A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright yellow sweater, is seated and operating a large, traditional wooden spinning wheel. The wheel has a large, circular, light-colored wooden frame and a vertical spindle. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The overall image has a warm, golden-yellow tint.

Diaspora

ISSUE 1

DIASPORA

Fall 2025

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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When Ukraine is discussed on the news or even in standard conversation, it's often as a 'country at war'; somewhere abstract and distant, reduced to anonymous statistics. As a Ukrainian raised in the U.S., I have repeatedly witnessed the ignorance regarding Ukraine and Ukrainians within the Western world. Even after Russia's full-scale invasion and Ukraine's increased mention in the media, I continue to be asked whether the national language of Ukraine is Russian, I frown as 'borscht' is labelled as a Russian dish, and I observe how the Ukrainian literature and culture that shaped my upbringing remains unheard of in English-speaking classrooms.

At its heart, 'Diaspora' seeks to showcase this vibrant culture and present it as accessible and compelling to English-speaking audiences. The pieces in this collection are raw, honest, and deeply human—they dismantle 'Ukraine' as a distant entity and illuminate the lived and nuanced experiences of Ukrainian diasporas globally.

Both an act of resistance and a narrative of resilience, 'Diaspora' strays away from the headlines which portray a war-torn and one-dimensional Ukraine. Rather, it aims to showcase Ukraine from closer to the ground; to humanize Ukrainians, dismantle stereotypes, and reframe understandings of Ukrainian life directly through a Ukrainian lens, rather than through the colonial narratives which consume political discussion.

Elizabeth Malone
Editor-in-Chief

Donate to support our future issues!



FEELS LIKE

KIRA SANTALOVA

I will give you my lips,

so you can speak my mother tongue.

And I will spare you a piece of my heart —

it will be a present of mine—

so you learn what my world really feels like.

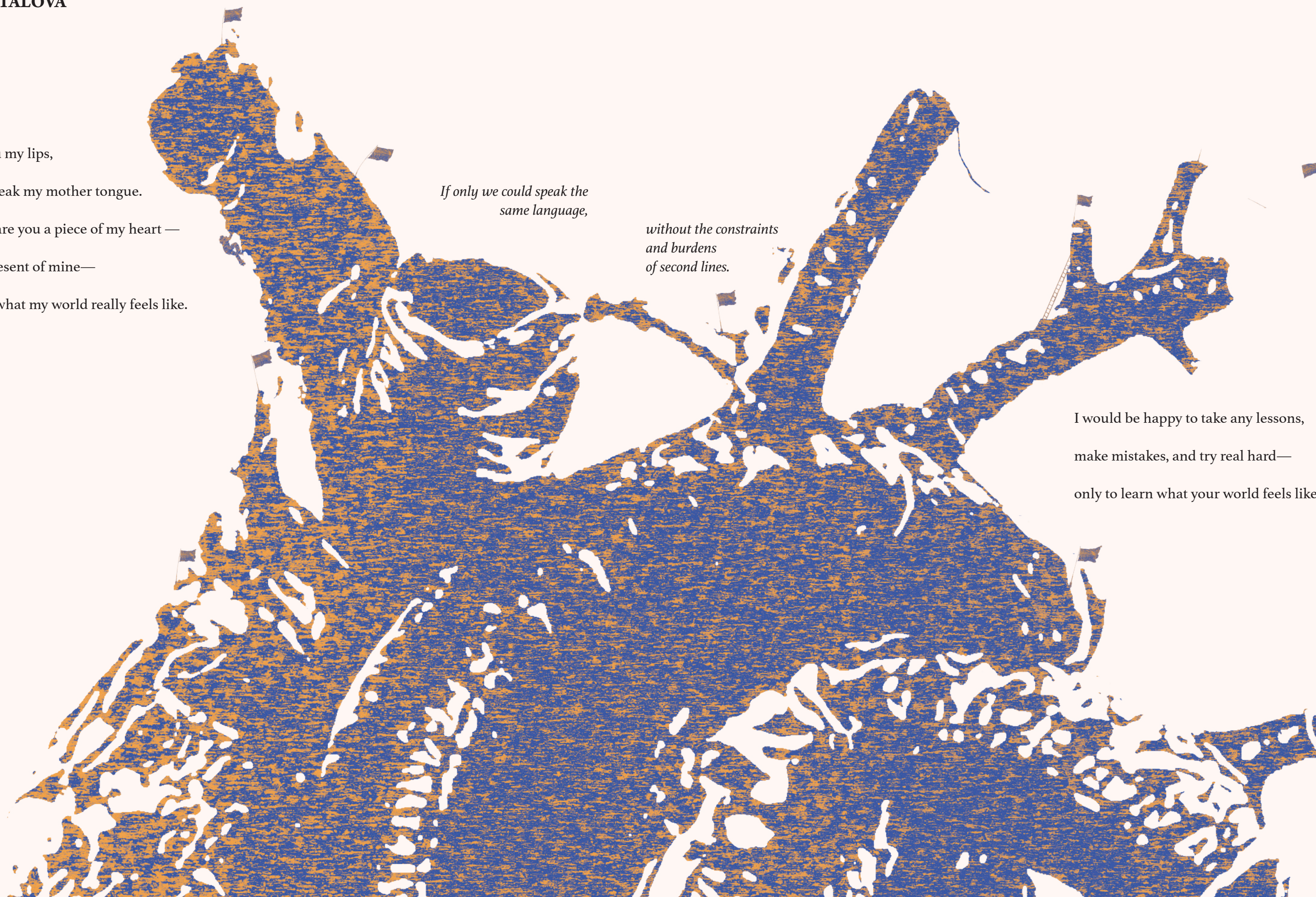
*If only we could speak the
same language,*

