ABSTRACT

EAGERTON, JAIME ELIZABETH. The Rage of Famine: Social Relations among Soviet Peasantry during the Great Soviet Famine, 1930-1934. (Under the direction of Dr. Gerald D. Surh).

The purpose of this study is to examine issues of peasant social relations in Soviet Ukraine during Great Soviet Famine of the early 1930s. The goal is to show how village society was affected by the conditions of famine. Also, issues of tension and cohesion among peasantry are examined in terms of how the famine manifested in the countryside. In particular, struggling for survival during the famine had a major impact on how peasants interacted. An important question surrounds this research: did the environment of the famine transform the notion of a peasant “moral economy” in peasant society? This research draws upon various primary sources, including memoirs and testimonies of survivors. Many of the oral histories are located in Congressional Testimonies of the Ukraine Famine Commission, as well as the Oral History Project of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine.
The Rage of Famine: Social Relations among Soviet Peasantry during the Great Soviet Famine, 1930-1934

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DEDICATION

To my loving mother, Katherine Eagerton. You are the greatest.
Jaime Elizabeth Eagerton was born on 14 March 1989 in Aiken, South Carolina. She lived there for twenty-three years, surrounded by family members in the countryside. She graduated from Midland Valley High School in Graniteville, SC in 2007. From there she enrolled at the University of South Carolina-Aiken, where she graduated with a BA in History with a Minor in Literature in 2011. While at USCA, she took a Modern Russian history class under the direction of Dr. Valdis Lumans and was immediately hooked (She also developed an affinity for playwriting during her undergrad years). After graduating, she applied to a handful of graduate schools in order to continue her academic studies. Gratefully, NC State accepted her application for the MA History program in 2012. For three years, she has called Raleigh her second home.
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INTRODUCTION

A critical period within the study of the history of the Soviet Union is the Great Famine of the early 1930s. These famines affected the Soviet countryside most heavily between the years 1931 and 1933. The loss of human life among Soviet peasants was tremendous. Economic and political influences surrounding the Soviet regime also factored into the harsh nature of the famines. A crucial issue surrounding the economic, political, and social factors within peasant life is how collectivization and dekulakization processes contributed to the famine. While these policies' practical goals for society were projected as beneficial, they still presented major problems for the peoples of the Soviet Union. Scholars agree that the combination of collectivization, the consolidation of land and labor into collective farms, and dekulakization, the process of exiling and deporting affluent peasant farmers, exacerbated the conditions that produced the famine.

The historical importance of the famine rests within the context of Soviet history. Certain historians of the period of the Soviet famine concentrate on the agricultural and environmental shifts on the physical landscape as factors leading to extreme starvation and hunger. However, many scholars highlight the political and national upheavals between Soviet state policies and the union republics as more significant reasons for deadly famine conditions. These particular scholars delve into the Soviet state’s policies, decrees, and administrative interactions within certain regions of the Soviet Union, like dekulakization and collectivization, and how those policies played out on the ground. In this same vein, a number of historians have also examined the famine in Soviet Ukraine in terms of nationalism, Soviet policies on Ukrainians, and premeditated destruction of Ukrainian
peasantry by Josef Stalin himself. In many cases, these historians fail to discuss other regions also affected by the famine, as though the Ukrainian famine was unique. All in all, how the famine affected the peasantry throughout the Soviet Union has been neglected by these various studies, especially those that focus in on political intrigue within the state administrative apparatus.

Yet, the social context of the Soviet famine is of the greatest interest to this particular study. The change in the social landscape of the peasantry, including the conscious and unconscious effort to cope and solve the problems of daily life during the years of starvation is necessary for a full, nuanced understanding of the famine. An important question that surrounds the famine and its social context is how Soviet peasant society was transformed in both good and bad ways. The main issue to address is whether the famine created an environment of cohesion or dissension among the diverse groups of villagers, and how it manifested among peasants in the villages. The main question to be addressed here is whether peasant society in the Soviet Union transformed socially, mentally, emotionally, and physiologically during the days of extreme starvation. In what ways did the famine affect village society? How did the policy of collectivization impact the prominence of the famine in the villages? Did issues associated with peasant strategies of survival influence social conditions for the peasantry? Was the presence of a transformed peasant “moral economy” during the famine a significant component of how peasantry was affected? Certain behaviors of the peasantry during the famine represent how they interacted with one another as a result of the ever-increasing demands of peasant subsistence and the economy of scarcity. Resistance, rioting, and the breakdown of the social system of the peasantry occurred
because of the extreme conditions of famine. Examining the various modes of disturbances among the peasant society and how they reshaped village relationships within the village community will divulge how peasants countered the famine and how their relations to one another involved both cohesions and tension.

For my study, “peasant society” refers specifically to the families that lived and worked on the land, which encompasses many groups of distinct and diverse peoples. For example, the peoples affected by the famine ranged from peasant members of the collective farms to the families of peasants who were liquidated as “kulaks” to individual peasants who did not join the collective farms. The scope of my study will focus on the various locales in Soviet Ukraine. While the Soviet famine involved a complexity of numerous famines throughout the USSR, the overwhelming evidence and data from Soviet Ukraine have provided a more integrated, complex view of 1930s Soviet peasantry. By investigating and comparing the patterns, practices, and conceptions of community among the peasantry in Ukraine, we will be able to understand the distinct environment in which the famine developed and how peasants dealt with adversity and struggles during this tumultuous period.
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE GREAT SOVIET FAMINE

Over the past half-century, the historiography of the Stalinist famine in the countryside of the 1930s has shifted in methodology, style, and perspective. Some of the basic avenues of famine examinations have progressed from political and economic arguments of the policies of grain procurements, rapid industrialization, and forced collectivization of peasants to more recent scholarship on the social, cultural, and environmental effects, such as peasant resistance and crop failures, of the famine in various regions of the Soviet Union. More and more researchers of the famine era are combining methodologies to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced view of the famine.

Robert Conquest, the earliest historian of the Soviet famine, provides a lengthy, comprehensively researched investigation of the Soviet famine, the rural-urban situation of the 1920s and 1930s, and the intersections between the Communist Party, the peasants, and the nation. In his book, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, published in 1986 without access to the Soviet archives, he details the effects of collectivization and dekulakization as resulting in the 1932-33 famine. He mainly focuses on how the population of the Soviet Ukraine responded to the famine and places blame on Stalin and his regime for the calamities that ensued, describing the famine, particularly as it affected Soviet Ukraine, as a "terror-famine." His argument analyzes, in two parts, how the processes of collectivization and dekulakization, along with the end of free peasantry, created the conditions for the resulting famine.¹

Conquest approaches his examination from a socio-economic-political viewpoint. He shows how the social structure and way of life for many peasants were altered by the policies of the Soviet regime. However, Conquest also analyzes the "economic side" of pre-famine Soviet Union and the struggles within the Communist Party in the early 1920s. He details Stalin’s ascent and his eventual campaign of terror throughout the Soviet countryside. While this context is necessary for understanding the events and decisions of Stalin and the Soviet regime, Conquest grants an overwrought analysis of the Russian Civil War, the NEP years, and the mortality rates before and after the famine. While his work is seminal for the study of the famine, other scholars have contested his outright condemnation of Stalin and the actions of the Soviet regime. For instance, the historian R.E. Johnson’s review of Conquest's book notes that the author uses the term genocide in his critique of the famine in Ukraine in relation to the rise of Ukrainian nationalism in the early 1930s. He poses the question of whether it could have just been "misfortune" for Ukrainian peasants to suffer such hardships of ecological, economic, and natural proportions because the location in which they lived was affected the worst by the famine. Also, Johnson calls attention to Conquest's lack of critical inference into the behaviors of Soviet peasantry. While Conquest intends to present a holistic view of the effects of the famine on the peasants, he never delves into how the famine affected the way peasants acted toward each other and toward the Soviet state. This gap is what this present study intends to remedy. The existence of peasant behavior and

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concepts of peasant community in the villages, which are missing from Conquest’s work, are the pertinent research questions in which my examination intends to answer.

Another major target of historical interpretation that has developed within the famine historiography since Conquest’s work is the debate over Ukraine’s Holodomor and its relation to the other areas of the Soviet Union affected by famine. The term “Holodomor” translates as “hunger-famine” and indicates Stalin’s genocidal intent to deliberately starve and suppress the Ukrainian peasantry, mainly in reaction to the rise of Ukrainian nationalism in opposition to Stalin and the state’s policies toward both Ukrainian intelligentsia and peasants. For most Ukrainian historians of the famine, the event is seen as an organized genocide by the Soviet government. These scholars see the famine solely as an incident relative to national Ukrainian history, ultimately separate from Soviet history. On the other hand, certain scholars and Russian historians view the famine within the context of Soviet history as a direct result of the repercussions of the collectivization of agriculture. The debate between these two main camps has impacted academia surrounding the historiography of the famine for decades.

