
FOUR

MARGINALIZED MEMORIES

From September 1941 to 1943, Babi Yar was used by Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* squads as a place of slaughter and mass burial. In excess of 100,000 people, including Jews, Roma and Soviet prisoners of war were killed here, their bodies burnt and their ashes buried in the ravine. During an initial massacre over two days (29–30 September) in 1941, 33,771 of these people were shot in the largest isolated killing operation of World War II. Today Babi Yar lies on the outskirts of Kiev within a public park which is roughly a kilometre in size. The exact position of the original ravine is no longer discernible, although several ravines shape the landscape woodland, lawns and paths. There are two distinct sections; one contains nearly all the officially inaugurated Babi Yar memorials including a central monument to slain Soviet citizens and a vast bronze sculpture group of oversized figures looming over this half of the park.



Figure 4.1. Soviet-era monument

Eight other memorials to various groups and individuals have since been added there.¹ One might easily assume that the broad, sweeping ravine at the centre of this space is the original site of the massacre. The landscape aesthetic in this area is more formal and manicured in appearance than in the other half, which is partially quite densely wooded, and to casual observation looks much as any other large city park.



Figure 4.2. Preparations for seventieth anniversary events



Figure 4.3. Babi Yar Park, Kiev

A stone menorah is one of the few memorials to be found in this second half of the park, and this is rumoured to be much closer to the original ravine than the Soviet sculpture group (although there is no way one could know this without researching the subject), and indeed there is an overgrown ravine just south of the menorah, which can be reached from the other half of the park by walking along a path named ‘the Road of Grief’. As one landscape, the park is a somewhat incoherent space. Each memorial bears little stylistic resemblance to those around it. Signage has recently been added on the northern edge of the park to show visitors where each official memorial is (in Ukrainian only). In September 2011 temporary banners were also positioned at intervals over the roads around the park announcing the seventieth year since the massacre. Otherwise there has been scant evidence of any attempt to provide an overall view of the landscape’s history or of how, or exactly where, so many people of diverse cultural groups came to lose their lives here.

The incoherence of Babi Yar’s landscape can be related in part to its slow and fractious development as a memoryscape, which corresponds to the larger context of Ukrainian Holocaust memory. Of the approximate 4 million Ukrainians and Jews killed during the Holocaust in Ukraine, up to 150,000 were killed and buried at Babi Yar. As in other locations throughout the country, victims were shot and their bodies thrown in a freshly dug pit. Many elements that characterize the landscape of the Ukraine Holocaust can be observed at Babi Yar; it is in some respects a microcosm of the larger topography of the country as a whole. In Patrick Desbois’s account,² the full impact of this campaign emerges. ‘The landscape of Ukraine, village after village,



Figure 4.4. Menorah

east to west, was transforming itself under my eyes into an ocean of exterminations ... The horrors of the Holocaust were not necessarily the same from one place to another, but they did unfortunately cover the whole country without exception' (2008: 147). His narrative is not one of isolated atrocities but of an apparently endless landscape of burnt bodies, offering a powerful image of nation-space as cemetery: 'I imagine that if we could open all the mass graves we would have to take aerial photos of the whole of Ukraine. A mass cemetery of anonymous pits ... Not a camp but a country of graves' (2008: 178).³

As elsewhere in Ukraine, commemoration of the Holocaust at Babi Yar preceding the fall of Communism in 1991 was notable mainly in its absence, reflecting the pervasive silence about the Holocaust in Ukrainian territory under the Soviet government. Indeed, the concept of the 'Holocaust in Ukraine' has existed only on the margins of academic perception for many years, and in some respects this trend persists (see Brandon and Lower 2008: 2–6; Shapiro 2008: viii). The complex and troubling history of Ukrainian anti-Semitism and complicity in Nazi atrocities (see Dean 2003: 20, 101–102), which for many years has been elided in national discourses, may be in part responsible for the long delays between the events of the Holocaust in Ukraine and their commemoration in public space. Brandon and Lower (2008: 6) also note that for a long time, and for understandable reasons, interest in the Holocaust was characterized by what they dub 'Auschwitz Syndrome': 'many historians, philosophers, and political scientists as well as the general public focused on the killing centres and methods used to deport Jews' to the camps; 'country and regional studies had to wait'. Ukraine was very much in the latter category.⁴ Paul Shapiro, director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, has stated that the spaces of killing in Ukraine, unlike the concentration and death camps elsewhere, 'offer up none of the architectural design elements that shape the iconic imagery of Holocaust memorial sites worldwide' (2008: viii). This is not to say, however, that the Ukrainian Holocaust did not result in a landscape replete with perceived symbolic significance; Ukrainian soil, rather than Ukrainian architecture, provides an alternative Holocaust memoryscape to many of those in other European countries. In both rural and urban areas of Ukraine, the traces of the mass killings that took place here between 1941 and 1943 are faint, but the evidence lies very close to the surface.