*without the constraints
and burdens
of second lines.*

I would be happy to take any lessons,

make mistakes, and try real hard—

only to learn what your world feels like.



UKRAINE'S MOST UKRAINIAN ARCHITECTURE

DAN MALITSKY

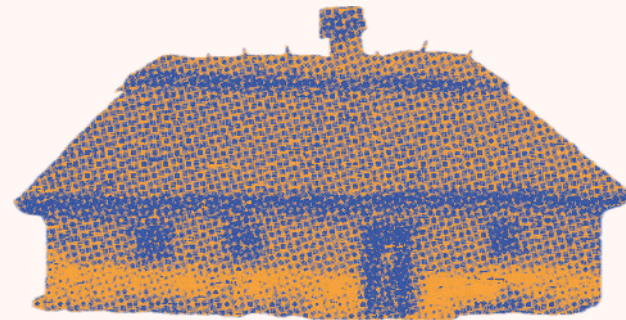
What do we see when we look at Ukrainian cities?

Soviet modernism. Imperial classicism. French Renaissance facades. These styles (borrowed, imposed, adapted) form the urban face of Ukraine. But is there anything beneath them? Something unique; something unmistakably our own?

Ukrainian Architectural Modern (Ukrainian Art Nouveau or UAM) is that something. A style that prevailed briefly and brilliantly in the early 20th century. It is rooted in folk traditions and shaped by national aspiration and identity. Unfortunately, it is little known even within Ukraine. But it should be. These buildings do not merely stand – they tell a story. And what they say is both beautiful and indispensable.

Across Europe, the early 1900s were a time of stylistic rebellion. Art Nouveau, Secession, Jugendstil...each region invented its own modern identity, rejecting classical uniformity. In Ukraine, this artistic wave collided with a deeper current: the search for cultural sovereignty.

But what could a modern Ukrainian city look like? Not one made in the image of Paris or Vienna, but in the image of Ukraine itself. Not imitation, but reinterpretation. Not nostalgia, but transformation.



Ukrainian Architectural Modern drew from the vernacular: countryside homes (haty) with thick white walls and thatched roofs, wooden churches with tiered silhouettes, and national art. These elements were not pasted on, they were woven into the logic of design. This was architecture grown from folklore.

Unlike the palaces of empires, these buildings were filled with light and humility. Take, for instance, the rural schools designed by Opanas Slastion, where rooftop towers symbolised that 'a school is a temple of knowledge,' and brick ornamentation resembled woven embroidery (vyshyvanka). A national style, carved from memory and thorough research.