A critical source of investigation includes many studies that fall within the line of the Holodomor argument. The publication, *Hunger by Design: the great Ukrainian famine and its Soviet context*, includes a number of scholarly articles which outline the connections between Soviet collectivization drive, the nationality question, and the presence of the famine in Ukraine. This collection was created by the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard

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6 Wemheuer, *Famine Politics*, 206.
University (HURI) and highlights recent breakthroughs of investigations of scholarly research on the famine in Soviet Ukraine.\textsuperscript{7} The historian Lubomyr Hajda states in the foreword to the collection that the polemics among historians of the Ukrainian famine have “…formed the core and starting point of the evolving scholarly discourse.”\textsuperscript{8} While many of the published articles deal with the issue of Ukrainian famine as genocide, the concern for my study leans toward understanding the effects of famine conditions on Ukrainian peasantry in terms of societal and cultural transformation, without much historical investigation into the political debate over Ukrainian famine as genocide.

Within the HURI book, Sergei Maksudov’s article “Victory over the Peasantry” is a lengthy study that details the legislative actions, diet of Ukrainian villages, dehumanizing effects and population losses in Ukraine during the years 1930 and 1933.\textsuperscript{9} Maksudov describes, in extensive detail, the legal definitions of grain procurements and food supplies. However, his discussion of the human condition of the peasantry and how famine shaped peasant interaction and identity in Ukraine is critical for my examination. Maksudov also provides his interpretation of witness testimonies, which enhance the perspectives of people who witnessed and experienced the famine. He documents a number of testimonies from witnesses of the famine.\textsuperscript{10} His inclusion of these testimonies presents readers with a view into everyday life, concentrating on 1933, the worst year of the famine. Examining everyday life

\textsuperscript{8} Hunger by design, x.
\textsuperscript{10} Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 75-80.
of peasants and social relations imparts an understanding of how they dealt with the effects of the famine. Also, Maksudov’s article analyzes the geography of the famine in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{11}

For the purposes of my thesis, it is necessary to understand the extent of the famine’s intensity and how it may have influenced the village relations among the Ukrainian peasantry.

In a different investigation, historians R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft offer disparate insights into the study of the famine. In their monograph \textit{The Years of Hunger}, published in 2005, Davies and Wheatcroft investigate the state of Soviet agriculture from the years 1931 and 1933. Unlike Conquest’s argument, their study benefitted from the investigation in former Soviet archives that were inaccessible before 1990, in which many reports from the regions afflicted with famine conditions were created; however, the authors state that not all secret reports are accessible. Top-secret papers about policy-making are also incomplete because of the lack of communication and disclosure about the actual presence of famine in the Soviet Union between key Soviet leaders, including Stalin himself.\textsuperscript{12}

Nevertheless, Davies and Wheatcroft explain how their study is distinct in focus and evidentiary support. They state that examinations of the "economic and social background to the famine" comprise their study and have had the advantage of examining new documents from the Politburo and other Soviet agencies to which Conquest did not have access during

\textsuperscript{11} Maksudov also traces the extent of human losses in villages, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 80-95.

his research. However, Davies and Wheatcroft fail to address the complexities of village social relations during the context of the famine. Their coverage of the famine is limited to a basic, bullet-point investigation of the physical conditions of the peasantry. They do not investigate whether peasant behaviors, peasant expectations, and peasant strategies of survival were altered. Hopefully, this present examination can fill the gaps of social upheaval and transformation that lie within the work of Davies and Wheatcroft.

An examination of peasant social relations during the early years of collectivization is Lynne Viola's *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*. Viola focuses on the peasant culture of resistance of the early 1930s and provides contextual evidence for exploring how the onset of collectivization affected the events that culminated in the 1932-33 famine. In her study, Viola states that during the collectivization era, a culture of resistance, described as "...a specific style of peasant communication, demeanor, and interaction with elites...[that] seeks alternately to manipulate, protest, and adapt itself...through subterfuge, rebellion, and other popular forms of resistance...to maintain their identities and lives..." developed among the peasantry. She examines issues like solidarity, unity, and homogeneity of peasant culture and how they fluctuated during collectivization. However, she does not provide enough insight into whether those cultural issues for peasants amid collectivization followed through to the famine period. In many cases, she only infers to what degree solidarity or dissension among peasantry was prevalent. While she adheres to the evidence of unity present among

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13 Davies and Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger*, xv.
peasantry during collectivization as an unusual feature of peasant communities, the question as to whether this environment carried over into the famine years (which is the main topic of her last chapter, “On the Sly”) leaves much to be desired. Her investigation calls attention to the “economy of scarcity” among the peasantry that existed in famine areas. Also, Viola focus on the concept of a cultural community of peasants in which factions and complexities were subverted or pushed aside in order to maintain their lives against the force of Soviet power. Viola highlights the appearance of kulak resistance during and following the main collectivization drive of 1930.\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 205.} She argues that the eventual grain struggle in the early 1930s, which led to the famine, affected the collectivity of peasantry and created different forms of resistance.\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 226.} My examination of peasant social relations and peasant behavior employs a similar vein of investigation related to Viola’s focus on the intricacies of Soviet peasant society and culture of Soviet peasantry during the chaotic 1930s.

In a different investigation, the historian Mark B. Tauger presents another argument centered on the Soviet famine. He claims in the case study, \textit{Natural Disasters and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931-1933}, that scholars who solely concentrate on famine in Ukraine misinterpret the larger context of the famines throughout the Soviet Union. He also states that recent studies and document collections have cast doubt on the conclusions of those scholars.\footnote{Mark B. Tauger, \textit{Natural disaster and human actions in the Soviet famine of 1931-1933} (Pittsburgh: The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies), 2001, 1.} Instead, Tauger’s argument centers on environmental factors and human actions and reactions, while concluding that the famine as “man-made” or resulting of a
single cause is unsatisfactory. Tauger also discusses peasant resistance and reactions to work, in which he finds fault in many arguments about labor resistance and human actions of struggle against the Soviet regime.

As for primary source documents, memoirs, testimonies, certain state policies and decrees, as well as images, pamphlets, and letters, are of great significance for examining peasant motivations, societal transformations, and to what extent the Soviet famine shaped these issues. The memoirist, Miron Dolot, delves into discussion of peasants and villagers in Ukraine during the famine in his book, *Execution by Hunger*. His personal account during the critical years of 1932 and 1933 in Soviet Ukraine does not intend to analyze the causes of the famine, but to record his personal testimony for investigation of the effects of the Ukrainian famine on his family and other peasant families. Dolot’s work provides pivotal insight into how peasant life functioned, how peasants responded to the Communist party, and motivations of the villagers toward community and survival. For instance, Dolot explains in the first chapter of his memoir how Ukrainian villages and farmers' houses were grouped together and how the community of peasants before the famine was "close-knit." However, by the first half of June 1932, after the start of the famine, the villagers of Dolot's region began to witness extreme lawlessness and many peasants were punished by both the Communist activists and their own neighbors for theft, burglaries, and robberies. Here, it is

22 Dolot, *Execution by Hunger*, 155-156.
evident that the solidarity of Dolot's village community pre-famine (and pre-collectivization) suffered at the hands of starvation. The worsening of the conditions during the famine years, as described by Dolot, reflect a prime example of the dissolution of the peasantry and how social situations transformed and influenced the reactions and responses of the peasantry to the famine.

Testimonials from famine survivors, provided in bound transcriptions by *Congressional Testimony and Hearings of the U.S. Government* and the *Oral History Project on the Investigation of the Famine in Ukraine*, also provide other views into how individual people were affected. The *Oral History Project* is a bound collection of oral histories of the survivors of the Ukrainian famine, which was collected during the Commission on the Ukraine Famine in the late 1980s. The director, designer, and editor of the project was James E. Mace, who worked as a research associate at the HURI and has become a prominent researcher of Ukrainian history and the famine proper. As outlined in the introduction, the philosophy of the *CUF (Commission on the Ukraine famine) Oral History Project* “…was to add as much as possible to the source basis…for specific study of the famine,” although some testimonies address the social history of Ukraine from the Revolution of 1917 to the beginning of the Second World War. The testimonies are rich material for studying the famine and gaining insight into how peasants faced their existence. Also, these particular sources offer various interpretations of similar events associated with

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the famine. This allows for investigation into a clearer and more concise argument about transformations within the peasantry and the famine’s place within the study of Soviet history. The distinct interpretations of how peasants survived or did not survive the famine, how they endured everyday life, how they reacted to their dire situation, and how social changes manifested are represented throughout first-hand accounts.
DISRUPTIONS IN PEASANT SOCIETY: 1920S AND EARLY 1930S

THE CONCEPT OF A SOVIET PEASANT “MORAL ECONOMY”

Before the onset of collectivization, dekulakization, and the famine, the peasants of Russia and the Soviet Union evolved during the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War. To comprehend the social and cultural transformations of the Soviet peasantry of 1930s, it is critical to look back to the formative years of the revolutionary period and examine the evolution of the Soviet peasantry. Consequently, the transformative periods of peasantry and village relations within the Soviet Union continued throughout the famine.