The Curse of Babi Yar

Russian writer Victor Nekrasov revealed how low a priority Babi Yar's commemoration was in Kiev immediately after the war when, apart from 'some

suspicious characters who crawled along the ravine's bottom in search of either diamonds or golden dental crowns', people 'faced tasks more important than Babi Yar'; it became 'simply a rubbish heap. A small lopsided post with the laconic inscription 'It is forbidden to pile rubbish here, fine – 300 roubles' did not in the least prevent local residents from getting rid of no longer useful old beds, tin cans, and other rubbish' (in Tumarkin 2010: 280). Nekrasov was among the first to attempt to raise public awareness of Babi Yar's neglect and wrote against plans to build a sports stadium at the site in 1959 (Tumarkin 2010: 280). The stadium was never built, but the local authorities embarked on a comprehensive project to wipe 'the good-for-nothing ravine' from 'the surface of the earth' by constructing a dam to flood it. The dam, which later collapsed, released 'a great billow of liquid mud around ten metres high ... from the mouth of Babi Yar. ... There were thousands of victims ... those who lived at ground level were killed instantly' (Tumarkin 2010: 281). Maria Tumarkin further remarks that the 'idea of the curse or the revenge of Babi Yar became understandably widespread' in Kiev after the flood (Tumarkin 2010: 281). A similar description appears in the testimonial accounts of Anatoli Kuznetsov, a resident in Kiev from his birth in 1929 until his defection from the Soviet Union in 1969. On the subject of the mudslide, he notes that '[t]he phrase "Babi Yar takes its revenge" was much on people's lips' (Kuznetsov 1972: 474). This sense of place as cursed, as will be discussed, can be seen as a reflection of local responses to other mass graves across the rest of Ukraine. Also in 1961, the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko wrote the poem 'Babi Yar', with its oft-cited opening line: 'Over Babi Yar there are no monuments.' Both a memorial in itself and an explicit condemnation of the Soviet authorities, Yevtushenko's poem was to play an important role in creating international awareness of both Babi Yar itself and continuing anti-Semitism in Ukraine in this period. I return to the question of how Babi Yar's memory came to travel through literary texts in the second half of this chapter.

In 1967, five years after the dam collapsed – and twenty-five years after the massacre – thousands of people attended an apparently spontaneous event at the site (Kuznetsov 1972: 475) in the first significant attempt by a large group to mark its atrocious history. Local authorities installed the first-ever official marker at the site two weeks later: a granite rock which read 'A monument will be erected at this site'. Kuznetsov suggests that this was put in place simply to show any foreign visitors who might have heard about the spontaneous meeting and who would expect Babi Yar to be marked in some way: 'If [they] insist, they can be taken along and shown the stone plaque, which will have some flowers lain around it in advance. Once the visitors have departed the flowers are removed' (1972: 475). In 1977 – ten years after the appearance of the granite marker – an official monument was finally erected, eliding the issue of 'Jewish' persecution by simply 'invoking the

theme of slain Soviet citizens' (Tumarkin 2010: 9). As in East Germany, the overall narrative – both at Babi Yar and across Ukraine – was one of a violent, tragic, but ultimately triumphant struggle against fascism, focusing particularly on heroic Communist figures. Again, Jewish victims were missing from the discourse and the landscape. Even when the stone menorah finally appeared at Babi Yar in 1991, historian Stefan Rohdewald argues that it served only to '[symbolize] the marginality of Jewish remembrance of the Shoah in Ukrainian society, rather than its incorporation into the national framework' (2008: 176). This observation is borne out by the striking difference between the simplicity of the menorah and the aforementioned ostentatious memorial to Soviet citizens. Rohdewald suggests that such marginalization also characterizes recent efforts to include Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Ukraine's commemorative landscape as a whole, despite an evolution in research on the subject since 1991 and the mandatory inclusion of the Holocaust in school programmes laid down by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education in 2001.

[L]inking the murder of Ukraine's Jews with Ukrainian national history remains a taboo in most public debates ... Ukrainian history textbooks [confirm] this: the tragedy is linked to German anti-Semitism and extermination camps in Poland, and is 'silent' about the death of Jews in the territory of today's Ukraine. Hence, a strategy to externalise the Holocaust can be observed. (Rohdewald 2008: 17)

In 2008, director of the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies Anatoly Podol's'kyi condemned the Ukrainian government for their lack of interest in 'promoting a discussion of Jewish life and the Holocaust in Ukraine', practically resulting in a failure to maintain the few memorials that have appeared or to provide any support – 'moral, institutional, or financial' – for the few independent institutions now working to keep Ukraine Holocaust memory alive (Podol's'kyi 2008: 5). Reviewing the peripheral presence of the Holocaust in Ukrainian school and education programmes, Podol's'kyi echoes Rohdewald, perceiving 'the subordination of academia to political interests' (2008: 4).

In 2009 a city council proposal to build a hotel on the Babi Yar site as part of a larger plan for the construction of twenty-eight new hotels to accommodate thousands of visitors expected to visit Kiev for the 2012 European Football Championships was leaked to the press by an opposed council member. It sparked immediate international controversy, unsurprisingly most heated among Jewish groups (BBC News 2009), but was publicly vetoed by the mayor of Kiev on the sixty-eighth anniversary of the massacre (Ellingworth 2009). As noted, the memorial topography at Babi Yar now includes monuments to a number of victimized groups, but the sports proposal of

2009 – echoing that of fifty years before (Tumarkin 2010: 8) – suggests a continued suppression of Holocaust memory in Ukraine despite the lack of direct prohibition.⁵

The Holocaust in Ukraine and ‘the Ukrainian Holocaust’

Podol’skyi notes a recently emerging competitive framework of Ukrainian memory generated by a refusal ‘to perceive ... national history’ as one of ‘various cultures’:

The ‘other’ tends to be excluded and viewed as something alien. Apparently it is more comfortable to talk about ‘us’ and ‘others’, for example about ‘our Great Famine’ and about ‘the others’ Holocaust’. A certain narrative is taking shape, in which the Holocaust does not appear ... in recent times, the Great Famine in Ukraine is increasingly being called ‘the Ukrainian Holocaust’. (2008: 4)

Rohdewald, too, argues that the Holocaust is frequently used as ‘a rhetorical framework’ for the *holodomor* (2008: 178), as the Great Famine became ‘the most important new element of Ukrainian collective memory’ in post-Soviet historiography (Kappeler 2009: 58–59). A necessarily brief survey of memorial activity instigated by official Ukrainian institutions in the recent past is suggestive of a similar tendency. The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM), in its first incarnation from 2005 to 2010, has been key in bringing the *holodomor* to public attention and was instrumental in facilitating the legal recognition that it constituted a genocide against the Ukrainian people.⁶ There can be little doubt that in recapturing the memory of the Great Famine, the UINM amongst others has performed long overdue work. The Ukrainian government recognized 2008 as ‘*Holodomor* Victims Remembrance Year’ and plans for a substantial memorial to commemorate the tragedy were announced. The UINM administered the competition for designs for the new space and oversaw the project to completion. The result is a monumental ‘Candle of Memory’ perched on a steep slope overlooking the Dnieper River, in a central and much-visited area of the city alongside UNESCO world heritage site the Peshersk Lavra. The candle itself, an impressive glass, concrete and metal structure, towers over the entrance to a comprehensive memorial museum, and is surrounded by a complex of walls, plaques, walkways and statues. The aims of the memorial, inherent in the designs of the monuments, museum and UINM publications sold in the small museum shop, are twofold: the provision of an appropriate space in which people may remember and pay tribute to the suffering of *holodomor* victims, and the integration of the famine years as a central co-ordinate in the creation of contemporary Ukrainian national identity. The former commemo-

rative agenda is visible in several elements within the museum in particular: a series of memorial books containing the names of victims from each region affected surrounds a pillar of corn kernels, into which visitors may place lighted candles. The associated museum publications also give a voice to the victims by reproducing their testimonies, which are featured in a film projected on the museum's inner walls at timed intervals.

The centrality of the *holodomor* to the construction of a new Ukrainian identity is manifest in the decisive casting of Stalin as a perpetrator of genocide, thus providing 'a convincing argument' for the elimination of 'Communism from the lives of all the world's peoples once and for all' (Yukhnovskiy, then acting head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory in Hetnov and Yukhnovskiy 2008: 3); an emotive argument in the context of the *holodomor*, but one which fails to differentiate between different phases and forms of Communism. Ukraine's independence is partly defined, for the institute at least, by anti-Communism. The museum catalogue also states that the principles that 'every nation forms a natural union with its native land' and 'Ukraine's land has consistently and indivertibly given birth to Ukrainians' are central to the exhibit. This is borne out by the many reminders of the traditional Ukrainian relationship with soil and wheat in and around the museum; in the design of the outer complex (which features golden wheat behind black metal cages), film footage of Ukrainian farmers working the land in the aforementioned projection, and in an installation of related farm equipment, also within the museum. This overriding aesthetic implies that a traditionally productive union between man and soil, violently subverted under Stalin, remains central to contemporary Ukrainian national identity.



Figure 4.5. Memory Candle



Figure 4.6. Wheat sculpture outside the Candle of Memory

The 'Candle of Memory' and the other work done by the UINM warrant a more lengthy analysis than I can provide in this context,⁷ but the above summary at least gives some weight to the argument that the centrality of the *holodomor* to discourses of Ukrainian national memory is manifest in the landscape of the country's capital city. Such cannot be said of the Holocaust; as the proposal for the 'Candle of Memory' was being put into action, the Kiev city council was discussing the practicalities of building a hotel at Babi Yar. In recapturing vital memories of the *holodomor*, those of the Holocaust have remained peripheral. According to Andreas Kappeler, the very notion of a Ukrainian 'national history' raises questions: 'What should be regarded as Ukrainian history? Is it represented only by the national Ukrainian narrative, focused on the Ukrainian people and their attempts to create a Ukrainian national state? Or does it embrace the territory of Ukraine, with its multiethnic population, from antiquity to the present time?' (2009: 56). Ukrainian historians, he goes on to suggest, have until now adopted a national paradigm; from the brief survey above, it may be suggested that memorial activity has proceeded along much the same lines.

Yet I would suggest that the Holocaust and the *holodomor* share more ground than current memory discourse and landscapes imply, and that any competitiveness that exists could be productively neutralized by an official recognition of this ground. Hence I go on, now, to consider the possibility that embracing Ukrainian territory, and the experience of the multiethnic population on that territory, may be productive for the future of Ukrainian memory; that, rather than promoting a superorganic version of Ukrainian identity, attending to the experience of landscape across a broader period might encourage a more inclusive perception of Ukrainian history as one as one of 'various cultures'. In order to draw connections between these two events, whilst retaining their individual specificity, I consider testimonial accounts written by both Holocaust and *holodomor* victims and witnesses alongside a discussion of the various political and geographical factors that determined and contextualized their experiences across Ukraine from 1930 to 1945. This analysis leads me back to representations of Babi Yar itself in testimony, where the journey undertaken by the second chapter in this section will begin.

