

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Memories of Displacement: Loss and Reclamation of Home/land in the Narratives of Soviet Child Deportees of the 1930s

#### Michael Kaznelson and Nick Baron

Our childhood was poisoned and taken away from us, we did not have a happy youth; in fact, we did not have normal human lives at all. We were despised, distrusted and kept out of all sorts of places. And what was it all for?

Maria Belskaia, born 1925, child of arrested 'kulak'<sup>1</sup>

For many millions of East European and Soviet citizens in the twentieth century the most significant and formative childhood experience was that of physical displacement, often entailing or arising from loss of family. Child displacement in the region had many causes, including states' strategies of population management and social engineering; warfare, socioeconomic upheaval or political conflict; abandonment by parents, often themselves victims of persecution or war; escape from oppressive or abusive homes or institutions; or combinations of these. This chapter will examine the

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Belskaia, 'Arina's Children', in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds), *Life Stories of Russian Women. From 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 223. The context of Belskaia's memoir is discussed in the conclusion to this chapter.

consequences for children of one of the most terrible state-initiated and orchestrated population movements of the century in both size and scope - Stalin's deportation of the 'kulaks' in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

The Soviet regime undertook the 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class' because it believed that the so-called kulaks - allegedly wealthier peasants - were irreconcilably hostile to its rule, resisting the collectivization of agriculture and withholding grain from state requisitions. The campaign aimed at eliminating this entire perceived social stratum from the rural population; children were not exempted from the measure. The Politburo's 30 January 1930 resolution 'On Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Households in Districts of Comprehensive Collectivization' declared that not individual peasants, but whole kulak households were to be removed from the villages. For the purposes of dekulakization, the regime divided the kulaks into three categories: firstly, 'counterrevolutionaries'; secondly, 'remaining activist elements of the kulak class, especially the richest kulaks and semi-landowners'; and, thirdly, those kulaks who were deemed less hostile, but were still not permitted to join the newly established collective farms [*kolkhozy*]. First category kulaks were designated for immediate arrest, followed by incarceration in labour camps or, in case of resistance, execution. Their families were generally to be subject to exile. Second category kulaks, together with their families, were to be deported to North Russia, Siberia, the Urals or Kazakhstan, to be installed in 'special settlements' [*spetspereseleniia*]. Third category kulaks were allowed to remain in their region of origin; however, they had to live outside the *kolkhozy*.<sup>2</sup> During

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<sup>2</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 162, d. 8, l. 64-69. The decree has been published in N. Ivnitskii (ed.), *Tragediia Sovetskoi derevni. Kollektivizatskii i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy. Tom 2. Noiabr' 1929 – dekabr' 1930* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), pp. 126-30. See pp. 116-126 for materials on the development of this decree, and subsequent documents for its implementation. For the decree in translation, see Lynne Viola et al. (eds), *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 228-34, and for associated materials, pp. 205-63. Further documents in: T.V. Starevskaia Diakina (ed.), *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004). For scholarship on dekulakization and the special settlements: R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture*,

1930-33 almost two million people were categorized as either first or second category kulaks or their family members. Almost two and a half million were stigmatized under the third category and expelled from village communities.<sup>3</sup>

Dekulakization had a catastrophic impact on rural areas. Among the immediate consequences of the mass repressions and deportations were the widespread abandonment of children, a vast increase in the number of orphans and homeless children [*besprizorniki*], and a dramatic rise in the death rate among exiled children.<sup>4</sup> The principal focus of this chapter, however, is on how the experience and memory of displacement and material privation affected surviving kulak children in the longer term. In particular, it will explore how former child deportees, as adults, remembered and narrated their childhoods and reflect on core themes in their accounts: the labour of memory; belonging and alienation; the lost, imagined *rodina* or home/land; the role of affect in memory practices; and the enduring impacts of childhood displacement and stigmatization on adult subjectivity and self-identification.

The geographical focus of this paper is Narym district, some 500 kilometres north of Tomsk in south-western Siberia, which was one of the principal destinations of

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1929-1930 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger. Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933*. Revised ed. (London: Palgrave, 2009); Lynne Viola, 'The Other Archipelago: Kulak Deportations to the North in 1930', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 730-55; Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag. The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); V.P. Danilov and S.A. Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 1. Vesna 1931-Nachalo 1933 g.* (Novosibirsk: Ekor, 1993); Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 2. 1933-1938* (Novosibirsk: Ekor, 1994); Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 3. 1939-1945* (Novosibirsk: Ekor, 1996); Sergei Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh. Krest'ianskaia ssylka v zapadnoi sibiri v 1930-e gody* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003); Viktor Berdinskykh, *Spetsposelelentsy. Politicheskaiia ssylka narodov Sovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005), pp. 181-302; V.N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelelentsy v SSSR, 1930-1960* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003). The literature is critically reviewed in Oxana Klimkova, 'Special Settlements in Soviet Russia in the 1930s-1950s', *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 105-139. For a demographic analysis: V.N. Zemskov, "'Kulatskaia ssylka" v 1930-e gody: chislennost', rasselenie, sostav', in V.B. Zhiromskaia (ed.), *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke. Istoricheskie ocherki. Tom 1. 1900-1939* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), pp. 277-310.

<sup>3</sup> S.G. Wheatcroft and R.W. Davies, 'Population', in Davies, Wheatcroft and Mark Harrison (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> See Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, pp. 43-44, 46-47, 51-53, 68-69, 87 and *passim*; Viola et al. (eds), *The War Against the Peasantry*, pp. 268-76 and subsequent documents.

deported kulaks and their families. The analysis is based on oral history interviews conducted by Kaznelson with ten former Narym child deportees in Novosibirsk (the administrative centre of the present-day Siberian Federal District) in 2003. We also draw on a collection of unpublished memoirs of Narym child exiles, mostly written after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 and deposited in the State Archive of Tomsk Region, and on their published testimonies. It is important to note that our inferences from the interviews and memoirs relate specifically to these regional sources.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this paper is not to provide a general history of how dekulakization affected children, but rather to examine and interpret the specificities of a range of individual experiences as refracted through long-term memory, and to reflect on the deep and lasting impact that the displacement of kulak families has had on these witnesses.

#### Methodological Considerations: Denial, Memory, Narrative, Subjectivity, Trauma

The present paper is mainly concerned with memory as 'individual remembrance', rather than with social or collective memory.<sup>6</sup> It will be seen, however, that private and public forms of memory are closely interrelated. This is true also of a second important

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<sup>5</sup> As such, this chapter contributes to a growing scholarship on children's experiences and later remembrance of the Stalinist repressions based on first-person testimonies. For published testimonies, see Olga Litvinenko and James Riordan (eds), *Memories of the Dispossessed. Descendants of Kulak Families Tell their Stories* (Nottingham: Bramcote Press, 1998); S.S. Vilenskii et al. (eds), *Deti Gulaga 1918-1956* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond 'Demokratiia', 2002), selected documents published in English translation in Cathy A. Frierson and Semyon S. Vilensky (eds), *Children of the Gulag* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), which also includes material based on Frierson's own oral history interviews (including one with Alefina Vasil'evna Krasil'nikova, also interviewed for the present chapter), and Deborah Hoffman (ed.), *The Littlest Enemies. Children in the Shadow of the Gulag* (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2009); Jehanne M Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck (eds), *Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), esp. pp. 117-89; Cathy A. Frierson, *Silence Was Salvation. Child Survivors of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Among recent Russian publications, see Inna Shikheeva-Gaister, *Deti vragov naroda. Semeinaia khronika vremen kul'ta lichnosti, 1925-1953* (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2012). For works analysing testimonies, see Andrew B. Stone, 'Growing Up Soviet? The Orphans of Stalin's Revolution and Understanding the Soviet Self', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Washington, 2012), especially Chapters 5 and 6; Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers. Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin, 2008). See also fn. 29 below.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in Winter and Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 16.

concept in our analysis, that of *denial*. The official Soviet discourse of history elided crucial aspects of the system's origins and development, including the human cost of forced collectivization and dekulakization.<sup>7</sup> The post-Stalinist period witnessed limited discussion of the suffering of earlier decades, but this was constrained by a prescribed state narrative of individual and collective healing and redemption.<sup>8</sup> Victims and their families could not speak freely about either the experience of terror or its enduring physical, psychological, emotional or social consequences. As Merridale has written:

Though any grief is a personal affair, the losses borne by Stalin's victims are exceptionally private, even secret. For fifty years, until the fall of Communism, families had kept bereavement of this kind to themselves. Some hid their pain from everyone, including their own children, for fear of the damage it might cause. It was dangerous, after all, to mourn the passing of an enemy of the people, and compromising even to be related to one. The scale of the murders [...] was officially denied. It was easy, therefore, for individual victims to regard themselves as uniquely cursed.<sup>9</sup>

Thus silence and stigma became mutually constitutive and reciprocally reinforcing in state discourse, in social - even intimate - interactions and in individual states of mind.<sup>10</sup> Entrenched and often internalized denial and the awareness (and often reality) of official discrimination and social stigmatization, in turn, precluded the formation of a community of survivors, united by common experience and shared memory.

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Merridale, 'War, death, and remembrance in Soviet Russia', in Winter and Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Polly Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 346-71.