Investigations of Soviet peasantry among historians of Russia during the 1980s led to the surge in research on the social history of peasantry, as well as peasant economy, culture, and politics among local, provincial, and regional archival material. A certain perspective of the peasant that will enhance my study of social transformation centers on the concept of a “moral economy.” As Esther Kingston-Mann maintains in Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics, peasants of both nineteenth- and twentieth century Russia who survived the upheavals of emancipation from serfdom, the tsarist regime, and the Bolshevik Revolution belonged to a moral economy that molded economic and non-economic behaviors. Some peasants upheld their traditional values, customs, organizations of social identities, and hierarchy and expectations of each peasant household. Also, these peasants depended on the

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25 This shift in Soviet scholarship on peasantry, which is also addressed in the historiographical section, is detailed in Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921, Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixter eds., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.  
26 Kingston-Mann and Mixter, Peasant Economy, 13; Also see James Scott, Moral Economy of the Peasant, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
relationship with the state to provide assistance during times of need, as noted by Aaron B. Retish in his study of the Vyatka province, *Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War*. During the 1922 famine, many villages throughout the Viatka province, for example, protested and petitioned the state for relief. Even workers and peasants contributed to fight against the famine by giving money to relief efforts. However, peasant society and their impressions of themselves as Soviet citizens evolved and transformed in order to survive total war of the Soviet regime of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Retish’s investigation of the peasantry and Soviet power includes a discussion of Viatka’s peasant society during the first modern famine in rural Russian countryside of 1922. For instance, Retish notes that the coupling of famine and Civil War transmuted social changes that led to the destruction of peasant households, migration of peasants from villages, and situating society “…in a state of even more dynamic flux”. In the same vein, we will see how the famine of the early 1930s also damaged the Soviet peasantry; however, there were different instigators of the 1932-33 famine than the First World War and the Russian Civil War. Also, while Retish argues that the peasant moral economic relationship with the state led to peasants demanding aid and relief during the 1922 famine and buoyed a relationship between the peasant and the state,

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29 Retish, *Russia’s Peasants*, 239.
this relationship ruptured and caused fissures among the peasants during the 1931-33 famine.\textsuperscript{30}

By the beginning of the 1931-33 famine, a new moral economy among peasants became paramount. Because of the overwhelming repressive powers of the state through levies on agricultural produce and mismanaged collective farms, peasants faced economic breakdown. The economy of scarcity of peasant subsistence and hunger was disregarded by the state. Peasants faced a new economy that was defined by the new collective farm order (collectivization will be discussed in depth in the following section) and the “economy of scarcity.” In response, conceptions of “fair play” and customary “social obligations” altered because of the new form of subsistence brought on by collectivization, including the transformed political culture of how peasants were viewed and treated by the state. Thus, the struggle for subsistence during the famine was based on a new moral economy, in which adaptation and strategies for survival encompassed the lives of peasants.\textsuperscript{31}

As touched on in the historiography of relationships among the peasantry, Viola also calls attention to what she denotes as the “normal reality” of the peasants during the early 1930s. Viola argues that stratification and internal strife among Soviet peasants was rampant throughout the society, but that the antagonisms culminated in the progression of “…unity and solidarity in action in the face of crisis.”\textsuperscript{32} She furthers her interpretations of peasant

\textsuperscript{30} Retish, \textit{Russia’s Peasants}, 262.; Retish delves into the issues of how the Soviets tried to control the modernization of the peasant society. He also details how “the citizens’ hunger” transformed the peasant-state relationship, including the issues of the Soviet welfare state and the responsibilities of governmental aid, which the peasants expected, Chapter 8, 239-262.

\textsuperscript{31} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 209.

\textsuperscript{32} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 5.
society during the 1930s by stating how the collective concern of the peasantry as a group, which faced the tribulations of social upheaval because of collectivization, outweighed previous dissensions and cleavages. However, in the conditions of the famine, the unity of the peasantry as a social group did not always exist. Village cohesion was not consistently ensured among the peasantry. In many cases, the social fissures that were temporarily mended by the peasantry during collectivization, as asserted by Viola, unraveled at the seams.³³

STALIN AND COLLECTIVIZATION OF THE 1930s

During the late 1920s, the Soviet Union and its people were facing a total revolution, in which Stalin was building his power and transforming the structure of the society. The New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1921, envisioned the coexistence of small-scale peasant farming with heavy industry under the control of the state and resulted in the revival of traditional peasant village communes and the persistence of the three-field system.³⁴ Stalin and his "revolution from above" attacked the traditional separation between peasantry and industry. Rapid industrialization during the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), intended to eradicate Soviet Russia’s backwardness and catapult it towards economic modernization, was

³³ Historian Timothy Snyder argues against the notion of solidarity among peasantry during collectivization, specifically in Ukraine. He claims that the collectivization drive ruined the identity of many peasants. In fact, he asserts that the cohesiveness of peasant society altered and that collectivization “…destroyed the Ukrainian peasant morally and then physically,” Bloodlands, 54-55.
the centerpiece of Stalin's socialism.\(^35\) Stalin’s economic and political policies involved the transformation of peasant agriculture into a state-controlled apparatus. Since the goal of Stalin's socialism was to prioritize the security of the industrial sector, control over grain procurements in the villages was prioritized as well.

The transformation of peasant society began with the processes of collectivization throughout Soviet Russia. Collectivization was a radical policy implemented by Soviet leadership in order to reform the land into collective farms that would be cultivated by the village communes. Collectivization has been defined in distinct ways. One of the facets during its formative years was state control over all crops and grain produced by peasants.\(^36\) Between 1927 and 1929, the Soviet industrialization drive generated a greater need for grain. In 1928, grain sales by peasants were less than the state required because of the extraordinarily high prices for the industrial products required both by peasants and by industry.\(^37\) This led to “extraordinary measures” of forced confiscation of grain procurements, livestock, and other assets from the peasant villages, in which the state enforced economic domination over peasant production to prevent the withholding of grain from the market. Confiscated grain was used for numerous purposes, mainly supplying the urban proletariat and exporting abroad to obtain over-priced industrial equipment.\(^38\) Forcing

\(^{38}\) Davies and Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger*, 11.
peasants to produce more grain made more frequent procurements conceivable and insured the process of industrialization.  

In order to accomplish the quotas for grain procurements and to modernize the agricultural economy, Stalin and Party leaders of the USSR forcibly introduced the creation of collective farms (kolkhozy). Interestingly, one scholar notes that there was no systematic layout for collectivization. This does not imply that the state acted haphazardly. Rather, the apparent lack of structure resulted from the rapidity associated with Stalin's drive for industrialization. While the Communist leadership never challenged the end result of collective farm production, there were issues associated with the force and the speed with which it was implemented among the peasantry. In fact, the fear of a civil war erupting in the countryside was a valid concern. On the whole, collective farms transformed the traditional peasant landscape by dividing and integrating individual landholdings into large, cooperative farms where members of the villages worked and resided. Administration officials within the Soviet socialist republics had already begun to force peasants into the collective farms, sometimes using the local Chekas as an authority over the peasants. In Dolot’s memoir, he describes how collectivization was implemented in his Soviet Ukrainian village:

…we heard an artillery barrage. Soon the crash of all kinds of weapon fire reverberated…our village was overrun…soldiers were armed with propaganda.

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42 Soviet state security; Cheka is the acronym for *Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya*, or the Emergency Commission
materials and Party and government instructions for conducting a
collectivization campaign.\textsuperscript{43}

His image illustrates the rapidity and display of force with which Party officials and soldiers
overwhelmed the unsuspecting peasants. Overall, the series of policies that arose between the
years 1930 and 1932 created an atmosphere of tension and anxiety for most of the Soviet
peasantry.

A critical factor of this study is the relation between the policy of forced
collectivization and famine. In 1931 and 1932 reports of hunger affecting the rural districts
continued during the crop failure of the 1932 harvest. The grain collections of 1931 and 1932
throughout many Ukrainian villages left peasants without “essential grain.”\textsuperscript{44} Requests sent
from grain-growing districts to Moscow asked for additional grain to be sent to the
countryside. Because of the shortages of grain, pockets of peasant hunger emerged
throughout the villages.\textsuperscript{45} As these instances of hunger became widespread in 1933, grain
quotas did not subside. Central leadership in Moscow urged the continuation of grain
collections, even though knowledge of famine was prevalent. However, there was a major
emphasis on grain collections in areas of the Soviet Union where famine was not widespread.
But this did not mean that extraction of grain from famine areas completely subsided.\textsuperscript{46}
Although the amount of collected grain tallied in less than the planned quota, repression

\textsuperscript{43}Dolot, \textit{Execution by Hunger}, 1.
\textsuperscript{44}“Essential grain” for peasants refers to the stocks of grain that would hold them over into
the next year of harvesting. Davies and Wheatcroft, \textit{The Years of Hunger}, 104.
\textsuperscript{45}Davies and Wheatcroft, \textit{The Years of Hunger}, 104.
\textsuperscript{46}Davies and Wheatcroft, \textit{The Years of Hunger}, 209-210.
among peasants, including the exile of peasants from households who refused to seed or sow, only resulted in worse conditions during famine.\(^{47}\)

With the implementation of collectivization came resistance and antagonisms of peasantry toward collectivizers. Peasants devised several strategies in order to protect themselves from the onslaught of collectivization. Some peasants sold their grain reserves and property while others hoarded grain. Others slaughtered or consumed their livestock and demolished their effects.\(^{48}\) Quite a few reasons for these specific strategies employed by peasants have been noted. One can view these forms of active peasant resistance as means of securing a basic means of living within the new collective farm system.\(^{49}\) Peasants oftentimes used strategies like livestock killing to fight back against Soviet agendas concerning collectivization and confiscation of property by the state. In some cases, peasants impoverished themselves as a form of protest against turning over their belongings to the collective farms.\(^{50}\)

Most important to the discussion of forced collectivization is to what degree village relations were affected and how those relations between peasants encompassed resistance toward or acceptance of famine conditions. Granted, Viola argues that the peasant culture of

\(^{47}\) According to data gathered by Davis and Wheatcroft, between February and June of 1933, only 30,000 tons out of 123,000 tons of grain were collected in regions of famine, *The Years of Hunger*, 210.