Multidirectional Experience? The Holocaust and the *Holodomor*

In exploring the experiences of Ukraine's population in relation to Ukrainian landscape, it is first necessary to note that I do not mean to replicate the logic of 'blood and soil' and thus construct a mythological, superorganic vision of

Ukrainian identity; I am wary of assuming ‘naturalized affiliations between subject and object’ (Campbell 2008: 3). I recall too Buell’s argument that ‘[n]ational borders by no means regularly correspond with “natural” borders’ (Buell 2005: 81–82). Yet Ukraine is an example of a nation whose borders are almost completely determined by natural elements and topographical forms. The term *ukraina*, by which the land which now constitutes modern Ukraine was originally known, means ‘undefined borderland’. The name *Ukraine* did not come into popular usage until the early nineteenth century (Magocsi 2010: 189–90). This land and the people who lived there have been historically defined according to their relationship with, and between, neighbouring states, rather than to any fixed conception of nationhood; indeed Ukraine did not become a nation in itself until the early twentieth century. The connection between inhabitants and territory was determined far more by the fertility of the rich black *chernozem* soil, ideal for growing wheat (Subtelny 1991: 3; Cooper 2006: 24–25), than by any particular ‘national’ narrative. The land of the Ukrainian steppe has for centuries been regarded as amongst the richest in the Europe, and as the continent’s ‘breadbasket’ Ukraine has been ‘valued for its natural resources more than its diverse population’ (Lower 2005: 2). Unlike their Russian neighbours to the north, who had to farm collectively to be effective, the fertility of Ukraine allowed inhabitants to farm independently, a natural circumstance that came to affect the ‘mentalit[y], cultur[e], and socio-economic organization’ of Ukraine and its people (Subtelny 1991: 5).

Ukraine’s borderland position and fertile soil have led to repeated colonizations; effectively, that is, attempts to territorialize the land. Thus as much as geography has played a part in defining Ukrainian identity, it has led to frequent, violent attempts to destroy the fundamental basis on which this identity exists. According to Lower, the perception that the ‘space and its people could be exploited and radically transformed was most extreme in the 1930s and 1940s when Soviet and then Nazi empire-builders unleashed their utopian schemes in Ukraine’ (2005: 2). There is, then, a fundamental parallel between the context in which the Holocaust and the *holodomor* occurred. Perhaps the most prominent example of comparative historiography to recognize this is Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* (2010). Snyder follows up Hannah Arendt’s argument that ‘the Nazi and Stalinist systems must be compared, not so much to understand one or the other but to understand our times and ourselves’ (Snyder 2010: 380). Yet the reluctance to embrace the notion of a double Ukrainian genocide – and subsequently, perhaps, to consider any possible confluence between victim and witness experience – is evident in responses to Snyder’s text (see Zuroff 2010 and Bartov 2011: 424–28). Furthermore ‘identification of the Holocaust with the Holodomor has ... been rejected by most non-Ukrainian historians’ because it presents

an unwanted challenge to 'the singular and exclusive place of the Holocaust and Auschwitz in the collective memory not only of Jews but also of most other Western Europeans and Americans' (Kappeler 2009: 59). Elie Wiesel, in reporting on Soviet Jewry, argued that '[a]n abyss of blood separates Moscow from Berlin. The distance between them is not only one of geography and ideology; it is the distance between life and death' ([1966]2011: 5). Examining the impact of these two totalitarian regimes within one geographic location at least removes one obstacle from this equation. The two regimes had different policies about the Jewish population, but whilst this was the central concern of Wiesel's report it is less so to my own; I pursue instead a focus on the experience of landscape as a co-ordinate shared by people across cultures under both Stalin and Hitler.

Concerns about the conflation of different histories are entirely legitimate. But in some instances such concerns can be contextualized within a broader rejection of recent attempts to open up the field of history to transcultural analysis, a rejection commensurate with the 'phallic logic' of much debate on empire, colony and genocide since 9/11 (Moses 2010: 6). In asking whether historiography needs to 'be a zero-sum game' (2010: 7), Moses also alerts us to the fact that possible alternatives exist as far as the interpretation of the past is concerned, and the most nuanced of comparative work supports this contention. As Craps and Rothberg suggest, some of the most influential work on the Holocaust has drawn attention to the fact that by refusing to consider interconnected histories together '(except in a competitive manner) we deprive ourselves of an opportunity to gain greater insight into each of these different strands of history and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the dark underside of modernity' (2011: 518). Accordingly, I pursue here the possibility of a multidirectional contiguity between two events which are inevitably drawn together by the Ukrainian experience of territory as a factor that both structures history and mediates memory.

The historical specificity of each event must be first addressed. The *holodomor* was a consequence of Stalin's Five-Year Plan, which, from 1928, violently enforced a programme of collectivized farming on the Ukrainian people (Snyder 2010:28). Under collectivization, which was well under way by 1930, the Ukrainian people were no longer able to live off their own soil. In fact they were alienated from it; although they were in charge of food production, they did not own the results of their labour. Harvests were poor for a number of reasons, but many of these were related to the disruption caused by the major shift to collectivized methods. Much of what had been grown was shipped to other parts of the Soviet Union and elsewhere; in many cases nothing at all was left to feed the Ukrainian people. Furthermore, Stalin's plan involved the destruction of the wealthier independent farmers, the '*kulak*' class, many of whom were either executed or deported (Snyder 2010:

26). This evacuation of space had lethal consequences: some of Ukraine's most reliable producers were unable to work their land. The liquidization of the *kulaks* was ideologically commensurate with Stalin's vision for a Communist society, but it was also a pragmatic move; he anticipated that collectivization would lead to a struggle between the peasant class and the Soviet police whose job was to enforce it. In depriving the peasants of their leaders, this clash would be minimized (Snyder 2010: 25). The idea that the annihilation of the *kulak* class would liberate the poorer peasant classes was undermined by the mass starvation that followed.