<sup>9</sup> Merridale, *Night of Stone*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of the interaction of social and individual denial, see Stanley Cohen, *State of Denial. Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), esp. Chapters 2-5. The classic work on stigma is Erving Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

Recognizing the operations and interactions of collective and individual denial, historians using first-person testimonies need to problematize memory.<sup>11</sup> For one thing, the substance of memory changes over time - the more distant in time a witness is from an event, the less precisely they will recall what happened. Details disappear, occurrences become confused. This is not merely about forgetting or misremembering. Researching memory, we are in fact dealing with a continuously reconstructed and renewed synthesis of past experience in the present.<sup>12</sup> The labour of memory, the efforts of witnesses not only to summon impressions of the past, not only to command its unbidden interruptions, but to order all these into coherent, continuous and meaningful personal histories, itself becomes a focus of research. As Langer notes in his study of the oral testimonies of former Holocaust victims: 'in the presence of their anguished memory, we are asked to share less what is recovered than the process of recall itself'.<sup>13</sup>

In seeking to understand this process, we take account of the mutable and fluid temporalities of memory – breaks, continuities, simultaneities, flashbacks - that complicate its narrativization.<sup>14</sup> Our analysis also attends to its spatial modalities. We

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<sup>11</sup> For general methodological discussion, see Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010). For issues concerning the use of testimonies in Soviet history, see Daria Khubova, Andrei Ivankiev and Tonia Sharova, 'After *glasnost*: oral history in the Soviet Union', in Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), pp. 89-102; Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch, *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2004); Merridale, *Night of Stone*, esp. pp. 412-41; Figs, *The Whisperers*, esp. pp. 597-656.

<sup>12</sup> For insights from psychology with implications for the use of testimony as historical evidence, see Daniel L. Schacter (ed.), *Memory Distortion. How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Elizabeth F. Loftus, 'Our changeable memories: legal and practical implications', *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience*, Vol. 4 (March 2003), pp. 231-34; Elizabeth F. Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Langer writes of Holocaust narratives: "'Cotemporality' becomes the controlling principle of these testimonies, as witnesses struggle with the impossible task of making their recollections of the camp experience coalesce with the rest of their lives.' See *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 3. Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) distinguishes between the 'belated temporality' of traumatic memory (whereby in the Freudian account the survivor is 'possessed by the past', reliving it in the present, p. 97) and the temporal 'duality (or double inscription) of being' characteristic of 'memory as an aspect of working through the past' (whereby 'one remembers [...] what happened then without losing a sense of existing and acting now', pp. 89-91).

reflect on the interrelations between written and oral testimonies.<sup>15</sup> Finally, we address ways in which memory shapes subjectivity as well as being a creation of the subject.<sup>16</sup> In sum, we are concerned in this chapter more with the processes and structures of memory practice than with the substance of memory (to the extent these dimensions can be disentangled), and to probe the interrelations between memory practice and the formation of the self in relation to dominant discourses of history, of social relations and identity, of space and place and of community and belonging. (See also Balkelis' chapter for the use of adult testimonies of childhood as historical sources).<sup>17</sup>

A second, related concern is the impact of physically, psychologically or emotionally overwhelming childhood experiences on the capacity of adults to remember what they lived through as children. In other words, can a person be *traumatized* into forgetting? (There is further discussion of trauma and memory in Finder's chapter.) The concept of psychic 'trauma' generally implies two separate yet intertwined possibilities in this regard: the incapacitation or attenuation of agency (the 'possession' of a person by their past) or the involuntary repression of memories of 'limit events'.<sup>18</sup> In addressing this complex issue, our point of departure is the assertion that children are

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<sup>15</sup> See Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, pp. 40-46, 58-68 and *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Langer writes of 'the complex layers of memory that give birth to [...] versions of the self', in *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. xv. For the interrelations of memory, time, narrative and sense of self, see Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (eds), *The Remembering Self. Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: Memory, History, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1993); David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Chapters 3-6; David C. Rubin (ed.), *Remembering our Past. Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> See Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 208-226; Nikolas Rose, 'Identity, Genealogy, History', in P. du Gay, J. Evans and P. Redman (eds), *Identity: a Reader* (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 313-25; Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', in Gay, Evans and Redman (eds), *Identity*, pp. 299-305; Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). For a general treatment of the social and political contexts of contemporary autobiographical writings on childhood experience, see Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood. Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> On 'traumatic memory' and the historian's engagement with 'limit events', see LaCapra, *Writing History*, pp. 91, 93, 97, 109 and *passim*. For a psychoanalytical approach, see Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn, 'Knowing and not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (1993), pp. 287-302.

not merely passive objects, but innovate their own strategies for living – they may endure trauma, but they also demonstrate resilience and exercise agency. This is true even in the harshest of circumstances - children shape as well as being shaped by social reality.<sup>19</sup> So even when the terms of this interaction are most sharply weighted against the child, when children are seen to be at their most powerless, we do not consider trauma to be a useful concept to deploy uncritically to understand the whole gamut of their lived experiences.<sup>20</sup> As Nicholas Stargardt argues in his history of children living in Germany during the Second World War: ‘Children were neither just mute and traumatised witnesses [...] nor merely its innocent victims. They also lived in the war, played and fell in love during the war; the war invaded their imaginations and the war raged inside them.’<sup>21</sup> The deported kulak children similarly demonstrated agency, often contributing to the survival of their families in exile, or assuming responsibility for younger siblings after the death of parents. One of the female interviewees recounted how she had worked as a young girl in order to provide bread for herself and her relatives. ‘This is how we survived,’ she recalled, ‘while many around us died and starved.’<sup>22</sup> (White, Finder and Balkelis also address issues of childhood resiliency and agency in their chapters in this volume.)

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<sup>19</sup> On children as ‘active social agents’, see William A. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997). On childhood resilience, see Sue Howard, John Dryden and Bruce Johnson, ‘Childhood Resilience: review and critique of the literature’, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1999), pp. 307-23; Suniya S. Luthar, Dante Cicchetti and Bronwyn Becker, ‘The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work’, *Child Development*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (2000), pp. 543–56; Suniya S. Luthar (ed.), *Resilience and Vulnerability Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Some mental health specialists also question ‘trauma’ as a default diagnosis for children who have experienced violence and/or displacement: Derek Summerfield, ‘Childhood, War, Refugeedom and “Trauma”: Three Core Questions For Mental Health Professionals’, *Transcultural Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2000), pp. 417-33; Chris Gilligan, ‘“Highly Vulnerable”? Political Violence and the Social Construction of Traumatized Children’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2009), pp. 119-34. An ethical approach to historical research must, of course, allow for the possibility – at times the likelihood – of trauma when investigating ‘limit events’. See LaCapra, *Writing History*, Chapter 3 ‘Holocaust Testimonies. Attending to the Victim’s Voice’.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War. Children’s Lives under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p.17.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, 23 August 2003 (Uliana).



Used uncritically, the concept of trauma is also unhelpful in understanding testimonies of lived experience.<sup>23</sup> While memory itself is a universal human faculty, the mediating forms and structures through which remembrance finds expression (or, as we have argued, through which expression may be suppressed) are socially conditioned.<sup>24</sup> Thus what certain western psychological schools might perceive as a post-traumatic disorder of memory might in other contexts be construed differently, for example as self-censorship or silence arising from the absence or proscription of an appropriate language in which to describe – and, implicitly, to account for – past experiences.<sup>25</sup> We have already referred to this socially-conditioned silence as denial.

The silence for many years of the former kulak children did not necessarily mean that they had forgotten anything – in fact many of the respondents continually stressed that they remembered everything. For most of them, denial seems to have been not so much a symptom of trauma as the outcome of a conscious or semi-conscious strategy to construct an integrated social persona and sense of self, in the face of the

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<sup>23</sup> For a similar statement of ‘ambivalence’ regarding ‘the manner in which the term “trauma” is often employed to confer a quasi-clinical authority upon a particular set of critical interpretations’, see Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver, ‘Introduction’, in Gray and Oliver (eds), *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 9-12 (quotation here, p. 11). For careful critical engagements with trauma in relation to history, see LaCapra, *Writing History*; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Caruth (ed.), *Trauma. Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), especially Part 2 ‘Recapturing the Past’; Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler (eds), *Witness and Memory. The Discourse of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Richard Crownshaw and Selma Leydesdorff, ‘On Silence and Revision: the Language and Words of the Victims’, in Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism*, pp. vii-xviii.

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of recent thinking in interdisciplinary ‘memory studies’ and its implications for history (especially oral history), see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), in particular Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion of individual memory and its interactions with social forms and processes. On memory as situated practice and discourse, see also Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, ‘Introduction. Forecasting Memory’, in Lambek and Antze (eds), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. xi-xxxviii.