\(^{48}\) Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*, 359.

\(^{49}\) Viola describes in detail how peasants struggled to survive: “The peasantry struggle to survive by assuming a largely defensive posture based on the exploitation of everyday forms of resistance—shirking work, foot dragging, wage leveling, dissimulation, sabotage, and flight.” As Viola argument follows, she views the peasants’ struggle to survive as a component of the peasant culture of life and labor opposing the state. Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*, 220-221.

\(^{50}\) Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*, 359.
resistance was a response to the perceived violation of peasant interests perpetrated by the state. In fact, social stratification and internal dissension among peasant communities were preempted by the solidarity of the peasantry in the face of life-threatening crises. But was this collectivism exhibited during collectivization also how peasants faced the conditions of famine? The answer to this inquiry is quite ambiguous. As we shall see, various stages of hunger created conditions in which social cohesion was sacrificed in the struggle for survival.

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51 Viola, Peasant Rebels Under Stalin, 5-6.
PEASANT RELATIONS DURING THE DAYS OF FAMINE

“STOP BEHAVING LIKE WILD ANIMALS”

In investigating peasant social relations during the famine, how can we gauge the processes of societal transformation? Soviet villages before, during, and after the famine were greatly influenced by the policies of collectivization and dekulakization. As the famine narrative continues, the presence of activists, Communists, and the Party subjected the Soviet countryside to a continuous manipulation of the traditional social and cultural roots of peasant life. 52 From a subaltern perspective, 53 we can try to reconstruct the social settings of the famine and the feelings of peasants toward their dire situations by drawing on peasant testimonies and memoirs. By examining what survivors of the famine retell of their histories we can track the fluctuations within social relations in the Soviet villages.

A prime example of how peasant social relations transformed through the onset of famine conditions shows how the situation attacked the social fabric of the peasantry in Soviet Ukraine. Miron Dolot, described his own Ukrainian village, located in Cherkasy county some one hundred miles south of Kiev. During the late 1920s and early 1930s it consisted of communal farmers’ houses and communal buildings comprising nearly four thousand people. 54 The disposition of villagers is evident in Dolot’s text:

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52 Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow, 187.
53 I am using the term “subaltern” in the same way historian Lynne Viola employs it in her investigation of peasant culture in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist years. Examining the subaltern means understanding a social group (in this case, peasants) that was excluded from representation within the structure of state power; for further research on the subaltern, I recommend Lynne Viola’s Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 12.
54 Dolot, Execution by Hunger, 1.
But though destitute, the villagers were neither hopeless nor forlorn…the young people gathered in neighborhoods at the crossroads and danced, sang, and played…[f]amilies visited relatives and friends, or enjoyed plays, dances, parties.55

Interactions among the peasants were based on hospitality, trustworthiness, and assisting each other both in and out of the household.56 However, as the Party moved into the village and began collectivizing farms, social responses from peasants began to arise. Showing active resistance to the presence of the Communist Party and the state implementations that uprooted their traditional living, villagers rioted.57 Even though the rioting of villagers occurred before the events of the famine proper, the close relations among the villagers indicated their decision to band together to resist joining the collective farm, which they viewed as a threat to their traditional structures of everyday life. To some degree, the permanence of peasant relations withstood the intrusion of the state.

Once the famine struck in 1932, the transition of social relations among the peasantry worsened in the village. The famine was so widespread that peasants did not receive any substantial amount of food.58 The desperate environment of suffering among peasants became rampant. For instance, there was an “…endless procession of beggars on roads and paths, going from house to house…first victims of starvation…orphaned children.”59 These starving farmers could not receive assistance from other villagers because they were

55 Dolot, Execution by Hunger, 2.
56 Dolot, Execution by Hunger, 2-3.
57 Dolot, Execution by Hunger, 87.
58 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 76.
59 Dolot, Execution of Hunger, 138.
essentially facing the prospect of starvation together. On the one hand, some villagers did spare potatoes. But as the starving peasants moved to the city in search of food, city dwellers did not provide handouts to the poor starving villagers.\textsuperscript{60} This dichotomy between the responses of the peasants and responses of city residents to the reality of famine reflected the distrust between urban dwellers and peasants, especially on the part of peasants. Villagers appeared to be apathetic about the situation of beggars and orphaned children on the roads, but the city dwellers were even more accustomed to the “everyday sight” of starvation victims in the city.\textsuperscript{61} Also, the exceptionality of peasants travelling to the cities for food is a predominant theme. In some cases, peasants travelled as far north as Moscow in order to barter goods for food or to obtain jobs in mining or construction.\textsuperscript{62} The outflow of peasants from villages to cities in order to escape starvation was an unusual facet of social movement during the famine.

Peasants who remained in Dolot's Ukrainian village continued to experience the hardships of famine. For instance, during the May Day celebration of 1932, Dolot details how tragic the famine had become. Because of the importance of the celebration for the Communist Party, the collective farm administration promised all villagers a "hot meal" for participation in the holiday, and then they would return to work the fields.\textsuperscript{63} The occurrence of this "celebration" resulted in different responses from the peasant villagers. On one hand, the villagers huddled together, supporting their weaker relatives and friends as they waited

\textsuperscript{60} Dolot, \textit{Execution of Hunger}, 138-139.
\textsuperscript{61} Dolot, \textit{Execution of Hunger}, 139.
\textsuperscript{62} Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 77.
\textsuperscript{63} Dolot, \textit{Execution by Hunger}, 140.
for the kettles of hot food to be doled out.\textsuperscript{64} Literally facing hunger, peasants held together in solidarity. However, this image of peasant fellowship quickly dissipated. As one of the persons in charge of the gathering finished making a speech, the spectators could wait no longer: peasants rushed to the kettles, trampling over each other. These villagers were described as "...shouting, shrieking, cursing" in order to get to the food.\textsuperscript{65} This behavior signaled a shift in social reactions of the villagers who went from looking out for one another to total focus on one's personal survival. Dolot recollected the envy felt toward the others who had already received their portion while he and his classmates from the village school were waiting to be fed porridge.\textsuperscript{66} During this interlude, peasant relations and their perceptions toward one another in this situation fluctuated from conscious concern for one another to basic survival instinct. This interpretation of the interactions between the villagers in Dolot's Ukrainian village shows how the famine opened the door for the transformation of the peasantry as a social entity.

TROUBLE IN THE VILLAGES

As the early stages of hunger continued to develop in the Soviet Union, peasants began to experience the most drastic period of their lives. The state raised the quantity of grain procurements throughout the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{67} The harvest of 1931 in Ukraine was especially poor and resulted in the "...acute worsening of the standard of living

\textsuperscript{64} Dolot, \textit{Execution by Hunger}, 141.
\textsuperscript{65} Dolot, \textit{Execution by Hunger}, 142.
\textsuperscript{66} Dolot, \textit{Execution by Hunger}, 143.
\textsuperscript{67} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Stalin's Peasants}, 72.
[during]...famine," along with the inability of farmers to fill the state grain quotas. An immediate result of the poor harvest was that scant amounts of grain were available for distribution among kolkhoz members. One of the effects of the deteriorating agricultural conditions was that villagers could only rely on livestock for survival, as the straw, chaff, and grain in the fields belonged to the kolkhoz. However, the crop failure led to the decline in livestock breeding, which placed farmers farther in a bind. The catastrophic transformation of the Soviet agriculture, which preceded the famine, also affected the social setting of peasant interactions and relations.

Cases of violence and diminishment of communication show the heightened sense of urgency of survival among peasants. For instance, a pregnant village woman was beaten for trying to obtain wheat in order to make bread. In another village, a neighbor violently thrashed a six-year old girl for stealing heads of garlic from his garden. Another woman, Nastia Slipenko, was shot by a Communist Party member for digging potatoes for her family. As for peasant-to-peasant relations, the narrator of a testimony details how a young man who was collecting pea seeds attacked him. At first, the narrator describes how he was

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68 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 64.
69 According to Fitzpatrick, “the procurements procedures that the state was trying to establish at this time allowed the kolkhoe to take an ‘advance’ of 10—15 percent of the crop for distribution to members immediately at harvest time, then meet its state obligations, and then set aside seed grain...But in the early 1930s, there was often nothing left to distribute, and a share of the 10—15 percent ‘advance was all the kolkhoz households ever got,” Stalin’s Peasants, 72.
70 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 68.
71 Maksudov, ”Victory over the Peasantry,” 70.
73 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 76.
74 Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow, 231.
thrilled “…to see a human being there” and how they began conversing. But, as the narrator walked in front of him, the young man grabbed him from behind, pinned him on the ground, and drew a knife. Luckily, the narrator was able to escape, but he firmly believed that the young man was intent on killing and eating him. While violence was not unfamiliar to peasant life, these examples of violence and terror signify a clear shift in peasant mutuality; the economy of scarcity created an atmosphere of desperate anxiety of starving to death.

