivka to pick up some food. Yashko and I slept alone at home, having barricaded ourselves up behind all sorts of bolts and bars out of fear that we would be kidnapped (my mother was afraid of this).

I got up early in the morning to bring the cow to the herd. I opened the door of the shed and Zirka was gone. Half of the wall with the sign had been smashed onto the road. I was still young and stupid, and I was glad that Zirka had been stolen, because I desperately wanted to sleep longer in the morning, because the dew was cold as an iceberg and we walked around barefoot. I didn't say anything to anyone. I went back to the house and fell asleep. After some time someone woke me up. I opened the door and three people came in: the head of the village council; old man Kanhul the executor, whose face was blue – almost black – and Starodubets, the secretary of the village council, carrying a rifle.

“To whom did your mother sell the cow?”

“I don't know.”

“And where is your mother?”

“In Mahdalynivka.”

Starodubets yanked me by the arm, threw me against the wall underneath the icons, aimed the rifle, and cocked it.

“Confess! Who did you sell the cow to? Tell me, you son of a serpent, or I'll kill you!”

The hair stood up on my head and my teeth began to chatter. I barely managed to mumble:

“Grandpa, I swear to God, I don't know.”

Yashko screamed and dashed under the floor boards.

“You serpent, so your teeth are chattering? Tell me! Well? One, two...”

“Don't frighten the boy!” The head of the village council shoved Starodubets. “Let's go.”

My mother returned after lunch. She got the works too: they abused, interrogated, and tormented her. Then they sent a telegram summoning

my father from Khashchove. He arrived the next day. That day they found Zirka's head and hide, and a bucket of lard. Our "good" neighbours had stolen the cow and slaughtered it<sup>59</sup>.

The dominant feature of the biographical narration is the surviving, not the looking for the culprit. Surviving is a fundamental value for the narrators; it becomes also the criterion of success, of a successful life<sup>60</sup>.

It was the year 1933: famine. In the springtime, after I quit school, I hired myself out as a cowherd to people who still owned cows. They gave me something to eat once a day, and in the field the other herders and I would roast hempseed and snails over a fire. Today we live well, but young people don't believe what misery there was in those days. The famine forced us to eat everything – bagasse [dry residue of sugar cane and beets], stripped corncobs, and sunflower heads. And when spring came, we ate beet leaves, nettles, pigweed, and frozen potatoes. The horses at the collective farm died. They buried them in the ground, poured gas over them, and during the night the starving people would hack off pieces of that carrion and bring them home.

My parents had seven children. First, my father's legs began to swell, then my sister's legs began swelling, then her face. Then the skin cracks and water starts to seep out. When I was herding cows, my father would always come out to meet me to help me bring the cattle back, so that he would also be given a piece of bread.

My father and I dug the garden, and my mother went to the market fifteen kilometres away to buy some food. My father sent me home to see whether my mother had returned. I ran home a couple of times; finally my mother returned. She had purchased two large pots and four cups of corn kernels. She minced up some sorrel and nettles, added some sheep's tallow that had turned green after many years of being stored, and put it on the stove. But the pot cracked, and everything fell into the stove. I came into the house, where my mother was picking up every kernel and weeping. I rejoined my father in the garden and told him what happened. He too began to cry.

In the village I often saw strangers swollen from starvation edema. These people, holding their children by the hand, were from Uman. Dressed in

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<sup>59</sup> The account of Havrylo Nykyforovych Prokopenko (born 1922), originally published in: *Golod 33: Narodna knyha-memorial...*, p. 196–197.

<sup>60</sup> In a book of Valentyna Borysenko there are many such oral histories. See: V. Borysenko, *A Candle in Remembrance: An Oral History of the Ukrainian Genocide of 1932–1933*, New York 2010.

expensive, cashmere-like shawls, they bartered various things for a handful of meal, potatoes, or beets. Some abandoned their children near fences, so that someone would take them and save them from starvation. A five-year-old boy who came to our house adamantly refused to leave us. I remember how some starving people from somewhere far away hunkered down for the night with their small children near the church. By morning the mother and father were dead, and their tiny children were waking them, thinking they were asleep. Our people took the children to their homes<sup>61</sup>.

The selection of the memories for the book of testimonies means that the selection is a part of a specific vision of this event, the means for presenting a specific image of the event which, according to the authors, is appropriate to present the Holodomor. Apart from the voices of the “Holodomor survivors”, there are no other testimonies from this period of time. This fact is mainly connected with the impossibility to recreate the memory of the generation of the violators on the basis of their relations. On the other hand, though, the narrations are usually the chilling stories about the losing of the values in the face of the starvation, repellent descriptions of cannibalism which very often depicted as a celebration of suffering, the perverse delectation of the drama of the starving people which in a sense is on the verge of a tastelessness.