<sup>25</sup> Merridale expresses similar doubts about the applicability of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, see Merridale, ‘The Collective Mind. Trauma and Shell-shock in Twentieth Century Russia’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), pp. 39-55. For the history of trauma, see Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions. Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Mark Micale and Paul Lerner, ‘Trauma, psychiatry, and history: a conceptual and historiographical introduction’, in Micale and Lerner (eds), *Traumatic Past: Memory, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1820–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1–27; Ruth Leys, *Trauma. A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

double stigma of displacement and orphanhood (Balkelis' chapter in this volume notes the prejudice and discrimination that former deportees encountered as they strove to reintegrate into society; and Green's essay discusses the stigma of orphanhood) and the absence of normative categories of experience with which they could identify.<sup>26</sup> That is to say, they could not begin to articulate 'authentic' life histories, publicly or privately, before shifts in public historical discourse enabled them to do so.<sup>27</sup> Until they found a narrative voice and a receptive audience, the former displaced children bore 'an impossible history within them, or they [became] themselves the symptom of a history that they [could not] entirely possess.'<sup>28</sup>

Thus while we must of course take full account of the wrenching hardships that these children endured, and the fact that experiences of violence may disrupt or disorder memory, self-narration and sense of self, we cannot make *a priori* assumptions of trauma nor apply the term indiscriminately without examining individual biographies (to the extent that sources permit this) and the social contexts which condition experience and define the discourses and practices of memory.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On stigmatization of former kulak children, see Lynne Viola, "'Tear the Evil from the Root': The Children of the *Spetspereselentsy* of the North', *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, Vol. 17 (2000), pp. 34-72. On the stigma of displacement and the striving of Soviet repatriates after the Second World War to construct autobiographies in accordance with the normative script, see Nick Baron, 'Remaking Soviet Society: the Filtration of Returnees from Nazi Germany, 1944-1949', in Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (eds), *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 89-116.

<sup>27</sup> On ways in which shifts in the public discourse of history give form to inchoate and/or unspoken individual memories, see Nick Baron, 'Perestroika, Politicians and Pandora's Box: the Collective Memory of Stalinism during Soviet Reform', *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'Histoire*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1997), pp. 73-92. For the intersections of collective and individual memory, trauma, identity and political action, see Duncan Bell (ed.), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics. Reflections on the Relationship between Past and Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For evolving Soviet and post-Soviet discourses of Stalinism, see R. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: The Politics of Revisionist Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia. Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See also works cited in fn. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience. Introduction', in Caruth (ed.), *Trauma*, p. 5. She asserts that trauma is 'not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history', bound up with issues of knowing, not-knowing, time and truth (p. 5). In Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, she develops her argument that trauma points to the possibility of a new non-referential notion of history, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> For discriminating studies of survivor trauma and testimony in post-Stalinist culture and society, see Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories'; Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking*

Of the ten interviewees, two were mother and daughter. This made it possible to examine not only how different generations constructed memory narratives in evolving social contexts but also how generations within a family influenced each other in shaping memory. The other eight participants were friends varying in age from seventy-six to eighty-five at the time of the interviews. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. It is important to note that these subjects had been briefed (by someone other than the researcher) before they were interviewed. They were thus already aware of the interviewer's work on kulak children, and of the scope and direction of the questions, and could prepare and present themselves accordingly.<sup>30</sup>

The interviewer structured the encounters by asking a set of predefined questions about the respondents' experiences and memories of displacement. These concerned their recollections of their original homes and their deportation; of death, within their close family or the local community; of conditions in the special settlements, including food supply, medical care and schooling; of brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents; and of their lives after release from the settlements. Finally, the interviewer asked all respondents to reflect generally upon their childhood and subsequent life.

### Contextualizing Displacement

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*the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Stephen Cohen, *The Victims Return. Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (London: IB Tauris, 2011); L. Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Nanci Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Frierson and Vilensky (eds), *Children of the Gulag*, pp. 352-407; Kathleen E. Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims. Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Irina Sherbakova, 'The Gulag in Memory', in Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism*, pp. 103-16; Erkki Vettenniemi, *Surviving the Soviet Meat Grinder. The Politics of Finnish Gulag Memoirs* (Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the interviewer and respondents may well have brought to the interview different ideas about what would be central in the narration. As Donald Ritchie asserts: 'People remember what *they* think is important, not necessarily what the interviewer considers most consequential' in *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 12.

Recently declassified data suggest that children aged fifteen or under comprised around 40 per cent of the targeted first and second category kulak populations. This would indicate that about 800,000 children were deported between 1930 and 1933.<sup>31</sup> They and their families were placed in special settlements, segregated from local populations, each administered by a *komendatura*, responsible for political surveillance, social order and the provision of basic welfare. Organisation and oversight of the special settlements fell within the jurisdiction of the Chief Administration of Camps (Gulag) of the Unified State Political Administration (OGPU, the Soviet political police until 1934).

On arrival, the exiled families were accommodated in tents, temporary huts or barracks. Ekaterina Sergeevna Lukina recalled in her written memoir of deportation to Narym that her family had initially lived on the bank on a river in hovels, which were still waterlogged and muddy after the spring floods. After a week, they were moved to shacks made of birch bark, before other exiles started building log cabins.<sup>32</sup> In Western Siberia in 1932 it was reported that buildings constructed for one family (four to six people) were being used to accommodate two to three families. The daily food ration for each household depended on how many of its members participated in the work of the settlements and how many were nursing mothers, children or elderly. Food was basic, low in calories and lacking in fat. There were no vegetables, meat arrived at the settlements irregularly and the nutritional level was very poor.<sup>33</sup> Lukina recalled:

They gave us scanty rations, mainly we were fed on a thin gruel [...] They didn't allow us into local villages, the guards were very strict. [...] We were

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<sup>31</sup> Viola, ““Tear the Evil from the Root””, p. 36. Frierson suggests, on the basis of 1926 census data, that roughly 39 per cent of deportees (approx. 700,000) were children aged sixteen or under; and 27 per cent (approx. 480,000) were thirteen or less, Frierson and Vilensky (eds), *Children of the Gulag*, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> V.N. Maksheev (ed.), *Narymskaia khronika, 1930–1945: Tragediia spetspereselentsev. Dokumenty i vospominaniia* (Moscow: Russkii put', 1997), p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 1*, pp. 230.

weak [...] People began to swell [from malnutrition] and die. They buried them without coffins, in mass graves which they excavated every day.<sup>34</sup>

Conditions in Western Siberian special settlements the previous year had reportedly been even worse.<sup>35</sup> Veniamin Makarovich Kurchenkov, who was deported with his family from Altai region to Narym in spring 1931 recalled:

Finding ourselves in the marshy taiga without a roof over our heads, among vast swarms of mosquitos, people were in hellish conditions [*katorzhnykh usloviakh*]. We ate a sort of gruel with a tiny bit of flour, and grass, green shoots, and on that we had to lug wood, build huts [...] people began dying in droves. Most families had a lot of children, and it was the children who first began suffering terribly. Their mothers were tormented too, as they were not strong enough to save their children. Entire families perished.

These conditions resulted in appalling levels of mortality. Kurchenkov stated that of 7,800 people in four local settlements, by 1933 only 2,000 survived. In another settlement everyone died. Only four of his own family of eleven remained alive; he was placed in a children's home with about 200 other orphans.<sup>36</sup> Overall, historians estimate that about 600,000 people died during the 1930s as a result of dekulakization.<sup>37</sup> Data for Western Siberia suggest that during 1930-33 children accounted for around half the total deaths in that region.<sup>38</sup> Living conditions for the exiles had improved and mortality rates

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<sup>34</sup> Maksheev (ed.), *Narymskaia khronika*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>35</sup> Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 1*, pp. 229.

<sup>36</sup> Maksheev (ed.), *Narymskaia khronika*, p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> For 1930-32 data are fragmentary, but suggest around 200,000 deaths arising from the deportations, see Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag. From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 327. For 1932-40, Zemskov cites official Gulag records indicating 389,521 deaths among special settlers (this figure does not include executions or deaths occurring during transit or in attempts to escape), Zemskov, “Kulatskaia ssylka”, p. 280.

<sup>38</sup> Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 1*, pp. 29-30. For child mortality among special settlers, see Zemskov, “Kulatskaia ssylka”, p. 299-30.

stabilized by mid-decade, but mortality within the special settlements remained higher than in society at large until near the end of the decade.<sup>39</sup>

As mentioned, dekulakization also produced a huge rise in the number of *besprizorniki*, as children became separated from their families during the deportations, or lost their parents to arrest, execution, disease or starvation. Regional data on the number of these waifs are sparse and partial. We know that in Narym district during 1935-36, children of deported kulaks comprised 52.4 per cent of the total number of *besprizorniki*.<sup>40</sup> We also know that in January 1937, the Soviet police registered 11,394 unaccompanied children in Western Siberia, of whom 2,606 were in Narym district. The relatively small territory where the special settlements were concentrated thus accounted for nearly a quarter of all *besprizorniki* in the wider region.<sup>41</sup> These numbers put extreme pressure on local orphanages. A report by the Western Siberian Children's Commission (a 'watchdog' agency attached to the regional government) of December 1935 draws attention to problems of overcrowding in regional orphanages.<sup>42</sup> Children often slept two or three together in the same bed. A significant number of the minors suffered from illness or disease, aggravated by the lack of adequate clothing, food, sanitary facilities and medical care.<sup>43</sup> The Head of the Gulag M.D. Berman, writing in October 1933 to the Central Children's Commission (i.e. the top-level body attached to Soviet central government, to which regional branches reported), reported that in Narym orphanages the children received very little bread and no fats or meat. Many had fallen

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<sup>39</sup> Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, p. 151; Zemskov, *Spetspereselentsy*, pp. 20-21; Stephen Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930-45' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 8 (1996), p. 1346-47.