The continued erosion of social conditions is seen in the children’s game called babki, which used cattle-bones, but could no longer be played during the famine because leftover cattle-bones were ground up for sustenance. The eradication of this child's game was further evidence of weakened social interaction among peasant children and households. The intense suffering of peasants contributed to the lack of social interaction and cultural cultivation.

While these occasions occurred between peasants and activists of the Communist Party, the interactions among peasants were continually tested. Wasyl Haj, of Vlasivka in the Poltava regions, relates how his father was harassed by Party activists and eventually jailed for refusing to work. The narrator's village reached extreme starvation levels and people by "the tens died each day." But what is most striking about Haj's testimony is the description of the neighboring village and its inhabitants. Peasants in that village survived hunger

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75 Case History LH 58, Oral History Project, 2: 629.
76 Case History LH 58, Oral History Project, 2:629.
77 Case History LH 58, Oral History Project, 2:629.
78 Babki was quoted by Conquest from Astafiev, “Posledniy poklon,” Roman-gazeta no. 2-3, 1979, 17; Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow, 234.
79 Case History UFRC03, Oral History Project, 3:1476.
because they banded together, according to Haj. Even though trouble existed in the village, Haj declares that "...people were united, refused to engage in class warfare, and helped each other nevertheless." His claim that people did not resort to extreme responses to the famine in that village leads one to wonder about the sort of social unity in the neighboring village and whether solidarity alone secured the survival of its peasants. Possibly the extent of starvation in Haj’s village of Vlasivka and disruption of social relations led him to sharpen the contrast between the two villages and exaggerate the success of the neighbors.

FAMILY TIES

Along the same lines, the famine and the conditions in which it festered affected familial relationships among peasants. Families did indeed dismantle. The case history of Iwan Serhijowycz Jemec describes the tragic circumstances of his experiences among his relatives. His well-off family lived on a large khutir of 100 desiatynas near the Dnipropetrovs’k region. However, during dekulakization, Jemec’s grandfather was arrested, but Jemec’s father was able to escape. Now alone, Jemec and his mother moved from place to place. By 1932, the narrator and his mother sought refuge at her father’s residence, but were driven away by the hands of her own brothers. While Jemec does not

80 Case History UFRC03, Oral History Project, 3:1476.
81 Case History UFRC03, Oral History Project, 3:1476.
82 Khutir (Ukrainian: хутиров, pl. хутопу, хуторy or khutor: Russian: хутор) is a term applied to label a separate enclosed rural settlement built on privately owned land and consisting usually of a single farm during both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Post-1917, the process of land redistribution led to the about 20 percent of khutory to be divided among poorer peasants. During collectivization and dekulakization, peasant khutor owners were mainly affected and the khutory were transformed into collective farms, S. Maksudov, Khutir, entry on Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine, http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CK%5CH%5CKhutirIT.htm, Accessed March 25, 2014.; Case History UFRC06, Oral History Project, 3:1505.
provide a clear reason for the actions of the uncles, we can infer that the social conditions of
dekulakization exacerbated even family relations during the famine. What is also interesting
about Jemec’s case is his assertion that his maternal grandfather assisted him and his mother
in providing shelter and food, but his uncles refused to help and forced them to leave. While
familial antagonisms denied Jemec and his mother support, help could oftentimes be found
elsewhere. After the expulsion from his grandfather’s farm, his mother moved him to a
“small informal orphanage,” where he was cared after by a “kind-hearted villager” in 1932.83
Interestingly, the narrator and his mother could depend on the care of a person who was a
non-relative rather than their own kin. Jemec’s story shows how the famine transformed
relationships among family members.

While Jemec’s account provides a glimpse into the destruction of family connections,
an abundance of personal testimonies attests to the cohesiveness of family relationships. In
an oral testimony given by an unnamed male narrator from the Kiev area, familial bonds
between the man and his family are highlighted. He explains the circumstances and
experiences of his family and others during the early stages of starvation: refusal to join the
collective farm, people attacking each other, escape from the arrests by the GPU, robberies,
and killings, specifically to obtain food.84 But, it is his detailed description of how he saved
his father from starvation that is most telling. The narrator explains how a field of peas was
located next to their house in the Novohrad-Volyns’k region of Ukraine. When his father

83 Case History UFRC06, Oral History Project, 3: 505.
84 GPU (Gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravlenie) was the secret police agency and
intelligence service of the Soviet Union in 1922. Case History LH58, Oral History Project,
2:627.
became “swollen and was dying,” the narrator took bags and crept into the field of peas to obtain food for his ailing father. He states that, luckily, the peas were high enough to cover his crawling body in the field. The narrator declares, “I filled up my bags with the peas…So this way I supported my father, I saved his life and the rest of the family.” In this particular case, the effects of starvation did not disrupt the solidarity of the family and their welfare. But, it is critical to note that it was the child, not the parent, who took the initiative to provide sustenance for him and his family’s survival. In this instance, the child metamorphosing into the main supporter for the family’s survival replaced the typical “breadwinner” of the family structure.

Another witness to the famine also discusses how relatives interacted with each other while standing in line to buy small loaves of bread. The queues for obtaining bread were stressful on the peasants. While explaining how the peasants camped overnight to ensure their place in the line, the narrator simultaneously describes how certain relatives would “…change the places, so that one can go and have some rest…so that the place was not going to be lost.” The bread lines, in this particular setting, allowed for family cohesion among peasantry and showed that survival was a main reason for maintaining social relations.

Conversely, cohesion among the peasants in terms of familial social relationships was not always prevalent. In the testimony of an anonymous female from the Zaporizhzhia region, the narrator details the tension among her family during the early years of famine. She retells how, after the death of her mother, her father and siblings relocated to the Donbas

85 Case History LH58, Oral History Project, 2:629.
86 Case History LH58, Oral History Project, 2:630.
region of eastern Ukraine in order to obtain barley for soup. While living in Donbas, her father remarried a woman who also had children from a previous marriage. However, there was a lack of family solidarity among all members. The narrator states, “… [her stepmother] was closer to her own children and looked after them first.” In this instance, family ties appeared to be limited to only blood relations; the extreme situation of famine for all members of the family did not lead to a unified social unit. Coupled with the neglect of the stepmother, the narrator and her siblings suffered at the hands of their own father. The famine survivor describes how her father, unable to witness the effects of extreme starvation on his children, buried her and her siblings alive. Fortunately, the narrator and her siblings were saved by Soviet police and moved to an orphanage, where they continued to experience extreme hunger. The evidence presented by the narrator shows how the environment of the famine did not socially connect certain families and relatives in order to ensure survival. Here, social cohesion among the peasantry was challenged.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

Familial relationships were not the only forms of social interactions and social relations among the Soviet peasantry during the early 1930s. Issues among neighbors in the villages also transformed the social conditions of the peasantry during the famine. Dissension and conflict frequently erupted among neighbors in villages. A number of instances of interaction among neighbors show how the circumstances of the famine created struggles for individual survival. The testimony of an unnamed male survivor in the Poltava regions

87 Case History LH10, Oral History Project, 1:115.
89 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 77.
examines the deterioration of relations among neighbors. The narrator explains how the process of internal passports, which began in 1933, resulted in a neighbor denouncing him. He states that he was “…denied an internal passport, and given 10 days in which to leave Kharkiv.” 90 No indication of why the neighbor denounced the narrator is provided. However, the narrator describes his family as “…well-to-do” peasants that had suffered during dekulakization, before the famine. Nevertheless, he had been able to enroll in Kharkiv University and become a teacher. 91 Evidently, social antagonisms between the narrator and the neighbor predated the desperate situation of the famine, indicating that the economy of scarcity during the famine can be seen as only compounding competition, animosity, and fights for survival among peasants, which existed throughout Stalin’s terror state.

An unnamed female narrator also describes how neighborly social relations soured in the countryside. The narrator, who lived in the Lokhvytsia district in Poltava region, recalled how she learned that her starving neighbor murdered a woman for digging and eating the sprouts of grain that the neighbor had secretly planted. 92 In this case, the breakdown in social relations among neighbors approached a new level: killing became a means by which people could ensure their survival. The drastic measure taken by the neighbor represents a social transformation; the days of communicating with one another through conversation were left in the past. The notion of social supports among neighboring peasants of the early twentieth century had ruptured.