Poltava, more than any other city, became the soul of this movement. Vasyl Krychevsky's masterpiece, the Regional Studies Museum (formerly the Zemstvo Building), is often seen as the birth of the style. But the movement stretched far beyond: to Kyiv, to Kharkiv, to Chernihiv, even as far as Kuban.

Across all these regions, a kind of architectural dialect began to form – a visual grammar of 'Ukrainianness' in a building. There were trapezoidal and hexagonal windows and doorways, their unconventional forms drawing the eye and being the most recognisable element in the style. Semi-elliptical arches softened rigid geometries. Roofs often swelled into tented peaks or folded into tiered ridges, recalling mountain silhouettes. Wooden galleries stretched along facades, their pillars sometimes twisted into carved spirals. Everywhere, tile and brick mosaics glimmered with patterns lifted from vyshyvanky, pysanky (decorated Easter eggs), and painted ceramics – fragments of a folk memory reassembled in clay and stone.

Before this, only the Cossack Baroque had given Ukraine a distinct architectural voice, and mostly within churches. Ukrainian Architectural Modern took that voice to the streets. Schools, cooperatives, and administrative buildings – all were reshaped in a vernacular that felt both timeless and thrillingly new.



UAM emerged at a time of radical social transformation. It lived through (and barely survived) the collapse of the Russian empire, World War I, Ukraine's brief independence, and the rise of Bolshevism. In those short years, dozens of masterpieces were built. And then, suddenly, they were not. The style was too national; too proud; too rooted. Under the Soviets, it was branded 'formalism' or even 'exoticism.' The Zemstvo building was called 'pseudo-Moorish' by officials unfamiliar with Ukrainian traditions. By the 1930s, Ukrainian Architectural Modern was effectively dead, buried under the concrete slabs of socialist realism and the silence of censorship.

What made UAM remarkable was not just its form, but its devotion to synthesis. Architecture became a vessel for the applied arts.

For those who wonder: could we ever build in this style again?

The answer is probably no. Not really. Ukrainian Architectural Modern was born from a specific moment – from artists shaped by folk memory, trained in craft schools, struggling under the empire, and dreaming of a free culture. Any 'neo-UAM' we might construct today would be a well-meant imitation 'inspired by,' but not of the original spirit.

But we can, and must, learn from it. Preserve what we have. Celebrate what survives. Not just physically, but intellectually and emotionally. Because it is not only the most Ukrainian architectural style ever created, it is one of the most vivid expressions of Art Nouveau anywhere in the world. And it is vanishing. Too many buildings have fallen into decay – their tiles cracked, their paint peeling, roofs collapsing, and their meaning forgotten. Few people (even among Ukrainians) know these names: Vasyl Krychevsky, Opanas Slastion, Johann Levynsky. Fewer still recognise the buildings that stand quietly on our streets as historical artefacts.

If you have never heard of UAM before, you're not alone. But now you have. If you want to go further, here are a few starting points:

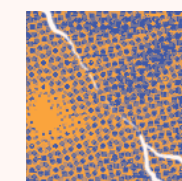
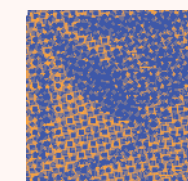
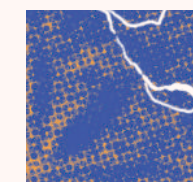
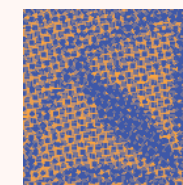
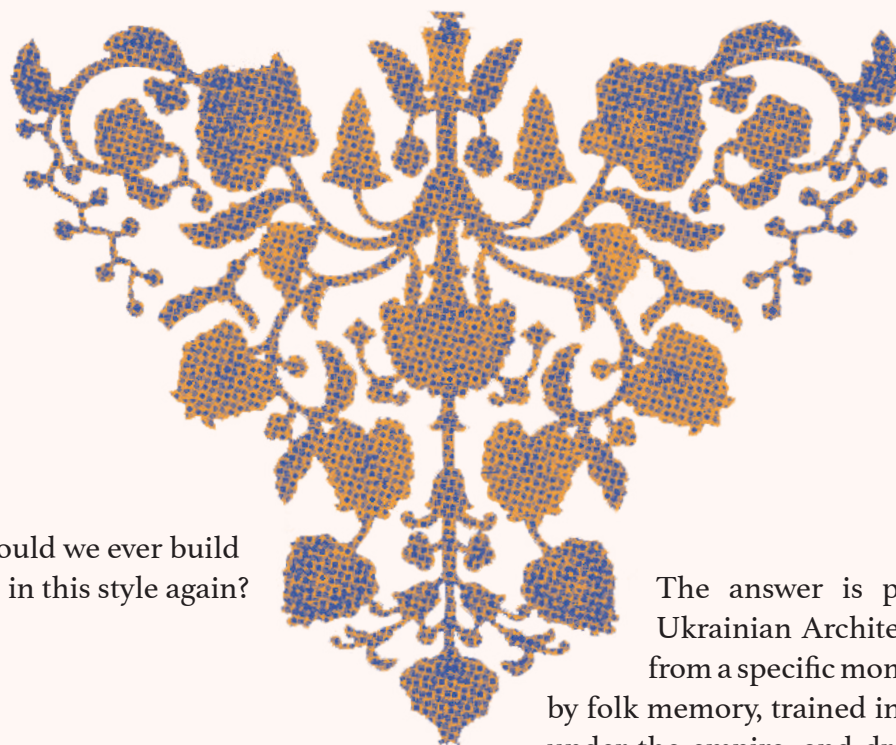
Ukrainian Architectural Modern is not just a historical curiosity. It is a testimony. It is the voice of great individuals who dared to speak and craft for Ukraine and Ukrainians.

It is also fragile. Fewer than a hundred significant buildings survive in relatively good condition. Some have been restored. Many are crumbling. And yet, each is a museum in itself – not only of objects and craftsmanship, but of ideas.

Look closer, ask questions, and remember. Because sometimes, the most powerful act of cultural memory is simply to notice.

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WHERE DO THE CHILDREN PLAY?

VALERIA GERUS

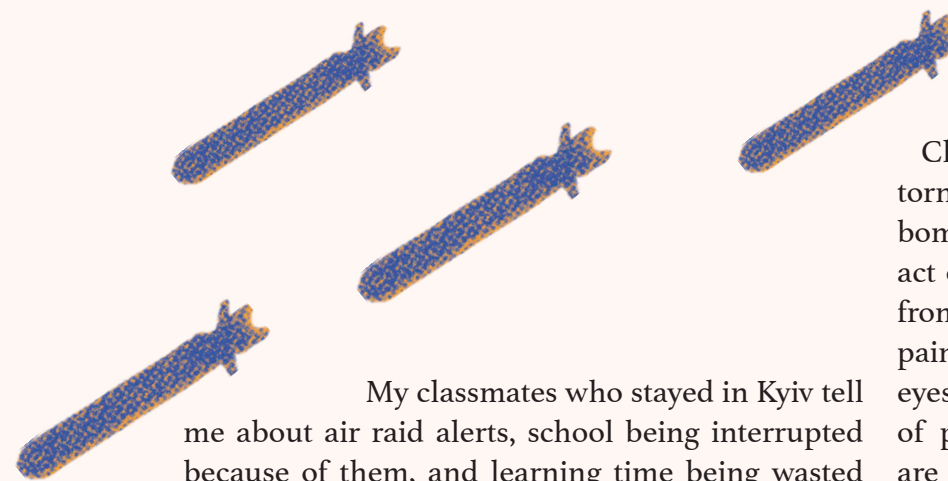
Children play on playgrounds, in parks, and in gardens. Children play at home, in their backyards, and in playrooms. Children play in schools with their classmates and teachers, at home with their parents and siblings, and in kindergarten with their peers and nannies. Children play on abandoned buildings. Children play on ruins where their schools used to be. Children play on the ruins of their houses. Children play in missile craters.

The last four places where children seek amusement are hauntingly disturbing, marked by the echoes of destruction that no child should ever have to endure. Parents do not wish for their children to play in locations other than designated safe areas. Yet, nowadays, when kids seek entertainment, there are no gardens, parks, or playgrounds available – they are ruined.