<sup>40</sup> Calculated on the basis of data in State Archive of Tomsk Region (GATO), f. r-430, op. 3, d. 2806, l. 1; d. 2867, l. 1; d. 2878, l. 2; d. 2894, l. 2; d. 2895, l. 2; d. 2902, l. 2; d. 2903, l. 2; d. 2903, l. 2; d. 2904, l. 2; d. 2905, l. 2; d. 2910, l. 2; GATO, f. r-591, op. 1, d. 15, l. 1; GATO, f. r-591, op. 2, d. 16; d. 17; d. 18, l. 8; d. 19, l. 1; d. 22, l. 1; d. 26, l. 6; d. 28; d. 29, l. 19; d. 30; GATO f. r-591, op. 3, d. 27, l. 6.

<sup>41</sup> State Archive of Novosibirsk Region (GANO), f. r-61, op. 1 d. 1607, l. 4.

<sup>42</sup> GANO, f. r-895, op. 1, d. 184, l. 35.

<sup>43</sup> GANO, f. r-895, op. 1, d. 184, ll. 38-40. The Narym District Party Committee's resolution 'On the Condition of Children's Homes in Siblag OGPU', 22 October 1933, reported that children in district orphanages had no winter clothing, see Maksheev (ed.), *Narymskaia khronika*, p. 49.

ill. In the Poludenovsk orphanage, only one child out of 108 was healthy. In another home, of 134 children, sixty-nine had tuberculosis and forty-six had malaria.<sup>44</sup>

Having created this crisis, the Soviet authorities responded hesitantly and ambivalently. In 1934, the regime decided to grant the deported kulak children – but not their parents - the right to apply for voting rights when they reached majority (the 1936 Constitution formally restored civil rights to all kulak exiles).<sup>45</sup> In 1938 and 1939 the Soviet government decided to permit the deported children to apply for passports at the age of sixteen if they wished to move to an urban centre for higher education, although they would still be prohibited from residence in any of the restricted cities or border regions. For the kulak children, despite the continuing constraints on their free movement and settlement, this concession marked a significant change in their status. As Khlevniuk has written, the decision ‘terminated the institution of hereditary exile and permanently divided the old kulaks, who faced lifetime exile, from their children, who received their freedom, even though as second-class citizens.’<sup>46</sup>

For the Soviet authorities, education was an important mechanism to facilitate the social reassimilation, however circumscribed this was, of the deported children. In late 1935, Western Siberian party and regional government leaders sent Moscow a memorandum stating: ‘We believe it is of general importance to step up our work to re-educate the children of settlers and to make them rightful citizens of our Soviet country, true labourers of a classless socialist society.’ Incentives should be provided, they asserted, for those children who have ‘broken with their parents’.<sup>47</sup> Already by 1933, the Gulag had constructed 370 pre-primary schools, 1,105 primary schools, and 136

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<sup>44</sup> Document published in Frierson and Vilensky (eds), *Children of the Gulag*, p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 2*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>46</sup> Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag*, p. 262, pp. 131-35. Note that certain categories of kulak children were given only temporary travel permits, and were obliged to return to their settlements afterwards, see Danilov and Krasilnikov, *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri. Tom 3*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Document in Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag*, p. 133.

secondary schools to service the nationwide network of special settlements, as well as 230 schools for higher technical education and twelve technical colleges. At the time there were reportedly 217,454 kulak children studying in the schools under the tutelage of 8,280 teachers (themselves mainly exiles). The authorities also constructed 813 clubs, 1,202 reading rooms, 440 cinemas and 1,149 libraries in the settlements.<sup>48</sup> In Narym district by 1935 there were reportedly 215 primary schools and twenty-one secondary schools.<sup>49</sup> Though the number of educational and cultural establishments constructed are impressive, implying a sincere initial intention to ‘reforge’ kulak children and reintegrate them into society (see also Quall’s chapter in this volume for discussion of ‘reforging’), there was a drastic and persistent shortage of funding for supporting both welfare and cultural activities in the special settlements.<sup>50</sup> In all settlements, the local *komendatura* was much more interested in mobilizing the exile population, including children as young as twelve, to work in agriculture, forestry and fishing.<sup>51</sup>

It was within this context of neglect, heavy labour, disease, malnutrition and high mortality that the interview respondents and memoir writers grew up, and it was this environment that left its imprint on their childhood memories. The following analysis will discuss how these experiences affected their adult lives and testimonies.

### The Labour of Memory

In 1995 the Russian Law ‘On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression’ prompted many former deportees and their descendants to write to local authorities

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<sup>48</sup> S.I. Golotik and V.V. Minaev, *Naselenie i vlast. Ocherki demograficheskoi istorii SSSR 1930-kh godov* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Ippolitova, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> Winston T. Bell, ‘The Gulag and Soviet Society in Western Siberia, 1929-1953’, unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Toronto, 2011), p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> GATO, f. r-590, op. 1, d. 16, l. 70, GATO, f. r-590, op. 1, d. 16, l. 1, GATO, f. r-590, op. 2, d. 128, l. 6. See also Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>51</sup> For the productive activities of the special settlements in Narym district, see Bell, ‘The Gulag and Soviet Society in Western Siberia, 1929-1953’, pp. 55-62.



requesting access to their personal case files or those of family members.<sup>52</sup> Most pursued both judicial rehabilitation and economic compensation for material losses incurred as a result of repression. The first was relatively easy to achieve, while the second was almost impossible – information on victims’ personal belongings had disappeared almost entirely from official records. In any case, hard-pressed Russian local authorities had insufficient resources to meet compensation demands and the centre offered no support. Officials also faced the difficulty of piecing together the fragmented identities of many of the petitioners and confirming their stories. The testimony of Georgii (born in 1927) illustrates what we term the ‘labour of memory’.<sup>53</sup>

Georgii’s father was arrested in February 1930 and executed as a counter-revolutionary the following month. His mother was exiled together with her children to Narym district. Aged three or four, Georgii was separated from his mother and placed in an orphanage (it is probable that she perished). The administration of the orphanage strove to ensure that he forgot his parents. In their records, they created a new identity for him: he was given a new forename, patronymic and surname, a new date of birth and new ‘social origins’. From the earliest age, Georgii nevertheless knew that he was a child of an ‘enemy of the people’. He remembers that in 1942, when children from Leningrad were evacuated to his orphanage, the local authorities moved him and other former kulak children to another, tougher institution to prevent any interaction between them and the newcomers.<sup>54</sup> When he finally discovered his true origins in 1992, he considered re-assuming his birth name, but decided not to do so, as all the official documents detailing his identity and life-history – his trade union book, his military

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<sup>52</sup> S.N. Ushakova, ‘Reabilitatsionnye dela repressirovannoi krestyan kak istoricheskii istochnik’, in S.A. Krasil’nikov (ed.), *Marginaly. v Sovetskom obshchestve, 1920-1930-kh godov* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2001), p. 87. Many of these letters are preserved in the State Archive of Novosibirsk Region.

<sup>53</sup> We refer to interviewees by their first names only for the preservation of anonymity.

<sup>54</sup> Extract from Georgii’s memoir in Vilenskii et al. (eds), *Deti Gulaga*, p. 118. Note that some biographical details in this text differ from those in his oral history interview. See also Viktor Timakov’s account of Georgii’s life story in ‘Mal’chik iz Novosibirska protiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, *Chestnoi Slovo*, No. 3/209 (2001), p. 23: <http://www.chslovo.com/articles/6041561/> [accessed 15 August 2015].

records, his educational certificates, his working papers, his identity cards and his passports – had been issued in his ascribed name.<sup>55</sup> The Soviet authorities’ eradication of Georgii’s link to his parents sixty years earlier and his education and indoctrination had created a biography that was plotted out by the state even before it was lived by the subject.<sup>56</sup>

While it is well-known that many children orphaned by Stalinist terror had their identities changed in children’s homes, there is no data on how systematic this practice was, or whether it was a co-ordinated policy dictated by the centre. Nevertheless, the aims of such a procedure are clear when considered in the context of Stalinist population policy and social engineering. As Mikhail Nikolaev, a child of arrested parents whose identity was also changed after he was placed in a home, wrote in his memoir:

The purpose was that they should know no-one, and no-one should know them, that they should forget about the past [...] The practice was to give the child a new surname, to preclude any possibility of remembering [...] Having lived my life [*prozhiv zhizn*’], I still don’t know whose family name I bear.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Viola has argued that Stalinist policy towards kulak children aimed to ‘tear evil from the root’.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the regime aspired, in principle at least, to ‘reforge’ them into model subjects. Soviet culture emphasized social environment, rather than genetic inheritance, as the predominant formative influence on moral character. Given the right upbringing, then, children separated from their parents at an early enough age and reared correctly would have the chance to mature into healthy, stalwart citizens. (In the early to mid-1930s, juvenile institutions, such as those established and run by pedagogue Anton Makarenko, discussed in Quall’s chapter in this volume, were still

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<sup>55</sup> Interview, 5 September 2003.

<sup>56</sup> See Bourdieu, ‘The Biographical Illusion’.