I would therefore like to point out two aspects of the stereotyping of individual memory: altering the narration and interpreting oral testimonies, done by the researchers of the Holodomor. A researcher who evokes the biographical narrations always gives the reason why he/she is doing so. Biographies which are written on the spot are fragmentary, non-linear and closely connected with the presence of the researcher and his/her questions<sup>62</sup>. In this biographical creation both participants of the talk: the narrator and the researcher are limited by the borders of the thematic research. The transmission of the initiative on the researcher is unprofitable for the later analysis of the means of the narration construction because it is the historian then who decides about the order of the threads discussed by the narrator<sup>63</sup>. In

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<sup>61</sup> The account of Dmytro Ivanovych Slobodianiuk (born 1919), originally published in: *Golod 33: Narodna knyha-memorial...*, p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> J. Labocha, *Tekst autobiograficzny jako pewna wizja świata*, [in:] *Językowy obraz świata i kultura*, ed. by A. Dąbrowska, J. Anusiewicz, Wrocław 2000, p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> I. Kabzińska, *Wśród “kościelnych Polaków”. Wyznaczniki tożsamości etnicznej (narodowej) Polaków na Białorusi*, Warszawa 1999, p. 18.

Alessandro Portelli's opinion, a similar request for asking questions is connected with the point dangerous for the narration – the narrator's attempt to check what the researcher would like to hear in this moment: ask and you will hear what you want to hear<sup>64</sup>.

On the level of the narration interpretation, there is a problem of the different means of the perception of reality and the past experiences of the community researched by the narrators and the researchers. It is easy to write about something that the narrator apparently wanted to say and not about what the narrator actually said. What is more, the researchers who record the memories are different from each other in terms of the age, sex, nationality, political views and value system. Moreover, they represent different communities which had the influence on their image of the past, so their images of the researched past can be different as well. In this way the researcher's stereotypical image of the past replaces the one of the narrator.

The possibility to get to know the unsaid forsaken facts from the history of the Ukraine under Communism engaged both the researchers and the narrators to create a new official version of events. The state monopoly, though, did not assume the relativism or the variety of memories about the Holodomor. The redefinition of the Soviet past in this context was the promotion of the directly alternative past to the foregoing one, not the revealing of the truth about the past, as was officially explained.

It is worth mentioning here an ideological aspect that is characteristic of a spoken history of any kind that is described with a "post-"prefix (post-colonial, post-totalitarian, post-communist etc.). Here, the spoken history came to life as a comeback against the ideologically-driven, official vision of history, that is a part of the country's politics, creating the identity of its citizens, on both an individual and a collective level. During the post-Soviet period in 1990s, when oral history was still emerging, this method looked in the formal sense more like a social movement than like a serious study on the narrations of the biographical witnesses. Then the floor was given to those, who among other things, wanted to shed a different light on the well-known momentous events of the Soviet Union era, by promoting their individual memories and completely rejecting the existing vision. Such memories, which helped to rediscover the "blank spots" of the Soviet

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<sup>64</sup> A. Portelli, *Oral History as a Genre*, [in:] *Narrative and Genre*, ed. by M. Chamberlain, P. Thompson, New York 2000, p. 28–29.

Ukraine's' history, became an object of interest of many researchers. They were seen as a tool that could be used against history, that could be helpful to sort out lies and illusions in the description of the former reality under the Communist power and that could impose its own interpretation of the past which would differ from the existing, distorted one.

The current interest in the Holodomor in the general politicization of this topic in the scientific and public discourse is still the effect of the so-called "excess of the memory". The thrilling and in a sense political shape of the debate concerning the assessment of the event makes it considerably difficult to credibly analyze the available sources. The multiple evoking of the gruesome images of pain and suffering eliminates different experiences (which are not considered real). In Oksana Kis's opinion, it is a practice of memory/oblivion because it gives the Ukrainian society a moral assentency not to protect and not to cultivate the real memory, but only its canonical images which are preserved in the social memory and "places of memory"<sup>65</sup>. It raises questions regarding the distinction between oral history – the first-hand evidence of individuals, and oral tradition – tales passed on from one generation to the next. But oral tradition may begin as oral history, mutating gradually from first hand narration to stories that open with "people used to say that..."

### **Instead of the ending**

In the context of this opinion, the fundamental questions come to my mind: is it possible to talk about the existence of the private memory about the momentous events in the spate of the public memories? Does the private memory about the Holodomor currently exist? Maybe we just use the narration schemes which are known from the public discourse and which help to tell one's story in a socially acceptable way. Isn't the operative narrative stereotype just a figment of the interpretation of researchers of the topic? Many analyzed narrations are characterized by the fear of being different and the willingness to key in the existing scheme. These reasons cause the following stereotypical images and lead to an even worse distortion of the image of the past "how it really was". In this way, the fact that the memory of the Holodomor was shaped due to the instrumental treatment

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<sup>65</sup> O. Kis', *Kolektivna pam'at' ta istorična travma. Teoretičnì refleksii na tli žinočih spogadiv pro Golodomor*, [in:] *U pošukah vlasnogo golosu...*, p. 171–191.



of the memories of the witnesses to history becomes even more noticeable. On the other hand, we notice in this way the need to approach the existing (operative) image of those events in a more reflexive way; to release the people's memory about the Holodomor and to get to know these people profoundly, which – unfortunately – is currently practically impossible.