According to Snyder's account, Hitler mobilized the *holodomor* as an example of the failure of Marxism in practice (2010: 61). In turn, in 1934 Stalin used antifascist rhetoric to marshal the European Left (2010: 66). Yet despite the binary opposition they were constructing, Hitler duplicated several of Stalin's tactics within Germany itself; just as Stalin had forcibly removed the *kulaks* and taken their grain, Hitler organized boycotts of Jewish businesses: 'like collectivisation, the boycotts indicated which sector of society would lose the most in coming social and economic transformations' (2010: 62). Forced deportation was considered a 'territorial solution' to Germany's Jewish 'problem' in the years leading up to the Second World War (2010: 112). Hitler and Stalin's policies thus share some methodological ground. Furthermore, in a display of pragmatism over ideology, Hitler and Stalin were to join forces to invade and conquer Poland in 1939. However, the alliance was short lived and the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 (Snyder 2010: 160–61). As a result the Jewish population suffered most; under Stalin, a high percentage of the dead were non-Jewish Ukrainians.⁸ Nonetheless, as will become clear, the landscapes and experiences of the *holodomor* substantially foreshadow those of the Ukrainian Holocaust that would follow.

The Nazi colonization of Ukraine was fundamentally a fight for soil and space, what Hitler called 'the shift to the soil policy of the future' (Lower 2005: 3): the campaign to reclaim Germany's 'garden of Eden' (Lower 2005: 101). Hitler aimed to settle Ukraine with German peasants: 'Sacred German soil, in the Nazi view, had no specific boundaries; Ukraine would effectively become part of Germany' (Kiernan 2007: 432). The campaign was 'naturalised' by colonial rhetoric, which depicted Germany's role in Ukraine as a form of 'manifest destiny' (Snyder 2010: 15). In 1942, children in Hitler's Germany played a board game in which armed forces competed for the 'fertile black earth' of Ukraine (Lower 2005: 187). In order to claim it in reality, Hitler needed to remove as many non-Germans as possible, resulting in a rapid and widespread ethnic cleansing programme. Whilst killing in Ukraine under Hitler was, in the course of time, to occur primarily as organized mass shooting operations, the first strategy planned for the country was the deliberate starvation of the unwanted Soviet population: the Hunger Plan.

Ukrainian food was again a central motivating force for this destruction of life. 'The Soviet Union was the only realistic source of calories for Germany and its West European empire ... Like Stalin, Hitler tended to see Ukraine itself as a geopolitical asset, and its people as instruments who tilled the soil, tools that could be exchanged with others or discarded ... Food from Ukraine was as important to the Nazi vision of an Eastern empire as it was to Stalin's defence of the integrity of the Soviet Union' (Snyder 2010: 161). Hitler's approach to territorializing the land was pursued via policies of 'starvation and colonization' (Snyder 2010: 163). That shooting, rather than starvation, came to primarily characterize the Ukrainian Holocaust may have been because it soon became clear that the Hunger Plan was impossible to implement in full (Snyder 2010: 167–69). Nonetheless, the German invaders did seize much of the food they came across, and famine again cast a shadow over many parts of Ukraine. As well as reducing the Soviet population as a whole, Hitler was determined to clear his new territory of 'agitators, partisans, saboteurs, and Jews' (Snyder 2010: 182). As had been the case throughout Germany's invasion of Poland, the task of eliminating these groups was given to the *Einsatzgruppen*.

Beyond these methodological similarities, both the *holodomor* and the Holocaust affected Ukraine and its people on two interconnected levels: topographical and experiential. The alienation of many Ukrainian peasants from soil in life, a direct consequence of the Five-Year Plan, very soon led to their internment within it in death; at the height of the famine, Ukrainian villagers were dying at the rate of 25,000 per day, equivalent to seventeen people a minute (League of Canadian Ukrainians website). Historian Robert Conquest introduces an initial parallel to the Holocaust by comparing the landscape of Ukraine in the early 1930s to 'one vast Belsen. A quarter of the rural population, men, women and children, lay dead or dying. At the same time (as at Belsen) well-fed squads of police or party officials supervised the victims' (1986: 3). Conquest's description resonates with Desbois's image of Ukrainian nation space as cemetery; throughout the Holocaust and the *holodomor* the landscape and soil of Ukraine was steeped in recent death. In recalling the difficulty of burying famine victims, *holodomor* survivor Maria Katchmar describes scenes reminiscent of Holocaust testimonies: bodies were thrown 'like mud', into a pit 'big enough for [an] entire village' (2008). Snyder similarly notes the problems faced by those left alive with regards burying the dead; 'healthier peasants ... barely had the strength or inclination to dig graves very deeply, so that hands and feet could be seen above the earth ... Crews would take the weak along with the dead and bury them alive ... In a few cases such victims managed to dig their way out of the shallow mass graves' (2010: 52). A parallel to the Holocaust again emerges; in nearly every account of Nazi mass murder and burial recorded by Desbois,

at least one witness recalled how the ground would continue to move for days: ‘shot Jews were very often only wounded, not dead. Everywhere, from east to west, north to south, the witnesses always ended their testimonies by muttering: “The pit moved for three days.”’ (Desbois 2008: 96–97). In both cases, the genocide’s impact on topography directly affected those who lived on the land and witnessed these events. Kuznetsov too returns periodically to the transformation of the Ukrainian landscape as a corruption of the soil. In an initial passage on Babi Yar, to which I will return in more detail later, the ground is described as made up of ashes and small pieces of bone; he also tells of a trench in a village field outside the city, a ‘local Babi Yar’: ‘partly filled in and partly washed away by the spring rains ... In one place there was something sticking up out of the ground. It was a blackened, moist human foot in the remains of a boot’ (Kuznetsov 1972: 269–70).