<sup>57</sup> Mikhail Nikolaev, *Detdom* (New York: Rossica, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Viola, “‘Tear the Evil from the Root’”, p. 62.

considered the most appropriate mechanism of socially re-integrating displaced or orphaned children.<sup>59</sup> By the 1940s, as Green argues in her chapter on adoption, the Soviet family had become the normative site of child re-placement.) Regardless of principle, official attitudes to the former kulak children remained ambivalent: as we saw in Georgii's story, they continued to be treated with suspicion and as a category apart even when denied knowledge of their parents.<sup>60</sup>

Georgii's experience as a child thus entailed more than physical displacement – it entailed a dislocation of the self. For Georgii as an adult, the challenge of 'finding himself' was not just an intimate labour of memory but also a struggle against social stigma and official obstruction. He had to come to terms with his childhood experience of loss as well as with a state power that had effaced his family origins, denied him his true identity, stigmatized him and yet had educated him and afforded him a career, and which, as a professional army officer, he had served. After 1991, he had to come to terms with the sudden disappearance of that state and the implications of change for the possibility of his memory.<sup>61</sup> Finally he had to accommodate the experience of growing up with two identities: his known and public Soviet identity, and his private and unknown (or only half-known) personal identity. We shall return to the significance of this below. For now, it is important to note that in his interview Georgii recalled a childhood lived in a grey zone between belonging and non-belonging.

### The Lost Imagined *Rodina*

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<sup>59</sup> For extended discussion of Makarenko and juvenile institutions as sites of 'reforging', in principle and practice, see Stone, 'Growing Up Soviet?', especially Chapters 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> For discussion of this ambivalence, see Golfo Alexopoulos, 'Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s-1940s', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2008), pp. 91-117. Green's chapter in this volume notes how the Soviet authorities in the 1940s in principle promoted the equivalence of 'biological' and adoptive families, but in practice gave precedence to 'natural' parents' claims on their child. On the nature-nurture tension, see also A. Weiner, 'Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 1114-55.

<sup>61</sup> Timakov, 'Mal'chik iz Novosibirska protiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii'.

Many of our source testimonies reveal that the former displaced children experienced a lifelong tension between belonging and alienation. They were raised in Western Siberia, went to school in that region, and made a career for themselves there – by most ‘normal’ measures, they belonged to this geographical region. Yet in their testimonies they often emphasize the significance of their place of origin. Among the interviewees, this was all the more striking as most of them had little or no personal recollection of that place, having been either too young to remember the area (most of the narrators were between one and three years old at the time of deportation), or, in the case of one of the participants, born in exile. All interviewees explicitly invoked the Russian concept of *rodina* to designate the place of their own or their family’s origin (the term can be translated as ‘motherland’, ‘native land’, ‘place of birth’ or ‘native region’, but we adopt ‘home/land’, to convey its combined sense of both intimate belonging to place and wider attachment to landscape).<sup>62</sup> Their preoccupation with the *rodina* implies a still-strong emotional connection to this distantly remembered or imagined place. Certainly, the expression of attachment to a lost childhood *rodina* distant in space as well as time from the narrator is characteristic of the memory narratives of migrants.<sup>63</sup> A 1920s study of the testimonies of Russian émigré children, also cited in White’s chapter in this volume, noted that: ‘Memories of the *rodina*, longing for it, a timid love for it, the hope to return to it and desire to work for its rebirth run through almost all the students’ essays as a leitmotif.’<sup>64</sup> (Both White’s and Balkelis’ chapters in this volume

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<sup>62</sup> For discussion of *rodina*, see Melissa K. Stockdale, ‘What is a Fatherland? Changing Notions of Duty, Rights, and Belonging in Russia’, in Mark Bassin, Christopher Ely and Stockdale (eds), *Space, Place, and Power in Modern Russia. Essays in the New Spatial History* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), pp. 23-48.

<sup>63</sup> On migrant nostalgia and sense of self, see Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, *Yesterday’s Self. Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). See also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). On nostalgia as a key ‘script’ of autobiographies of childhood, see Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, pp. 84-105.

<sup>64</sup> Petr Dolgorukov, ‘Chuvstvo Rodiny u detei’, in V.V. Zenkovskii (ed.), *Deti emigratsii. Sbornik statei* (Prague: Izdanie Pedagogicheskago Biuro po Delam Srednei i Nizshei Russkoi Shkoly Zagranitse, 1925), p. 167.

also discuss nostalgia – yearning for a lost time and place of familiar comfort - as a key element in the self-narration of childhood displacement.)

The paradox is that none of the participants of these interviews had returned to their *rodina*, instead remaining throughout their adult lives in the areas around Novosibirsk and Tomsk. Uliana had been deported with her family at the age of three from Ukraine to Narym district. She stayed there until 1980, when as a pensioner she moved to Novosibirsk to live with her children. She had made her adult life in Western Siberia and this was the birthplace of her own children and their families. Nevertheless, Ukraine remained her *rodina*, as she repeatedly stressed during her interview.<sup>65</sup> These adults keenly felt that they had been deprived not only of the *time* of childhood, but also of the *place* of childhood. Yet even if they were to return to their place of origin, they would find no ‘home’, as Uliana’s friend Iuliia noted in her interview.<sup>66</sup> The Soviet state had expropriated all that belonged to the kulak households at their deportation. So what did the concept of *rodina* mean in the present day to these people, who as small children had been dispossessed of their family past, and in some cases of their own identities, and as adults had built new lives far from their original homelands?

Here we return to Georgii’s paradox of living ‘in-between’ – of both belonging in a place, and sensing an existential alienation from that place. The respondents related themselves to and derived their core identity from their place of origin, not their place of residence. Narym was never termed the *rodina*, even by the one respondent who had been born there. In other words, they all understood their ‘roots’ to be elsewhere, that they had been ‘uprooted’, and to have lived lives which were ‘rootless’ and, because of that, in a way most found hard to define, impoverished and less whole. For them, the lost *rodina* (like their childhoods) had acquired a mythical quality. As adults, we

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<sup>65</sup> Interview, 23 August 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Interview, 30 August 2003.

suggest, they repeatedly invoked the ‘myth’ of home/land in the interviews as an articulation of their rejection of the Soviet regime. By asserting their place of origin as their true *rodina*, they were pointing to the failure of the Soviet project.

That is to say, the Soviet authorities had displaced the kulak children, then sought to reintegrate them, but had never succeeded in instilling in them a full or secure sense of belonging. The regime had destroyed settled communities which defined themselves in large part by their relationship with native landscapes, but failed to recreate in the spaces of resettlement the bonds, the shared affiliation to place, which were needed to hold new communities together. Evidently, in the case of the child deportees, the Soviet regime had also failed to substitute for local attachments to place any overarching sense of spatial identity, of the Soviet Union itself as *Rodina*.

This suggests some important, though provisional, conclusions: that a sense of place is deeply implicated in identity; that place also has a crucial temporal component, i.e. it is constructed through memories, and especially those shared by individuals, families and communities; and that, for the adult, the concept of ‘childhood’ is in part defined by memory of place, as a site or landscape situated in both space and time, that is, memory of the *rodina* (with its linguistic connotations of birth-place and maternal nurture). Home/land is thus ‘naturalized’ in memory, and the regime’s displacement of these children construed not merely as un-natural, but de-naturalizing. The displaced have not only lost their homes but been dispossessed of aspects of their humanity.<sup>67</sup>

Anatolii’s family had been deported in 1930 after his grandfather was arrested as a kulak. He described his family’s loss of their small farm in the following manner:

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<sup>67</sup> For humanistic approaches to understanding interrelations of place, memory and identity, see D. Lowenthal, ‘Past time, present place: landscape and memory’, *Geographical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (1975), pp. 1-36; Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (eds), *Place Attachment* (New York: Prenum Press, 1992), especially Chapter 4, Louise Chawla, ‘Childhood Place Attachments’, pp. 63-86; Lynne Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright (eds), *Place Attachment : Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Jerry Burger, *Returning Home: Reconnecting with Our Childhoods* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

‘of course, [the authorities took] the arable land from those people, who loved the soil.’<sup>68</sup> He highlights here the state’s severing of the peasants’ emotional connection to the land from which they had been torn, as well as the land’s importance as an economic resource and means of sustenance. Violent dispossession and displacement forced people to live in a land they did not love, to which they felt no natural affective bonds.

The reference to the *rodina* as a means of self-definition by the respondents also points to what surviving parents believed most important when relating experiences of deportation to their children, as children may incorporate parents’ memory narratives into their own and reproduce many of the same tropes later in life.<sup>69</sup> Thus in the double interview conducted with ninety-seven year-old Agrafena and her daughter Tatiana, the latter referred to places and events that had occurred before her birth (in Narym) as if she had experienced them first-hand.<sup>70</sup> Agrafena spoke of own loss of *rodina* in terms of personal loss and victimization. But Tatiana also gave loss of home/land central place in her narrative. She thought of herself as a victim in relation to both her own dislocated childhood and her parents’ loss of agency in their own and the family’s lives.