In the Irkliiv district of Poltava region, issues among peasant neighbors continued to create social friction. Semen Klochko described how he became swollen with hunger, but he notes his relations with his neighbor with more vigor and anger. Klochko states:

But ours (i.e. Ukrainians) did it [stealing and digging up vegetables]. A neighbor! How he took what I owned and threw me out of the house over the fence, what was left of it. He threw out the children, threw out everything, my house, my garden. [He said] get out and don’t come back here! And he was ours! Ours, not a foreigner. But our own did it, they themselves were the murderers.93

The evidence, which Klochko provides in his testimony, sheds light on his own perception and understanding of how relations among his fellow peasants transformed. Klochko’s astonishment at the fact that his own neighbor was robbing him and forcing his family from their house signifies that the expectations of village collectivism that the neighbor’s harsh actions violated. Village solidarity, in this instance, had dissipated. In fact, the issue of subsistence “self-seeking tendencies”94 directly related to the rise in theft among neighboring collective peasant farmers. Reports of theft from collective farmers created an atmosphere of fear and resulted in peasants actively concerned that other collective farm members would

93 Case History LH37, Oral History Project, 1:446.
94 The notion of “self-seeking” tendencies is explained in Viola’s Peasant Rebels under Stalin, Chapter 7, 221. She argues that the state labeled the attempts of peasants to obtain sustenance (pilfering, thievery) for survival during collectivization and famine as illegal acts against the socialist state. Viola notes how the state redefined the peasant moral economy and turned “…most peasants and many local officials into ‘saboteurs’ and ‘thieves’ in their attempts to eke out a minimal existence within the economy of scarcity,” 221.
burgle their homes. Like the example Klochko provides of his harrowing encounter with his neighbor, the famine and the subsequent extreme economy of scarcity created fissures among social cohesion of collective farm neighbors.

However, social fissures among some peasant neighbors were absent. In the case of Anna Pylpiuk's testimony, social solidarity and fidelity among neighbors continued to thrive. The death of Pylpiuk's grandfather on Christmas Eve of 1934 in Kaharlyk (south of Kiev) was a distressing time for her family. Because of the extremely cold winter, the ground was frozen and it was impossible for Pylpiuk's stepmother to bury him. Her stepmother asked the collective and the village soviet for help in burying the body, but was rejected. While the village was suffering the effects of famine, Pylpiuk's stepmother reached out for the help of her neighbors. Promising the chance to cut firewood from "their" property, Pylpiuk's family received assistance in the grandfather's burial. It is evident that relations between peasant neighbors could be based on mutual respect and mutual aid in order to survive. The relationship between Pylpiuk's family and their neighbors resembles a quid pro quo scenario: both sides were willing to look after one another, whether helping for the proper burial of a loved one or providing firewood for keeping people warm and alive.

Another case of neighborly concern among peasants is documented in the testimonial of Valentin Kochno. Kochno relates how the famine set in during the wintertime and resulted in swollen and emaciated kids in his classroom. In his village of Horodetsko, the availability

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95 From Sovetskaia iustitsiia, no. 16 (August 1933), p. 3; no. 21 (Nov. 1933), p. 12; no. 2 (1934), pp. 8-11; noted in Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 223.
of living quarters was practically non-existent.\textsuperscript{97} Luckily, Kochno's family received support from a "...poor family [that] took the Kochno family into their house."\textsuperscript{98} The host family provided the Kochno family with shelter, ultimately ensuring their survival from the harsh elements of the weather and the famine. While the narrator does not detail whether the host family obtained any food, the fact that people, who were already suffering from the famine, were concerned about the welfare of others. In a way, the host family was willing to sacrifice its comfort of a home as a refuge for another family.

A letter written by a student from the Polish Consul in central Soviet Ukraine to a Polish representative in Moscow describes the environment among peasant neighbors as a changed place due to the effects of the famine. The student, named Buczak, begins his report by detailing how a “single-individual” peasant\textsuperscript{99} refused to fulfill food production plans for the grain requisitioning officials in January 1933. As a result, the peasant was forcibly removed from his home and the state authorities took his possessions.\textsuperscript{100} The peasant, who was left without shelter or possessions, roamed the countryside. In the letter, Buczak notes how the relationships between certain peasant neighbors were affected by the presence of hunger. “A neighbor,” states Buczak, “has no right to show pity on the exile [the peasant], or he will become an exile himself should he take him in.”\textsuperscript{101} Buczak’s example conveys the shifting dynamics of social relationships among peasants interconnected with the rising

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\textsuperscript{97} Testimony of Valentin Kochno, \textit{Investigation of the Famine in Ukraine}, 119.  \\
\textsuperscript{98} Testimony of Kochno, \textit{Investigation of the Famine in Ukraine}, 119.  \\
\textsuperscript{99} These are peasants who did \textit{not} belong to the collective farms and were not collective farmers.  \\
\textsuperscript{100} “No. 94, January 1933, Kiev, Letter from Polish consul to Polish representative in Moscow with letter from student Buczak,” \textit{Holodomor}, 276.  \\
\textsuperscript{101} “No. 94,” \textit{Holodomor}, 279.
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climax of the famine. However, Buczak’s observations incur more questions than answers, especially as to whether the “lack of pity” and fear of ostracism penetrated deep into the peasantry.

An issue, which arises from the aforementioned example, is the role of the state/Party authorities in reinforcing peasant responses to famine. Soviet officials witnessed people dying of hunger. Most officials remained silent about the situation because of fear of political repercussions from Moscow. Thus, they continued requisitioning grain from peasants. Some were taking advantage of famine victims while others were also suffering from conditions of starvation. In 1932, as the standard of living among peasants worsened because of hunger, grain procurement by Soviet officials was enforced through harsh measures. Officials never supplied villagers with seed, food for their livestock, or food for the hungry masses. If a village or region could not fulfill grain quotas, they were reprimanded and placed on an official blacklist. Due to the merciless measures of the state authorities, strategies of survival among peasants arose. Peasants began to utilize different kinds of greenery for sustenance. They also procured nourishment through whatever means possible, even going as far as committing cannibalistic acts. As those strategies morphed, social ties also transformed and impacted the ways in which peasants experienced famine.

102 Kuromiya, Freedom and Terror, 179.
103 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 64.
104 Maksudov states that the punishment for not fulfilling quotas was surrendering meat “…a year of more in advance of procurement.” Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 64.
105 This is documented in the testimony of V. Maly. Maly was a peasant farmer who lived in the Kharkiv region and experienced famine in his village (Korulky). Testimony of V. Maly, Black Deeds, 543.
THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN

One of the consequences of the scourge of famine examined is the disruption of the family unit. Because of widespread fear in famine-stricken areas, parents protected their children from the unsavory consequences of extreme hunger. Rumors of cannibalism and abduction of children for meat ran rampant.\textsuperscript{106} Many feared traveling outside during nighttime. However, hungry parents who could not care for their children abandoned them by dropping them off at train stations and village markets.\textsuperscript{107} Displacement of children from their homes was commonplace. M. Osadchy, a representative for the district branch of the Commissariat of Peoples Education, provides an example of abandoned children facing the famine in Don Basin. Osadchy details a visit to a “Stalin” children’s shelter in the village of Ulyaniuka in the Hryshyn district, in which the situation for the peasant children was indescribable. “I saw a horrible sight,” says Osadchy, who witnessed upon entering the shelter a floor strewn with skeletons of children laid on straw.\textsuperscript{108} The children, who ranged from eight to twelve years old, begged for bread while “stretching out their feeble hands…”\textsuperscript{109} Osadchy claims that the environment of the shelter reveals the status of the famine to “…decimate the Ukrainian peasantry.”\textsuperscript{110} However, this revealing image of peasant child life during the famine shows how social breakdown affected even the youngest victims of starvation. The only notions of cohesion among the children were their simultaneous pleadings for bread and the ever-present reality of death. In fact, the irony of the children’s

\textsuperscript{106} Kuromiya, Freedom and Terror, 172.
\textsuperscript{107} Kuromiya, Freedom and Terror, 172-173.
\textsuperscript{109} “‘Stalin’ child shelter,” Black Deeds, 551.
\textsuperscript{110} “‘Stalin’ child shelter,” Black Deeds, 551.
shelter was its lack of shelter for the children; no nourishment, no protection, no chance for social development or survival.

Another example of abandoned children is cited in a testimony given by Mykola Kozka. Kozka, who came from a large peasant family in Ukraine, lost his relatives and home to the famine. Ultimately, he became homeless and moved around the U.S.S.R. and witnessed the effects of the famine on others. In western Ukraine, he saw a woman who was suffering from the effects of starvation. The woman, who was reclined on the ground, was swollen and had cracked skin covered in pus and worms. Kozka notes different actions of passersby to the woman. Some placed pieces of bread upon her mouth (which, according to Kozka, she could not eat), while others passed on by. Here, we see that generosity among people was not always widespread. The young Kozka continued to wander through Ukraine, eventually visiting Kharkov, where the militia took him to a cell filled with other “…tired, hungry people.” Luckily, Kozka was able to escape from jail and, after more wandering throughout the Soviet Union, was able to obtain a job back in Kharkov from a Jewish man. In Kozka’s testimony, it becomes evident that not all Soviet peasant children were placed into shelters or orphanages. His account of the starving women who did receive food from passersby but did not get medical attention in order to save her life reflects the different reactions of people to the reality of the famine. Kozka was perceptive of social transformation among his fellow Ukrainians. But, was Kozka able to interpret the actions of

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112 Kozka, “I became homeless,” 557.
113 Kozka, “I became homeless,” 558.
famine sufferers as a decline of social activity among peasants? One highly doubts that. Nevertheless, his testimony provides an interesting view into the life of a peasant child and how children could survive such horrendous conditions.