The impact of the famine was thus the dual destruction of millions of lives and of ‘the essence of a peasant-based, rural Ukrainian culture’ (Wanner 1998: 41); ‘irreversibly sapped of life’, its ‘soul destroyed’ (Wanner 1998: 43). Whilst the relationship between people and land is couched in somewhat sentimental terms by Wanner, there is little doubt that the experience of many of those who lived on Ukrainian soil was radically altered. The harmony mourned by pastoral logic is often naively formulated, constitutive of a longing for a past which never really existed. In Ukraine post-*holodomor*, however, there is some legitimate cause for mourning. The lives of the Ukrainian peasantry may not have been defined by a truly harmonious relationship between man and nature, but what relationship there had been was subverted throughout the famine years.

That this subversion was to continue throughout the Holocaust is evidenced in Kuznetsov’s account. Early in the Nazi occupation, when Nazi activity was centred in Kiev itself and the outlying countryside remained relatively intact, Kuznetsov walked through the Pushcha-Voditsa forest. He could still find peace there, but events in nearby Kiev loomed in his consciousness.

A BEAUTIFUL, SPACIOUS, BLESSED LAND

There was the world itself. So vast and with so much life always surging up. The tall old pine trees of the dense Pushcha-Voditsa forest towered into the sky ... full of peace and wisdom.

I lay face up in the straw ... thinking, I suppose, about everything at once ... Babi Yar, Darnitsa, orders, starvation, Aryans, Volksdeutsche, book-burnings; yet close at hand the fir trees were swaying gently in the breeze as they had done a million years ago, and the earth, vast and blessed, was spread out beneath the sky, neither Aryan, nor Jewish, nor gypsy, but just the earth intended for the benefit of people ... How many thousands of years has the human race been living on the earth, and people still don’t know how to share things out. (Kuznetsov 1972: 187)

In this passage, Kuznetsov characterizes the earth as ‘intended for the benefit of people’, an anthropocentric suggestion but one which, it becomes clear, is firmly rooted in the idea of a productive, rather than destructive, union between man and nature. Leo Marx has discussed two categories of pastoral, ‘sentimental’ and ‘complex’ (1964: 25); ‘[h]is sentimental pastoral is precisely the escapist, simplistic kind attacked by the pejorative use of the term’ (in Gifford 1999: 10). Kuznetsov adopts the position of a sentimental commentator only to introduce a pejorative conclusion; man should be able to exist in a harmonious, innocent relation with the natural world as it was ‘a million years ago’ but has failed to do so in his obsession with eugenic superiority. His own sense of the pleasure to be found in working with soil is evident in his description of digging trenches, one the many jobs he undertook in wartime Kiev: ‘Earth has a very pleasant smell. I always enjoyed digging it. ... it can make you quite dizzy, the pleasure of that smell’ (Kuznetsov 1972: 398). Passages such as this are suggestive of Kuznetsov’s sense of what work characterized by a harmonious man/nature relation could be, a harmony missing from the destruction of the forest:

It was a beautiful, well-kept pine forest, in which every single tree used to be cared for ... The Germans had starting cutting the forest down. Not the Germans themselves, but workers who were paid a pound of bread a week for doing it ... the saws rang out, the tractors chugged away, and the tops of the fir trees trembled and shed their snow and then came sailing down, to hit the ground with a crash like an explosion. (1972: 232–33)

The next time he walks through the forest – unfortunately for the purposes of dating his experiences accurately, Kuznetsov’s narrative appears to follow the whims of his memory rather than a definite chronology – large areas of it have been cleared. He describes the scene in a chapter clearly titled to resonate with the earlier section about Pushcha-Voditska.

NO BLESSED LAND

Once again I travelled across that beautiful spacious blessed land. But now it looked rather different ... I had none of the feeling of joy and peace I experienced once before. They were still cutting down the pine trees; there were now clearings in the forest, and big lorries and trailers were carrying long, straight tree trunks. ...

The forest along the banks of the Irpen was also being felled ... prisoners were building a bridge across the Irpen. Covered in mud, some of them with their feet wrapped in rags, others simply barefoot, were digging the still-frozen ground and handling the planks of wood, standing up to their chests in water. On both banks there were guards with machine-guns sitting in towers and patrols with dogs standing ready. (1972: 266–67)

As at Buchenwald, a forest is destroyed by the forced labour of prisoners of war. Kuznetsov concludes: 'Everything in the world was terribly mixed up' (1972: 267).