Ukraine is at war. My country is at war. Many other countries all around the world are at war. Children all around the globe play on craters, ruins, and abandoned buildings, seeking entertainment to forget about the horrors around them, just for a brief moment. I look at all of the photos and videos of destruction in the news, I read Ukrainian media outlets that report on current events around the world, and I see how people suffer. I see the economy being ruined, lives being destroyed, and buildings becoming rubble.



During the first month of the war, my family and I moved to the central part of Ukraine, in fear that the capital, where we lived, would be the main target. We feared that the bridges would be bombed and that we wouldn't be able to escape to the right bank of Kyiv. On our way, we heard military jets flying by and missiles being fired. I had a feeling that they were chasing us. But even when we arrived, jets would fly above the house we stayed in almost every night. My parents told me they were Ukrainian planes patrolling, but I still wonder whether it was indeed patrols, or if they told me that to calm me down.



My classmates who stayed in Kyiv tell me about air raid alerts, school being interrupted because of them, and learning time being wasted while they are hiding in a bomb shelter or underground parking. Their siblings are afraid of the sounds every night. If this is happening in the capital, presumably the most defended part of Ukraine, I can't imagine the terror people endure in the Eastern part of my country.

There are a lot of international organisations that help children live through this war, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, as well as Ukrainian funds like the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation. These organisations often collaborate with local communities, governments, and other NGOs to provide comprehensive support. They work to create safe spaces for children, offer counselling and mental health services, distribute essential supplies like food, clean water, and medical care, and focus on educational initiatives to help rebuild shattered lives and futures. Their efforts not only address immediate needs but also aim to build resilience among children and communities, helping them recover from the psychological scars of conflict. They help children find hope in the demoralised world we live in.

Children get torn away from their parents, parents torn away from their children. Whether through bombings shattering homes, or the heart-wrenching act of children being snatched away, and taken far from their loved ones by russian occupants – the pain is unbearable. Imagine the terror in a child's eyes as they're forcibly separated and the despair of parents watching helplessly as their children are torn away. It's a gut-wrenching assault on love and safety, leaving wounds that may never heal. Innocence is shattered and replaced by fear and unfillable voids.

I don't want my future kids and grandkids to experience this 'amusement' of playing on ruins. I don't want them to suffer from trauma after hearing bombs falling from the sky, or drones and jets flying right above their heads. I don't want them to need these foundations. I want them to have a better childhood. I want them to feel safe and happy.

I want children to play on a playground.



AN ODE TO AN AUTUMN AMONG THE BIRCHES

BENYA PYATSKI

It's autumn among the birches, or so I'm told—
I haven't yet seen the leaves turn and fall.

It's cold, but I missed the waves of
pink,

brown,

yellow,

red,

that should've come crashing down all over me.

If the leaves haven't yet turned, then there's still time—

time to prepare for my long, dark slumber

in the bowels of the caves of my daydreams.

Time to sing,

to dance,

to cry,

before the eternal dark of night.

Autumn among the birches reminds me that time is all fleeting after
the long, warm bliss of summer.

Autumn among the birches gives me a new lease on life:

With every layer I put on—

With every breath of cold air—

A gift I could never repay.

It was in dreams that I danced in my garden—for my awe may cloud me.

But beauty may bloom bitter dandelions—for she opened herself to me, yet her name I did not know,

as death's breath chanted nevermore—for the fields are under the watch of storms.

From kisses delirious,
to faces frantic-

elaborate are dreams;
wandering thoughts.

Pounding sleep,
lovely language.

Sometimes, in rest,
I prick myself—
I can't control me.

And it's funny—I imagine she can't too.