For other Soviet children, remaining with parents during the famine created greater obstacles to survival in terms of experiencing and interpreting social relations. In the testimony of Zinoviy Turkalo, who experienced the famine in Soviet Ukraine as a child, the deterioration of the villages is noted. As a child, Turkalo lived near Kharkiv. He attended school where he played an instrument in the school orchestra. His testimony details the transformation of peasants: “…the number of people, the way they looked, the way they behaved, and it got progressively worse every time.”

Turkalo witnessed how peasant social behavior had changed during his travel to the villages to play for the funerals of murdered collective farm activists. While he was not a peasant, his eyewitness account and his conception of peasant relationships, appearances, and behavior illustrates how a particular child absorbed the surroundings and the impact of starvation on the social structure of peasants.

This issue of children interacting with their families during the episodes of famine was also evident in the town of Voronezh, in the Sumy oblast. The narrator, Pavlo Lyutarevich, details how his family moved from the Poltava region in Ukraine to Voronezh in order to “escape the famine.” Instead of escaping the famine, they began to suffer the pangs of starvation yet again. Lyutarevich’s father could not supply the family with substantial nourishment. Lyutarevich explains how he and other children would “…go to the

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114 Testimony of Zinoviy Turkalo, from the *Investigation of the Ukraine Famine*, 96.
railway yards to pick up scattered grain and occasionally some salt.\textsuperscript{115} He also states that he secured small sample bags of wheat, which had been guarded by the NKVD. According to Lyutarevich, the grain he illegally obtained contributed to saving his family from starvation.\textsuperscript{116} Furthermore, he notes how the children with whom he scavenged grain at the railway station began to interact with one another. The children, who spent day and night waiting to obtain grain, gathered and started to communicate with one another. Lyutarevich says, “One could hear them identifying themselves as: ‘I am a Ukrainian,’ ‘I am a Russian,’ ‘I am a Jew’.”\textsuperscript{117} Thus, it turns out that a number of different peoples of the Soviet Union, who were in Ukraine, were engaging in social relations even under the most grueling circumstances. Could this one occasion of social connection between children have been a common occurrence among sufferers of the famine? Also, the testimony leaves the issue of whether these refugee children interpreted the conditions of the famine in relation to the deterioration of social ties. Possibly, their short interlude about their backgrounds was a way of escaping the current despair of the famine. Nevertheless, we see how children found ways to survive their plight within the harsh and relentless hunger.

In another account of child life during the famine, understanding of the events surrounding the famine was not always present. As a young child in the outskirts of the Cherkassy region in Soviet Ukraine, Edward Chernenko details the first time he witnessed the deadly effects of the famine. Chernenko states that he witnessed a woman die on the

\textsuperscript{115} Pavlo Lyutarevich, “Children help parents to survive the famine,” \textit{The Black Deeds of the Kremlin}, 562.
\textsuperscript{117} Lyutarevich, “Children,” \textit{Black Deeds}, 563.
street, but “…was too young to understand…” for what reason she died. Another famine experience Chernenko witnesses is the gathering of homeless children and how they were taken to orphanages. He continues outlining the rise of famine related events by describing how his classmates discussed the famine in the school. When asked whether people talked about the famine, he and his schoolmates mainly conversed about the famine, but he never heard his family talking about it. Chernenko’s testimony reveals how, as a child living during the time of famine, he understood that his society was transforming, although he could not fully comprehend his surroundings and the actions of others around him. Throughout his testimony, Chernenko repeatedly states that he knew nothing about the extent of the famine. How could this lack of awareness have affected his reaction to the social upheaval he viewed? Were the whisperings among his classmates and lack of discussion among his family have been a way of displaying fear or uncertainty about their survival? All of these are possibilities for the way Chernenko, his family, and his classmates responded to the events associated with the famine. Nevertheless, the sociological and psychological effects of extreme starvation on peasant children were pervasive.

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118 Case History SW49, Oral History Project, 3:1054.
119 Case History SW49, Oral History Project, 3:1054.
120 Case History SW49, Oral History Project, 3:1055.
BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL SYSTEM: THEFTS, PEASANT RESISTANCE, AND STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

PEASANTS AND THIEVERY

As the famine continued to worsen the peasants’ expectancy of survival throughout the USSR, theft and burglary among the peasantry became widespread. It has been noted that thievery arises from the disintegration of society and the turmoil associated with societal breakdown.\textsuperscript{121} This breakdown of the traditional ways of peasant life in Russia’s villages resulted in a growing crime rate and village conflict.\textsuperscript{122} Even though most cases of banditry related to roving guerrilla bands of dispossessed peasants (i.e. kulaks) raiding collective farms, certain peasants continued to execute acts of theft against the state and against other peasants in order to ensure survival.

To illustrate the rise of thievery, a document from a survivor of the famine in Soviet Ukraine details how theft became a "...commonplace phenomenon." For instance, the unnamed reporter states that in the village of Yaroslavetz, theft of livestock among peasants occurred during the day and throughout the night.\textsuperscript{123} The narrator continues, claiming that the village soviet "mysteriously" neglected to address the "epidemic" and were more "...devoted

\textsuperscript{121} Lynne Viola claims that historian Eric Hobsbawm believed that banditry arose during the times of social unrest and were representative of organized social protest. However, Viola pushes this argument further by stating that banditry and brigandage during the collectivization drive was an “…atavistic protest against the new order and its institutions, “\textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 179.
\textsuperscript{122} Moon, \textit{The Russian peasantry}, 364.
\textsuperscript{123} “Thefts, a Commonplace Phenomenon," \textit{Vistii}, September, 8, 1933, \textit{Black Deeds of the Kremlin}, 522.
to drunkenness rather than the welfare of the village.”

The disregard of the village soviet for the theft of state property angered the peasants because the inertia of the village chairman led to the increase in theft. Also, the narrator notes that peasants were resigned to remaining tight-lipped because thieves would exact revenge if they were reported. Clearly, not all peasants were committed to helping one another ensure survival; it appears as though personal survival outweighed all other aspects of social ties.

As thefts became a normal reality during the famine, the state reacted with repression. On August 7, 1932 a new law, drafted by Stalin himself, made theft of Socialist property, including grain stocks, a crime punishable by execution. In 1932-1933, thousands of people were sent to labor camps and even more were executed. The new law was a political movement by the state to keep people, including peasants, from stealing food during days of famine. But, it did not necessarily keep peasants from obtaining whatever grain, foodstuffs, etc. that was available.

Thievery among the peasants appears to be a result of the changing attitudes associated with the despair of extreme starvation. For example, a Polish Vice-Consul reporting on the situation of the Polish colony in rural Ukraine of 1934 notes how the only issue of great importance was personal salvation from hunger. The testimony states that a

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125 “Thefts,” Black Deeds, 523.
126 “Socialist property” was defined as the “harvest in the fields, public reserves livestock, cooperative storehouses, and stores, etc.” From the law of 1932, reprinted in Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 60-61; Wemheuer, Famine Politics, 47.
127 Maksudov, “Victory over the Peasantry,” 60.
"...defeatist mood among the people is much more widespread than in previous years."128

From this evidence, it is apparent that the occurrences of theft in the Polish colony were linked to the despondency and desperation of the peasantry affected by famine.

The crucial issue surrounding theft was how peasants interpreted their actions. Here, most peasants would not have construed their stealing of clips of grain or remaining peas as a conscious act of resistance against the state. If the preoccupation among a peasant family’s life was survival, it is questionable whether peasants were employing pilfering as a means of active resistance.129 Nevertheless, the environment of survival and the lack of interest and motivation among the collective farm peasantry created a complexity of attitudes and tensions.

PEASANT RESISTANCE

Peasant resistance, which was predominant during forced collectivization, continued well into early 1933, even though widespread hunger engulfed Soviet Ukraine. However, the motivations behind peasant resistance were based on the struggle for survival instead of political act of resistance to the state.130 A secret informer living among German settlers residing in Odessa Oblast’ discloses how peasants were outraged at the Communist Party's removal of peasant possessions that were purportedly stolen from the collective.131 In the

128 “No. 201, 22 July 1934, Fragment of letter from Polish Vice-Consul to "East" Bureau of Section II of Main Staff regarding the bad situation in agriculture and the anxieties of the people regarding the next wave of hunger in Ukraine," Holodomor, 541.
129 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 221.
130 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 209.
131 "No. 87, 8 Jan 1933, Odessa. Report by a secret informer of the Odessa Oblast Division of the GPU of the Ukrainian SSR regarding statements made by German settlers from the village of Strasburg," Holodomor, 255-56.
report, the secret informer claims that hunger will certainly propel them to commit acts of theft. Quoting from a peasant, the informer writes "Whatever will happen, we will steal everything we can get our hands on, we will no longer consider what belongs to the state or to some comrade; now it will no longer be important whose it is." The evidence that the reporter provides serves as a glimpse into how social breakdown, brought about by the famine, created dissension among peasants. Although the tone of the peasant’s declaration is directed at the incursion of Soviet power and its requisitioning of peasant property, the phrase “now it will no longer be important whose it is” gives an indication that some peasants were prepared to steal from their fellow peasants.