Desbois's account reveals further evidence of the subversion of the Ukrainian landscape experience and topography, and the consequences of this for Ukrainian memories of the Holocaust today. The Nazis' use of the Ukrainian landscape and farming equipment as tools in genocidal processes took 'the beauty from everything. The most luscious green landscapes became extermination fields ... The perpetrators of genocide used everything – cliffs, grain silos, beaches, irrigation wells, ditches' (Desbois 2008: 98); local people were ordered to collect hemp and sunflowers to help burn corpses (2008: 66–67). Aspects of the landscape in Ukraine were central to the planning and co-ordination of Nazi atrocities. Topography determined where and how local people were executed and buried. German soldiers checked each village and town in advance, ascertaining soil type, and searching for existing ditches, forests and any other topographical elements which might prove useful (2008: 106). Repeatedly Desbois encounters a peaceful rural, 'bucolic' (2008: 165) scene only to reveal atrocity just below the earth's surface. Desbois's interviews constantly provide evidence of deliberate avoidance, deep-rooted unease, and, in some cases, superstition about these landscapes from those who inhabit them. A road outside the Rawa-Ruska camp, for example, had been constructed after the war with sand from the nearby Jewish cemetery. A local man reports: 'You know, there are lots of accidents on this road, and people say that the road should not have been built with the bones of the dead' ('Maxim' in Desbois 2008: 33).

In many cases, Desbois found that local people who had witnessed the original massacres would never return to these sites again, despite having lived their whole lives in close proximity to them. "Did you never come back?" ... "No, for me, this is hell" ('Adolf' in Desbois 2008: 114). Whilst, understandably, such witnesses seemed to feel the sites of atrocity were cursed, in some villages the burial grounds are simply too central to be avoided and were necessarily reintegrated into everyday life. One man leads Desbois and his team to a group of village houses with gardens.

He said: 'This is where they were killed ...' The owners of several neighbouring houses came running out ... One of them interrupted the witness: 'My vegetable allotment patch. That's my vegetable patch! Leave our gardens alone.' Without realizing it, with their protestations they were only confirming what everyone else in the area knew: the bodies of shot Jews resting under the tomato plants. (Desbois 2008: 64–65)

Thus the destruction of the relationship between Ukrainian people and Ukrainian land, which began in the *holodomor*, can be seen to have con-

tinued throughout the Holocaust, with a lasting impact on the memories of witnesses. A resonance can be seen in Soviet writer Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*:

Once ... I thought that good was to be found ... in the silent kingdom of the trees. Far from it. I saw the treacherous way [the forest] battled against the grass and bushes for each inch of soil ... a constant struggle of everything against everything. Only the blind can conceive of the kingdom of trees as a world of good. ([1985] 2006: 391)

In Grossman's work it is not a mourned, if imaginary, harmony between man and nature that has been destroyed, but any sense of good, in any form of life. This statement is made by Ikonnikov, a character introduced early in the novel by a sceptical narrator as a 'dirty, ragged old man'; his 'absurd theory' that 'morality ... transcended class' (13) developed in response to witnessing the cannibalism that resulted from 'all-out collectivization' followed in later years by 'the torments undergone by the prisoner-of-war and the execution of Jews' during the Nazi campaign in Belorussia ([1985] 2006: 391). The painstakingly realistic *Life and Fate* includes many details gathered in Grossman's notebooks from his time as a journalist in World War II, and Ikonnikov's loss of faith in goodness has been called a direct expression of Grossman's own beliefs (Chandler 2006: xxi).

The cannibalism Grossman refers to was a fact of daily life during the *holodomor*, as the state police recorded in 1933: 'families kill their weakest members, usually children, and use the meat for eating';⁹ 'Survival was a moral as well as a physical struggle' (Snyder 2010: 50). That the Nazi Hunger Plan resulted in similar experience during the Holocaust is evident in Kuznetsov's testimony. To return to his description of a land which is no longer 'blessed':

[The fields] had not been dug since the previous year, and there were little rows of humps made by the potatoes which had been left in the ground and had gone bad. The corn had been beaten down and was also rotten. Yet there had been such a famine in the city at the time. (1972: 266–67)

The famine to which Kuznetsov refers was that engineered by the Nazis in their bid to deurbanize Ukraine. The young Kuznetsov finds work assisting a sausage-maker, Degtyaryov. The sausages are made not from pigs, which are unheard of in wartime Kiev, but from horses which are too old to be useful for other purposes. Also at this time, a man in Kiev is hanged for making sausages out of human flesh. 'He would go around the market, pick on some likely man or woman, and offer to sell him or her some cheap salt which he would say he had in his home. He would take them home, let them through

the door first, crack them over the head with an axe – and turn them into sausages’ (1972: 347). On one occasion, Degtyaryov relates to Kuznetsov the story of the ‘graveyard gang’ – a group led by a graveyard keeper. They opened new graves after funerals and fed the bodies to pigs to fatten them up: ‘Even if a corpse today is pretty skinny, it’s meat just the same, and what’s the sense of letting good stuff go to waste with such hunger about?’ (1972: 348).

For Kuznetsov, burdened by empathic imagination, even the slaughter of the horses is difficult to assimilate (1972: 348). Degtyaryov asks Kuznetsov if it still hurts him to kill them:

‘Yes, it hurts.’