Barbara Misztal, however, states that the way to work out the experience from the past is that the society has to open up to the survivors' experience to give them the voice in the public space<sup>66</sup>. Numerous printed memories were to be such an element of the process of the Ukrainians' purification, their discovering (or, for the most part, constructing) their Ukrainian national identity.

The discussion about the collective oblivion is a starting point for the social and cultural change, because it exposes the individuals' and communities' conviction about their memories having the important gaps or, so to speak, "white spots". In this way, the community of memory of this community does not preserve the essential content from its members' experience, which thoroughly influences the shape of their identity and, therefore, it demands critical reflection and reinterpretation of the image of such an event distorted or removed from the memory.

Being convinced about falsifying of the identity motivates to get into oneself, to gain the entry to the memory resources, to visit the real places connected with starvation. The lack of acceptance for the politicization of the Holodomor, the willingness to get to know this phenomenon, the location of the history of our ancestors against those events (on which side they were) turn out to be the inspiration and even the impulse to re-remembering (anamnesis) the Holodomor.

The term "anamnesis" itself was originally used by Plato to refer to deliberate recollection rather than unbidden flashes of memory, and has been used in post-colonial theory. Post-colonial anamnesis does not entail abandoning the official archive as nothing more than a technology of government. Personally, I understand this kind of anamnesis as it is defined by Homi K. Bhabha as a conscious work of memory which not only recovers the forgotten content but mainly points the very existence of the content. Remembering in post-colonial societies, he writes, "is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering,

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<sup>66</sup> B. A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Maidenhead 2003, p. 160–161.

a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present"<sup>67</sup>. It is worth emphasizing that recalling does not mean here reminding and mainly this subtle difference may be noticed on the Holodomor. The purpose of remembering is not the reconstruction of the events about the existence of which we have forgotten. Recollection is possible only when we are conscious that something has been forgotten. Forgetfulness is usually preceded by the suppression or other forms of repression which are used against the individual or community of memory and as a result of which the remembered content becomes hidden<sup>68</sup>. Recollection is also not an independent process but it requires the consciousness of the effort which is taken to self-declaring<sup>69</sup>. Hence, being conscious that the Holodomor took place and that the memory about it became distorted as a result of the political manoeuvre series which took place at the beginning of the 1990s but this memory lasts until now, under the influence of the impulse which the contemporary political situation turned out to be, the Ukrainian society may get ready for remembering of the Holodomor. The proof for it can be at least the beginning of the academic discussion about the politicization of the memory about the Holodomor, as well as about its commemoration.

In this case, the memory's work demands referring to the memory of others (representatives of other communities of memory or of violators) or to the memory carriers (e.g. real places) which will help to put the remembering content in order. Such a point of reference may (but do not have to) be the places of the memory of Holodomor which were constituted by various communities of the memory about the Holodomor. This is the reason why they should be analyzed with great attention.

In the context of working out of the experience of the Holocaust, Dominick LaCapra wrote that people have to accept the existence of the open wounds but they have to fight off the power with which they are able to consume the existence and to deprive a person of the agency<sup>70</sup>. In case of working out of the trauma of the Holodomor by the Ukrainian society, at first it's about remembering the event because of its highly political image.

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<sup>67</sup> H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994, p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> R. Terdiman, *Present Past. Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, New York 1993, p. 344–360.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> D. LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, Ithaca–London 2004, p. 106–143.

This process is getting even more difficult because of the fact that there are not too many living eye-witnesses of the Holodomor.

The conversation about the past and the restoration of the memory cannot be done after all without referring to the values. Even when we pursue the maximal objectivism, we cannot completely free ourselves from ordering according to certain norms, if not from the valuation. The fundamental task of the historians, philosophers or sociologists is therefore working out the theoretical categories which will help the society understand the past events<sup>71</sup>. The trauma of the Holodomor cannot be healed but its symptoms may milder through working them out. It does not matter if this tragedy is treated as a genocide or just as a “traumatic event”.

Admittedly, remembering does not guarantee that the regained memories will not deepen the emptiness and the sense of the incompleteness of the identity. Though, the search for the “real” memory about the Holodomor may turn out to be crucial for the working out of the social trauma which results on the one hand from the experience of the Holodomor and on the other hand from the multi-layered oblivion about this event.

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<sup>71</sup> P. Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie*, Gdańsk 2005, p. 176.

**The article discusses a wide range of aspects concerning the Holodomor – the Great Famine in the Soviet Union in the years 1932–1933. The author focuses on examining the processes of creating a collective image of the Great Famine and the role of individual memory of its survivors in building this image. Analyzing the memories of the survivors the author deals with distortions and myths which has grown up around the Holodomor. The significance of this disaster for the Ukrainian identity is also the subject of the analysis.**

**Wiktoria  
Kudela-Świątek**

*From private memory  
to the collective image  
of the Ukrainian  
Holodomor*