### Displacement as Emotion

We have already alluded to the role of emotions in memory narratives of displacement. It is useful here to distinguish among three discrete though intersecting aspects of affect that are relevant in our analysis: memories of emotions experienced in the past (for example, childhood fears – the recollection of which may or may not elicit fear in the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview, 17 August 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles. Children of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge: 1992) suggests that the children of Holocaust survivors manifested a ‘complex synthesis of identifications with figures of the dead’ that produced a ‘multiplicity of contradictions in their identity’, p. 99. This is also explored in Louise J. Kaplan, *Lost Children. Separation and Loss between Children and Parents* (London: Pandora, 1995), especially Chapter 12.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, 24 August 2003. See also Frierson’s analysis of ‘Notes of a Kulak’s Daughter’ by Maria Solomonik, in Frierson and Vilensky (eds), *Children of the Gulag*, p. 132 and *passim*.

adult); emotions involved in the work of remembering (for example, sadness provoked by recollection); and emotion which is beyond remembering or, at least, beyond telling. The narrator is conscious of the first two forms of affect and may verbalize or enact them. The third form remains latent or only intuited, but may shape memory and self-narrative and be revealed in respondents' use of language or in their behaviour (enabling the observer to test hypotheses of trauma). Understood in these three ways, it is clear that emotions play a crucial structuring role in the mediation of experience.<sup>71</sup>

Emotions are as frequently unspoken as they are explicitly articulated and need to be inferred through an imaginative and empathetic engagement with the source material. In his written memoir, Vitalii Konstantinovich recalled:

My sister Anna was sick with a light inflammation and died in the hospital, where she was buried we don't know. Afterwards my youngest sister, Vera, also died, and since nobody dug a grave, our grandmother wrapped her in a blanket and brought her to a graveyard and buried her.<sup>72</sup>

The family's ignorance of Anna's place of burial remained significant for him. Sites of death, burial and commemoration play an important role in establishing enduring emotional connections to places, including in the construction of a sense of home/land.<sup>73</sup> For Vitalii, the lack of a marked burial site for one of the deceased sisters evidently symbolized the family's inability to strike new roots after its displacement. Vera's unceremonious interment by her grandmother also marked a rupture with the rituals by which the family had defined itself in and in relation to its place of origin. Other memoir writers also recalled these improvised burials. Aleksei Aleksandrovich wrote:

'Soon we had another misfortune. Vera [his elder sister] starved to death. She found her

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<sup>71</sup> Stone also addresses the role of affect in testimony, see 'Growing Up Soviet?', pp. 261-74 and *passim*. See also the essays in Rubin (ed.), *Remembering our Past*, Part III 'Emotions'.

<sup>72</sup> GATO, f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 27, l. 4.

<sup>73</sup> See Patrick Laviolette, 'Landscaping Death', *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2003), pp. 215-40.



place in the taiga by the large coniferous trees'.<sup>74</sup> The narrator seemingly derives comfort from the thought that Vera had 'found her place'. Through this trope, Aleksei seeks to mitigate the family's 'de-naturalizing' experience of exile.

Narratives of the deportations and of life in the special settlements are often characterized by markedly unemotive descriptions of appalling physical privation. In his written memoir, Dmitrii Tikhonovich recounted:

They [the OGPU] drove us to the settlement of *Bol'shaia Galka* ['Big Jackdaw'], where there were barracks. They packed us in like sardines, we slept on freezing plank-beds above the freezing ground. From the iron stove came smoke, children cried, screamed, young people died. We went to Bakchar and an epidemic of typhoid fever broke out.<sup>75</sup>

Another memoirist, Kseniia Markovna, simply recalled: 'We starved.'<sup>76</sup> In these written testimonies, the authors have used a condensed, direct, dispassionate prose to convey overwhelming experience. The reader is left to interpolate affect. Similarly, interviewee Iuliia recalled: 'We had no childhood. We were poor. We did not have anything. We had to work very hard. Everything we owned was taken away from us.'<sup>77</sup> Here Iuliia invoked her family's material dispossession to stand for everything that she had lost, including childhood itself as a time of comfort and care. This was perhaps the only way she felt she could communicate a sense of her incommensurable, irretrievable loss to a listener who had not shared her experience. Many of the female participants in the interviews used the words *trudno* [difficult] and *tiazheło* [hard, burdensome, laborious] to sum up their lives in exile.<sup>78</sup> These adjectives carry a double semantic load: they are used overtly to describe the physical burden experienced, but implicitly invoke the

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<sup>74</sup> GATO, f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 42, l. 4.

<sup>75</sup> GATO f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 50, ll. 2-7.

<sup>76</sup> GATO f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 10, l. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Interview, 30 August 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Interviews, 16 August 2003 (Maria) and 23 August 2003 (Uliana).

emotional impact of displacement on the narrators as children and the mental burden of this experience they still bore as adults. It seems that in such instances witnesses refer to physical loss or hardship to substitute for and symbolize the emotional pain that they cannot or will not express.

It is unclear whether a subject's use of such narrative tropes is suggestive of their enduring trauma or of their resilience and creative capacity to sublimate grief and pain. As we have argued, we may question the general or uncritical use of trauma as an explanatory concept without denying that physical, psychological or emotional suffering arising out of the experience of violent displacement may have profound and lasting consequences. The point is that suffering affects people in various ways. In the interviews, it was evident that respondents had adopted different strategies for coming to terms or at least coping with the impact of their childhood experiences.

Uliana concentrated on detailed descriptions of her family's everyday life: working in the woods, collecting firewood, smoking out the mosquitoes from their house, cultivating the land and purchasing livestock. Her focus on practical tasks and achievements seemed to be a way for her to 'normalize' her extraordinary experience. It was also a narrative of survival that underlined the agency, moral strength and humanity of the deportees. Uliana studiously avoided emotive language or evocation of negative emotions in her narrative. Even when she mentioned the death of her first child, she appeared unaffected.<sup>79</sup> She was, however, anything but unemotional. Summing up her experience she stated: 'it was the will of fate' and laughed. In fact, a form of laughter constantly punctuated her narrative and accompanied the most terrible incidents, such as when she was once nearly killed by a falling tree when working as a lumberjack.<sup>80</sup> Her seemingly 'out of place' laughter was evidently for her a purposive mode of expression,

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<sup>79</sup> For psychoanalytical examination of varying parental responses, see Kaplan, *Lost Children*.

<sup>80</sup> Interview, 23 August 2003.

a means of vocalizing the unspeakable. Again, we should not like to judge whether her strategy of self-narration is indicative of trauma or of resilience.

Among the male interviewees, only Anatolii used explicitly emotive vocabulary and body language. On one occasion he alluded to an incident when a deported woman threw herself into the water and drowned, apparently because she had been forced (so it was rumoured) to leave behind her four children. The narrator avoided describing the incident, which he obviously found difficult to relate verbally. On stating how many children the woman had, he mentioned that his mother only had three children – information which was, strictly speaking, irrelevant, but which evidently helped him in telling the story, since it seemed to offer a rational explanation for his own survival. After having mentioned this incident, he reflected: ‘there were many such experiences. I remember it all – so dreadful [*uzhasno*]!’ On another occasion, he shed tears when recalling how he and his father had stood by the bed of his two year-old sister as she lay dying. In contrast to Uliana, he dwelt on this moment of death, although he then abruptly switched to a less painful subject. As an adult he was seemingly most affected by the suffering of other children that he had witnessed as a child than by recollection of his own experiences. Yet this grieving for others was perhaps also transference of his mourning, as an adult, for his own lost childhood. If displacement was a dehumanizing experience, denying ‘natural’ roles to both children and adults, uprooted from their own place and traditions, then even small recalled acts of humanity inevitably loom large in the reconstruction of such events, as narrators seek to salvage some sense of logical and moral order from the experience of chaos. ‘He was nice,’ Anatolii recounted of a policeman in his special settlement, ‘not like any of the other brutal characters, he was good toward us children.’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Interview, 17 August 2003.

The authors of the written memoirs of displacement deployed similar strategies to articulate or suppress affect. In general, the narrators seemed to be more emotionally expressive in prose than in person. Tears featured quite often in the texts. Thus T.A. Akimtsev recalls: ‘we children cried day and night, whimpering like hungry kittens.’<sup>82</sup> The animal simile communicates the children’s fragility, vulnerability and weakness and emphasizes their lack of agency. Kseniia Markovna recollects her father wrapping her in a protective embrace: ‘[He] hugged me and cried heavily and we became one.’<sup>83</sup> The helpless child willingly surrenders her autonomous self; the bereft adult narrator strives not merely to evoke but to re-experience the comfort of her father’s embrace. By contrast, narratives that foreground children’s resiliency and strategies of survival, such as carrying out labour, while figuring this as a loss of childhood (Iuliia: ‘we had no childhood’), draw attention to the subject’s agency.

Intensity of emotion is just as often conveyed in the written memoirs by the explicit denial of tears as by descriptions of lacrimosity. One male author writes that following the death of his father: ‘I cried for three minutes and that was it!’<sup>84</sup> Nikolaev in his memoir invokes a theory of childhood resiliency to explain his own apparently swift adaptation to tragic circumstances: ‘A child must have some kind of defence mechanism against things like that [...] No small children grieve for long over parents who have disappeared; at that age wounds inflicted by fate heal quickly.’<sup>85</sup>

These various ways of articulating childhood experience suggest that we need to take account of gender when interpreting memory narratives. In the interviews conducted for this project it seemed that female respondents focussed on the everyday physical hardships of their exiled childhood. This perhaps reflected their different role

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<sup>82</sup> GATO, f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 3, l. 1.

<sup>83</sup> GATO, f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 10, l. 5-6.