‘Silly little fool, why bother about them? As you see, that’s the way life is – not only horses; even human beings go for sausages...’ (1972: 348)

Kuznetsov presents an image of wartime Kiev under the Nazis as a realm in which human life is reduced to units. Explicit in his reference to the production of sausages, units of flesh are evaluated in terms of use value. This paradigm can also be traced throughout the city in the everyday actions to which its inhabitants are reduced. The narrative is suggestive of Agamben’s description of the reduction of citizens to bare life within states of exception (1995). The citizens of Ukraine, beyond the Jewish community, fall into the category of ‘life unworthy of being lived’, the counterpart to German life which deserves to live simply for the fact of birth into a favoured nation-state.

Following this logic, based on the experiential parallels noted throughout this chapter the spaces of the Holocaust and the *holodomor* in Ukraine were those in which life was rendered bare despite differences of racial or ethnic denomination. As Snyder notes, one of the first authors, alongside Arendt, to break the ‘taboo of the century’ by ‘placing the crimes of the Nazi and Soviet regimes on the same pages, in the same scenes’ was Grossman, in both the aforementioned *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows* ([1994] 2011). Grossman juxtaposes the cannibalism under Stalin with the shooting of Jews under Hitler ‘in the same breath’, and draws attention to the physical similarity between children in concentration camps and those starving in Ukraine during the *holodomor*: ‘They looked just the same ... Every single little bone moving under the skin, and the joints between them’ (in Snyder 2010: 386). For Grossman, ‘[h]uman groupings have one main purpose: to assert everyone’s right to be different, to be special, to think, feel or live in his or her own way ... The only true or lasting meaning of a struggle for life lies in the individual, in his modest peculiarities and in the right to his peculiarities’ (2006: 214). Indeed on the first page of the novel he states, echoing Celan’s demand we attend to the orchid, ‘[e]verything that lives is unique. It is unimaginable that two people, or two briar roses, should be identical ... if you attempt to erase

the peculiarities and individuality of life by violence, then life itself must suffocate' (2006: 3). Snyder's conclusion states accordingly, following Arendt and Grossman, that legitimate comparisons between the two regimes must 'begin with life rather than death. Death is not a solution, but only a subject' (2010: 387). My own comparison can be seen as legitimate in this sense. Whilst recognizing the intrinsic uniqueness of each life, I have considered alternative ways to group those who suffered which are based not on 'a race, a God, a party or a state' but on the experience that results from the 'fateful error' that such groupings are the very purpose of life' (Grossman 2006: 214). One result of this error, in both Stalin and Hitler's campaigns in Ukraine, was the reduction of life to bare life within the Ukrainian landscape.

Notes

1. Others in this area include monuments to Soviet citizens, prisoners of war, and officers of the Soviet Army executed by German Fascists at Babi Yar, to a 'Hero of Ukraine', the Kiev underground worker and revolutionary T. Markus, and a separate monument to executed children; and various monument crosses, for priests executed (shot) for praying for the protection of the Motherland from Fascists, and monuments to members of OUN (the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and the Ukrainian poet O. Teliha.
2. The French Catholic priest Patrick Desbois has contributed significantly to an improved understanding of this period, and in the section to come I integrate several of the many testimonies he collected from survivors, as well as certain observations these have allowed him to make about Ukrainian experience of the Holocaust.
3. Desbois's team excavated only one of the graves in full, in order to pre-empt accusations from Holocaust deniers.
4. There were concentration camps in Ukraine territory, but they have not captured the popular imagination of the public or extensive interest by researchers. Janowska, a concentration camp in L'viv (Lwow/Lemberg/Lvov), has been described as 'a death camp by any reasonable understanding of the phrase', although there were no gas chambers built there (Winstone 2010: 382). Regular selections took place at Janowska, and many deportees were shot in a ravine to the north of the camp. Between 100,000 and 200,000 prisoners, many Jewish, were killed at the camp over the course of two years (1941–3). The camp is still a prison today, which may go some way to explaining why there is no official commemoration at Janowska, although a privately funded memorial stands at the northern ravine where shootings took place (Winstone 2010: 383). Various attempts have been made to research other Ukraine concentration camps, but for the most part there is either very little left to see or the sites are still being used as prisons or military bases; see for example Desbois's account of Rawa-Ruska (2008: 27–37).
5. Whilst further investigation, certainly into sources beyond those made available in the media, would be required to determine reliable details about the 2009 hotel

proposal, it is at least suggestive in light of Rohdewald's argument about continuing Ukrainian externalization and marginalization of the Holocaust.

6. The *holodomor* was officially categorized as genocide against the Ukrainian people according to the national parliament (Verkhovna Rada) in 2006. Then President Victor Yanukovich has controversially argued that '[t]he Holodomor was in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It was the result of Stalin's totalitarian regime. But it would be wrong and unfair to recognize the Holodomor as an act of genocide against one nation' (*Kyiv Post* 2010) – the implications of this statement will be considered at a later stage in this argument.
7. The museum further deserves attention as constituting a marked development in Kiev's gradual move towards the provision of Westernized visitor spaces. It has left many of the 'Soviet' museum features behind. Multilingual staff and the availability of museum publications in several European languages are particularly notable in this regard.
8. Snyder (2010: 53) estimates a total number of deaths in Soviet Ukraine during the famine years at 3.3 million, of which approximately 3 million were Ukrainian. The remaining 300,000 were 'Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews, and others'. A further 3 million Ukrainians died in other areas of the Soviet Union during the same period.
9. Snyder reports the recorded number of people sentenced for cannibalism between 1932–3 at 'at least 2,505 ... although the actual number of cases was almost certainly greater' (2010: 51).