In some instances, peasants performed actions of deception in order to survive. Collective farmers manipulated the scales, acquired fake documents that showed they had fulfilled grain quotas, and stole whatever grain was available in train wagons. The terms of peasant resistance during the famine stemmed from the alteration of peasant-state relations. Peasant acts of subsistence were labeled “self-seeking” tendencies by the state, ultimately making their attempts to fend off starvation illegal and immoral. These “self-seeking” tendencies of peasants, like pillaging and concealment of grain, increased during the economy of scarcity. Unfortunately, there was not much grain available to steal. Peasants

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132 “No. 87,” Holodomor, 255.
133 Viola notes that these incidents occurred well into 1934 and 1935, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 225.
134 Viola defines the “self-seeking” tendencies of the peasantry by the state as a way of disfiguring “…the terms of the peasant moral economy, turning most peasants and many local officials into ‘saboteurs’ and ‘thieves’ in their [the state] attempts to eke out a minimal existence within the economy of scarcity.” It is clear through Viola’s assertion that the state was focused on labeling what they deemed “subversive” activities against the collective farm and against socialist property. Quote from Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 220-221.
who were faced with hunger also resisted labor regimens. Some refused to go to work while others used techniques like foot-dragging. Reports of low labor discipline were numerous.\textsuperscript{135}

However, resolving to not work in the collective farm was not always a form of resistance. From the testimony of S. Korobeynyk in Kharkiv region, certain survivors of the famine refused to work in the collective farms. Korobeynyk states, “Hardly anybody thought of working at the collective farm because the predominant worry was to save one’s life.”\textsuperscript{136} The famine in his village had reached terrible heights; peasants were only concerned with trying to survive.

RIOTING AND UNREST

Peasant rioting retains a strategic place within the context of 1930s Soviet history. Popular riots provide avenues for examination into the status of social consciousness among, in this case, the wide spectrum of peasants. Tension and desperation impacted the movements of peasant resistance against the state. One of the most intriguing observations of peasant rioting before and during the famine is provided by Viola in her research on the culture of peasant resistance. In her study, she specifically examines the different forms of rioting among peasants during collectivization. However, she notes that basic and sporadic forms of peasant riots erupted during the famine but never accords it proper analysis.\textsuperscript{137} Even though peasant riots were infrequent because of extreme hunger, the fact that some peasants continued to riot is important to document. It is crucial to examine whether the objectives for

\textsuperscript{135} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 213.
\textsuperscript{136} Testimony of S. Korobeynyk, \textit{Black Deeds of the Kremlin}, 547.
\textsuperscript{137} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 226.
peasant rioting during the collectivization years impacted the social upheaval associated with the famine years.

Peasant rioting, for the most part, was directed against what was perceived as the Soviet power’s incursion on the social, economic, and cultural solidarity and cohesion of the peasant community by the policies of erecting collective farms, forced grain requisitioning, and shifting autonomy and leadership.\(^{138}\) By early March 1930, the fear of hunger that arose throughout the countryside incited a number of disturbances due to food issues.\(^{139}\) In 1933, riots in Soviet Ukraine that were associated with famine began to erupt yet again. In a document by General Pyotr Wrangel, he notes the swelling of hunger rebellions. Wrangel details the reactions of peasants: “Masses of people were shouting: ‘Work, bread!’ The result—terror, mass arrests, and exile.”\(^{140}\) The peasants, in this case, were not able to work, which resulted in them not receiving any form of food rations. Disorganization and mismanagement of the state apparatus led peasants to riot. For these “rebellious” peasants, solidarity and unity against the state defined their social relationships and how they functioned in the social sphere. Images of peasants storming granaries and staging riots and disturbances evokes a sense of collectivity that persisted through the most difficult of times. The atmosphere of scarcity prodded at the innermost struggle for survival among certain

\(^{138}\) Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 154-155. According to Viola, there appeared to be a progression from non-violent reactions toward Soviet power, which consisted of “…peasants (often women) [who] attempted verbally to defend their farms, neighbors, or church,” to actual beatings and rebellions (especially in Soviet Ukraine), refer to Viola, *Peasants*, 154, 155, 159.

\(^{139}\) Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 173.

\(^{140}\) “No. 88, 10 January 1933, Representative General Pyotr Wrangel,” *Holodomor*, 256.
groups of peasantry and, in turn, produced outcomes of risk-taking and trying to maintain some semblance of social cohesion.
CONCLUSION

Peasant society during the famine of the early 1930s experienced grave inhumanity and nightmarish occasions of death and despair. Famine impacted the social and cultural relations of the peasantry in a number of different ways. This, of course, should not come as a surprise. For certain peasants who belonged to the collective farms, the famine was not always as difficult a phenomenon to face as it was for individual, non-collective peasant farmers. The policies of collectivization and dekulakization that progressed throughout the countryside, in many ways, set the stage for the conditions that would result in the severe starvation of the peasant population. The economy of scarcity of the 1930-1933 period transformed the expectations of the peasantry toward the state and, more importantly, toward themselves.

As the famine struck the countryside in 1932, it was clear that a deathly blow was delivered to the peasantry. For some peasant families, the destruction wrought by the famine strengthened the familial bonds. These bonds withstood the lack of food, shelter, and security that always test the resilience of people during times of crisis. However, cohesion among some families did not persist. Overwhelming concentration and determination for survival among some peasants often outweighed traditional forms of familial relations and blood ties.

Along the same lines, the social relationships among neighbors also resulted in the same dichotomous realm as familial connections. Some neighbors cared for others by providing shelter or scraps of sustenance that could be obtained. Neighborly attention and concern, for instance, consisted of a simple act of proper burial of one’s family member in exchange for firewood. Nonetheless, social tensions and fissures arose among peasant
neighbors. These relationships soured because of the extreme circumstances of the famine trauma that the people experienced. In many cases, peasants robbed from their neighbors and, in one exceptional example, neighbors committed acts of brutal violence and murder against their neighbors. Again, just like the testimonies of familial cohesion and dissension, the idea of neighborly connections between fellow peasants was not always a defining feature of social relations during the famine years.

The lives of peasant children represented, on many levels, a tragedy. These peasant children witnessed the tired, hungry, huddled masses of other peasants. Under these circumstances, some children received assistance from concerned citizens while others were taken to orphanages and left to suffer. Their perceptions about how the famine encroached on the notions of community and cohesions are indicative of a deeper thread running through this narrative: the overwhelming sense of peasants struggling for survival by transforming social strategies and adapting to a new life.

Peasant behavior and social interactions continued to transform as the famine progressed. Lawlessness and rioting among the peasantry surged. Thievery became a commonplace occurrence throughout the villages. And, the peasants did not just steal from the state; peasant-on-peasant theft also existed. The thefts of grain, livestock (whatever remained), and everyday belongings that were not confiscated by the state were looted. Banditry, too, was a result of the desperation for ensuring survival for peasants. Along with peasant lawlessness, rioting because of food shortages also affected the status of the peasantry. Peasant riots that occurred due to starvation embodied a kind of solidarity and cohesion of the village and community. The transformation of certain peasant relations as a
consequence of riots was for the better; these groups of peasants creating mass disturbances showed that they could band together against a common threat to their survival. Moreover, the polarity between the actions of thievery and the persistence of rioting illustrates the severe breakdown of the social system. While this was not always a negative issue, it still leant itself to altered social relationships and different expectations of whether those relationships were needed during such a time of turmoil.

The struggle for survival impacted every form of social interaction among the peasantry. For some, it meant looking after their village or peasant community; for others, it meant personal survival at the expense of relationships, law, morality, and cultural norms. One thought is certain: the famine as a brutal force encompassed the lives of the peasantry. None were left without scars.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

artel'(-i) form of collective farm (with collective cultivation, marketing, and ownership of means of production)

bedniak (pl. bednota) poor peasant(s)

Cheka (Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya) Soviet state security created in 1917

collectivization policy adopted by the Soviet government, pursued most intensively between 1929 and 1933, to transform traditional agriculture in the Soviet Union and to reduce the economic power of the kulaks

dekulakization expropriation of kulaks by means of deportation, exile, and mass arrests

dvor household

kolkhoz (-y) collective farm(s) in Soviet Union

khutor (Ukr. khutir) separate enclosed rural settlement consisting usually of a single farm during both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union

kulak literally, “fist”; in Communist terms, a capitalist farmer (regarded as an exploiter of poorer peasants by Communists)

muzhik (-i) Russian peasant (male)

NEP New Economic Policy (1921-1928)

sel’sovet lowest level of rural government

sovkhоз (-y) state farm(s) in Soviet Union
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