<sup>84</sup> GATO, f. r-1993, op. 1, d. 17, l. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Misha Nikolaev, ‘Orphanage’ in Natasha Perova and Arch Tait (eds), *ZIP and other Stories. Childhood* (Moscow: GLAS Publishers, 1998), pp. 169, 173.

in the special settlements, where they would have carried much of the burden of caring for families, as well as fulfilling many of the same labour duties as the men. Only one respondent – a man, Anatolii – vocalized his childhood in an intensely emotional manner. Generally, the former kulak children seemed to avoid or suppress their emotions even when describing the most painful memories. The act itself of composing and relating a narrative appeared to be a basic coping strategy, as if telling their story imposed some order on inchoate lived experience, and implicitly or explicitly rationalized their extraordinary suffering and chance survival. Narration may also have enabled them to ‘take charge’ of their past, to assert a degree of agency – even if their narrative agency was constrained by available ideological ‘scripts’ - over events in the past and memories in the present, both of which were in most ways, then and now, outside their control. Narration may also have enabled them to situate their childhoods in a longer-term history of self-development that included, to a lesser or greater degree, adaptation and reintegration into society – albeit marked by a persisting external and internal ambivalence about their identity and status. We turn to these themes below.

### Living with Dual Identities

For most of their lives, the child survivors of Stalinist terror lived with a ‘dual identity’ - on the one hand, as excluded, displaced persons, many orphaned as young children and reared as wards of the state, on the other, as Soviet citizens, residents of their places of exile, who strove to establish a career and to progress, despite the double stigma of their origins. On leaving a children’s home in 1941, Misha Nikolaev, who had lived in orphanages since his parents had been arrested in 1933 (when he was three or four years old), was told by the director not to feel shame that he was an orphan and that his parents had been ‘decent people’. The boy had been brought up a good Bolshevik child,

learning that the ‘whole world was divided into those on our side and those on the other side.’ Yet Nikolaev vividly recalled that soon after the murder of prominent Bolshevik Sergei Kirov in December 1934, one of the teachers shouted at him when he misbehaved that he should be shot like his parents as an enemy of the people.<sup>86</sup> ‘And I have to admit,’ he wrote in his memoirs, ‘that all my life I have been ashamed that I was brought up in a children’s home, without roots, like some sort of foundling [*shto ia detdomovskii, bezrodnyi, vrode by podkidysh kakoi-to*].’<sup>87</sup> He remembered also the role-playing games they had enjoyed as children - Reds versus Whites, Soviet border guards versus saboteurs, and asked: how could the orphans have known then that they would be playing such games all their lives? He compared the enduring disorientation produced by his half-remembered origins and dual identity to the physical sensation he had experienced when, as a child, he tried to swim for the first time: ‘Many times in later life I felt myself sinking but by some sort of miracle swam back to the surface again.’<sup>88</sup>

Another child, the son of deported kulaks, interviewed for an oral history project in 1993, described how he continued to be painfully conscious of his origins even after he was accepted into a technical college: ‘I was over the moon; before the host of fellow students I was no longer a special emigrant, though I never forgot that unique label.’<sup>89</sup> Many of our respondents had experienced similar tensions between a desire for social inclusion and an enduring sense of difference and exclusion. This sense of dual identity had manifested itself and was articulated in various ways.

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<sup>86</sup> Nikolaev, *Detdom*, pp. 13, 19, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Nikolaev, *Detdom*, p. 13. Note that *bezrodnyi* has the same root as *rodina*. It could also be translated as ‘without kith or kin’ or ‘homeless’.

<sup>88</sup> Nikolaev, *Detdom*, pp. 19, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Testimony of Victor M., in Litvinenko and Riordan (eds), *Memories of the Dispossessed*, p. 50.

There is a substantial amount of recent scholarship on the role of Soviet discourse in shaping ‘subjectivities’ – accounts of the self and social relations.<sup>90</sup> The literature is as relevant when considering how Soviet subjects recalled and related their earlier lives as it is when examining sources, such as diaries, that mediate current experience. This is true even if the extended temporal perspectives of our sources – that look back on Soviet times from a post-Soviet viewpoint, a turbulent era of deep structural and social transformations that caused their own perturbations in subjects’ sense of self – may complicate the analysis.

Much of the subjectivity literature is concerned to argue that Soviet power did not merely condition the subject’s framing of lived experience, by imposing ideological conformity through propaganda, censorship, social pressure and the threat of repression, but constituted social relations and identities. Hellbeck’s work on the 1930s diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, the teenage son of an arrested kulak, for example, reflects on how the adolescent strove to construct for himself a ‘positive’ Soviet identity and to overcome his ‘negative’ social origins. For the young man, the deportation of his father afforded an opportunity to cure himself of the ‘sick psychology’ of class aliens. He expressed a sense of being caught between two identities: ‘Right now, I am a person in the middle,

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<sup>90</sup> Notably, with reference to Stalinist ‘subjectivities’: Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, ‘Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s “Magnetic Mountain” and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,’ *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (1996), pp. 456-63; Halfin, *Terror in my Soul. Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jochen Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931-1939,’ *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (1996), pp. 344-73, reprinted in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-116; Hellbeck, ‘Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia,’ *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 71-96; Hellbeck, ‘Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-era Autobiographical Texts,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July 2001); Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). For critical perspectives on this literature: Alexander Etkind, ‘Soviet Subjectivity. Torture for the Sake of Salvation?’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 171-86; Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, ‘Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2008), pp. 967-86; Katharina Uhl, ‘“Oppressed and Brainwashed Soviet Subject” or “Prisoners of the Soviet Self”? Recent Conceptions of Soviet Subjectivity’, *Bylye Gody*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2013), pp. 4-10.

not belonging to one side nor to the other, but who could easily slide to either.’<sup>91</sup> Here, argues Hellbeck, we see not an autonomous subject, outside discourse, struggling to conform to ideology, but an ideologically-constituted subject struggling to resolve innate tensions and contradictions and become healthy and whole.

In our interviews, the dual identity articulated in adulthood by many of the displaced children derived from their sense of both spatial and temporal dislocation. We have proposed that an integrated self-consciousness is predicated in important ways on attachment to place, as well as on the capacity to formulate, for oneself as much as for society, a continuous and meaningful life history. The Soviet state’s coercive and violent removal of the children from their original homes and their subsequent loss of family, the rupture that these events represented in their biographies, as well as the double stigma of displacement and orphanhood that they bore in later life, had denied them the possibility of constructing an account of the self that was either ‘subjectively’ coherent or ‘objectively’ correct.<sup>92</sup> Like Podlubnyi, many interviewees had felt themselves divided – in their case, between the impulse to mourn lost time and place and the aspiration to assimilate to normative histories and social spaces. We cannot generalize about the locus of their ‘authentic’ identities, though we might speculate that for many this shifted from their ‘public’ (present-oriented) to ‘private’ (past-oriented) selves as changing Soviet and then post-Soviet discourses of history and selfhood began to structure, render meaningful and valorize their memories of childhood dislocation.<sup>93</sup> Certainly, at the time when the interviews were conducted, most (though not all) of the respondents desired to be able to speak publicly about their childhoods, to have their

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<sup>91</sup> Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul’, in Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>92</sup> Hellbeck writes of the attempts of a loyal Stalinist playwright to ‘align his “subjective” self with “objective” reality’, in *Revolution on my Mind*, p. 288.

<sup>93</sup> On the relations between evolving Soviet and post-Soviet discourses of history and survivor testimonies, see especially Jones, ‘Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories?’, Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*; Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*; Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party*. In distinguishing between ‘public’ and ‘private’ selves, we do not suggest that these are real and discrete entities, but different modes of self-presentation, the ‘authenticity’ of which is a function of their role in normative discourse.



suffering acknowledged and to find a place in society on their own terms, and felt that this was all finally possible.

At the same time, many of the interviewees still drew on Soviet discourse for self-identification. Perhaps, for some, their early displacement and institutionalized upbringing meant that they had few alternative narrative resources (for example, family traditions) on which to draw in formulating life stories. That is not to say that these respondents now denied the arbitrariness and violence of the Stalinist state; but those who had constructed an identity in opposition to the (post-Stalinist) state - like Aleftina, whom we discuss below – notably condemned it in its own ‘conceptual language’,<sup>94</sup> as much as those who had strived to establish a positive Soviet identity - like Anatolii and Georgii – accommodated to its terms and its values.

While it is important to stress that the former kulak children adopted diverse narrative strategies to tell their life histories and relate their sense of self to official discourses of belonging, we remarked that gender was clearly (and unsurprisingly) implicated both in determining their life experiences after displacement and in structuring their presentations of self. Many male respondents had served in the Red Army, becoming protectors of the same state that had originally excluded them and their families. Most of these men preferred to speak of their adolescence and youth as soldiers rather than of their childhoods. On the other hand, most female interviewees focused more on their early experiences and placed less stress on their lives after dekulakization or on their subsequent careers.

As we have seen, Anatolii did speak at length about his childhood, but his emotionally highly-charged narrative changed character when he recollected his army career. His story became less demonstrative and more matter-of-fact: ‘[...] and then

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<sup>94</sup> Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul’, p. 104.

came the War,' he recalled, 'and, well, you know what that was like.'<sup>95</sup> The change both in his demeanour and his narrative occurred within a few moments. He had lived two lives, and was accustomed to telling two different stories that ran in parallel and never intersected. To do so he adopted two different narrative styles – indeed, two different personae. His childhood story of displacement and exclusion had never been part of the state's official historical narrative, and post-Soviet discourse continued to treat the Stalinist repressions with ambivalence, so that in relating his childhood experiences he was perhaps cast back, more or less, onto his own story-telling resources, drawing on literary or other tropes of victimhood. His narrative of displacement thus remained intensely intimate. His Red Army career, on the other hand, conformed precisely to the heroic trajectory of the normative Soviet male citizen of that period, so that he was readily able to narrate his wartime experiences (probably no less 'traumatic' than those of his childhood) drawing on the depersonalized official discourse that confirmed his integration into the wider community, his agency and his masculinity. If he chose not to relate disturbing memories of his wartime experience, it was not because he needed to deny or suppress them, but because all listeners 'know what it was like.'

Georgii too spoke much more comfortably and at much greater length about his Red Army career (1949-57) than he did about his recollections of dekulakization and his years in orphanages. In his case, this was not only because it was easier to draw on established discourse than to improvise his own counter-narrative of displacement. As Bourdieu has noted, a person's name is one of the principal 'institutions of integration and unification of the self'.<sup>96</sup> We have mentioned earlier how the Soviet authorities, after executing Georgii's parents, had dispossessed him of his identity, even while ensuring that he did not forget that he was the 'child of an enemy of the people'. In so

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<sup>95</sup> Interview, 17 August 2003.

<sup>96</sup> Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', p. 301.

doing, it had disrupted the formation of a sense of unified and integrated self, of an autobiography which he possessed rather than which possessed him. When asked to recollect his childhood, he repeatedly gave a short answer and switched to his military experience, even if this was not relevant to the question.<sup>97</sup> He emphasized his Red Army service, in other words, to reinforce and legitimize his acquired false identity.

Without the army as a mechanism of social integration, many of the women had more self-consciously borne the burden of stigma. In their joint interview, Agrafena and her daughter Tatiana (one of the few respondents who had not been orphaned) spoke of having lived their whole lives in silence and uncertainty. On three occasions in the interview they alluded to their compulsion to remain inconspicuous. During the 1950s and 1960s, they stated, the Soviet authorities had offered them the possibility of financial support, but they had refused so as not to be obliged to reveal their past.<sup>98</sup>

When women addressed the war, they usually did so through the eyes of male family members – that is, they did not tell their own stories, but instead that of their fathers, brothers and husbands.<sup>99</sup> Distinctions of gender were also embodied in the self-presentation of the interviewees. This became particularly obvious during a joint interview with Valentin and Iuliia, two respondents who were not related to each other, but lived in the same small high-rise apartment in the Novosibirsk suburbs. Valentin proudly wore the medals he had earned as a soldier in the Red Army. Iuliia wore unadorned clothing which gave no indication as to whether she had served during the war or not. They also recollected their pasts differently: Iuliia concentrated on her deportee childhood, and never spoke of her wartime experiences, while Valentin spoke of both his experiences as a child and as a soldier and war veteran.<sup>100</sup> We are not

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<sup>97</sup> Interview, 5 September 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Interview, 24 August 2003. Agrafena was ninety-seven years old at this time.

<sup>99</sup> For example, interview, 16 August 2003 (Maria).

<sup>100</sup> Interview, 30 August 2003.

suggesting that the female subjects were more emotionally fixated on their childhood experiences than the men - the juxtaposition of Anatolii's emotional testimony and Uliana's dispassionate narrative belies that inference. Rather, we are suggesting that the male participants more readily switched from the identity of socially-excluded kulak child to socially-included soldier, since the latter role had for many years furnished them with social legitimacy, while the women concentrated on displacement and victimization precisely because they had lacked a similar 'entry ticket' into society.

Yet even those women whose lack of opportunity or desire to integrate into Soviet society made them self-conscious 'outsiders' for much of their lives (like Agrafena and her daughter Tatiana, who made such efforts not to draw attention to themselves in case their secret was revealed), articulated their memory narratives in Soviet terms. Interviewee Aleftina placed especially strong emphasis on her distant home/land and its loss as the wellspring of her identity in order to emphasize to the listener her early exclusion and enduring alienation from society.<sup>101</sup> For Aleftina, who has a university degree and worked as a teacher for many years until her retirement (her son is a prominent Russian historian), her cultivated 'outsider' identity was clearly more significant for her identity and self-presentation as a member of the critical intelligentsia than her social reintegration or professional success. Yet Aleftina repeatedly asserted: 'I am not a human being – I am an enemy of the people.' She had evidently incorporated this Stalinist category into her self-identity and self-narrative, even if her appropriation of it was marked by a conscious irony that simultaneously signalled her moral and political rejection of same discourse of violence that had victimized her.

Less self-consciously, several interviewees vigorously denied that their fathers had been kulaks, without questioning the label itself. Maria stressed that her father was

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<sup>101</sup> Interview, 16 August 2003.

a 'middle peasant' who had never hired labourers, but had been denounced by 'poor peasants' who avoided work.<sup>102</sup> Tatiana asserted at the end of her interview that the Soviet authorities had only deported the poor, while the 'real kulaks' remained in the home region.<sup>103</sup> Both women, in articulating their own victimhood, integrated in their narratives the categories of Stalinist social division and stigmatization.

There are no clear-cut conclusions about the formation of Soviet subjectivity to be drawn from these oral and written testimonies composed many decades later. They reveal many different ways in which subjects experienced displacement and its consequences, as well as divergences in how their childhood experiences affected their subsequent social relations and interactions, the extent to which they came to terms with the brutality and loss of their early lives, and the means by which they created narratives that, in changing social contexts (including that of our research), conveyed coherent and purposeful life histories. But the sources do reveal each person struggling, in their own ways, to become 'the ideologist of [their] own life' while conditioned and constrained by changing social values, norms of affect and discursive rationalities.<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion

In the long-term, the former kulak children we have studied were caught between denial and remembrance and between belonging and exclusion; they had to find a way to live with the double stigma of displacement and orphanhood. Until almost the end of the Soviet period, reaching accommodation with the system generally meant living in silence. After the Soviet collapse, they sought restitution for their dispossessed childhoods and most were also driven by a desire to know and to speak about their past as a means of publicly validating their own personal narratives.

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<sup>102</sup> Interview, 16 August 2003.

<sup>103</sup> Interview, 16 August 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Quotation from Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', p. 303.

In this context ‘remembering’ was not just a matter of establishing the truth of their past experience, but of positioning themselves in relation to the continuing evolution of Soviet and post-Soviet society. For some, vocalizing silenced memories was an act of personal and social catharsis. In 1987, Maria Belskaia, whose father had been arrested as a kulak and who had experienced starvation, bereavement, displacement, abandonment and life in an orphanage, wrote to the Soviet journal *Ogonek* to refute the assertion of a Communist Party member, an opponent of *glasnost*, that time had healed the wounds of collectivization. ‘Our childhood was poisoned and taken away from us,’ Belskaia wrote, ‘we did not have a happy youth; in fact, we did not have normal human lives at all.’ The journal did not publish her response, which ended simply: ‘I would like for my letter to be published, if only because of all our suffering and underserved torment.’<sup>105</sup>

For some, telling their story was an ethical imperative, the assertion of human truth over the systemic denial and deceit of the communist era. At the end of her interview, Iuliia instructed the researcher: ‘you just go home and write, since what you hear is the truth’.<sup>106</sup> Georgii said: ‘Write what you hear. They will think you are lying, but it is the truth.’<sup>107</sup> For these witnesses, the writing of their histories would serve not only to record and preserve their personal memories but to mobilize their testimonies in a struggle for a new social and political morality.

For some, rendering testimony was a calling to account. Semen Vilenskii, a former Gulag inmate and organiser since 1989 of the society ‘*Vozvrashchenie*’ [‘Return’] which supports survivors of terror and collects their memoirs, has described the publication of testimonies as a means to re-assert truth over the ‘diabolical and phantasmagoric existence [of the Soviet period ...] where words themselves existed

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<sup>105</sup> Belskaia, ‘Arina’s Children’, pp. 223-24.

<sup>106</sup> Interview, 30 August 2003.

<sup>107</sup> Interview, 5 September 2003.

quite apart from their meanings', to confront and, implicitly, to pass judgment on the perpetrators of terror and those who later maintained the silence, and to reanimate in society the values and virtues of those who have borne witness.<sup>108</sup>

Yet remembering is not an instinctive process but a constant labour. As Primo Levi wrote, to know is 'not a matter of arriving at the deepest roots of knowing, but just of going down from one level to another, understanding a little bit more than before'.<sup>109</sup> Uliana's laughter or Anatolii's tears reveal that memory is similarly a continuous work-in-progress. Displacement engenders a lifelong struggle to re-place the self, to find a way back home – which rarely entails physical return from exile to a place of origin [*rodina*], but instead a striving through memory practice and self-narration to reconcile the subject's personal history with normative discourses of belonging. These endeavours may fail, and are never wholly successful; for many they amount to a lifetime of further psychological, emotional and social pain and dislocation.

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<sup>108</sup> Simen Vilensky (ed.), *Till My Tale is Told. Women's Memoirs of the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. xii-xiii. On Vilensky, see Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, pp. 125-133. For the still-surviving Vozvrashchenie Society, see: <http://www.vozvrashchenie-m.ru/> [accessed 14 August 2015].

<sup>109</sup> Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon (eds), *The Voice of Memory. Interviews 1961-87. Primo Levi* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 8.