SECOND FRONT

Ukrainian Journalism in a Time of War

ANASTASIIA HRYSHCHENKO

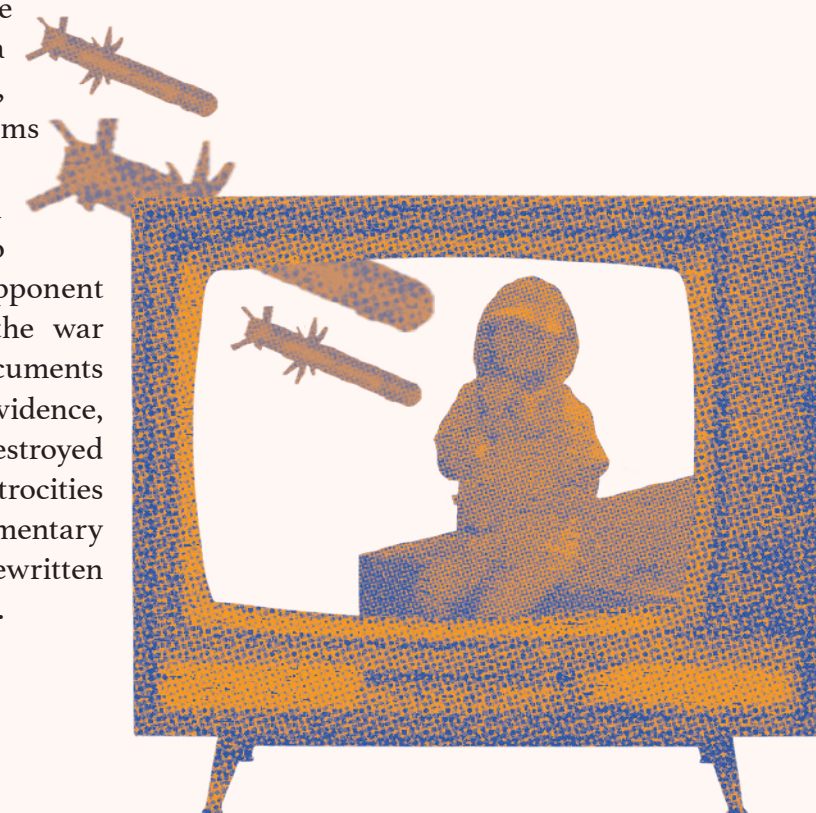
On February 24, 2022, Ukraine entered a new reality: full-scale war. Russia's attack on Ukraine fundamentally changed Ukrainian society, affecting every individual and bringing lasting socio-political and economic consequences. Journalism, in particular, has changed dramatically during wartime, as it plays a crucial role in covering events that influence how Ukraine and Ukrainians are perceived both domestically and globally. Journalists have had to adapt to these new conditions and form a 'second front' — an informational one, behind the lines of armed confrontation.

Journalists now have an even greater social obligation than at any time in the recent past, and changes in the standards of reportage have become evident. Reporting from the front lines has always come with a tremendous responsibility, but acquiring new and unique skills is now essential for every journalist working in the midst of war.

They must learn to distinguish what can and cannot be reported and how to communicate with soldiers respectfully. This process of understanding is key to journalism in modern Ukraine. New laws also reflect journalists' increased social responsibility. Journalism has always been vital in shaping public opinion, but today this role has become even more critical. Media workers are under special scrutiny because they shape how the majority of people see the world. During the publication process, editors must fully understand the implications that their content will have for society and national security.

In this new reality, the rhetoric used by Ukrainian journalists has also changed. The formal and official tone used in the past has become more conversational, with slang and neologisms now commonplace. Despite deviating from traditional journalistic standards, this new language appeals to audiences by building trust and making the information more accessible. Great responsibility remains with the journalist, however, whose choices define the structure of a narrative presented to a wide audience. Furthermore, finding eyewitness accounts and consulting experts is of paramount importance, considering that people are often biased.

One of the most pressing challenges Ukrainian journalists face is the information war. Since 2014, the media space has become a massive battleground. While traditional propaganda seeks to capture public consciousness, Ukraine's modern information campaign aims not only to influence the domestic audience but to win the support of international partners. The core goal of this effort is to undermine the political strength of the opponent and weaken its regime. In this way, the war correspondent becomes an agent who documents crimes, provides photo and video evidence, sometimes exposing horrifying scenes — destroyed buildings, mutilated bodies, and other atrocities of war. War journalists become documentary witnesses to ensure that history cannot be rewritten by those for whom the truth is inconvenient.



Ukraine is enduring the most difficult period in its modern history. In recent years, Ukrainians have fought fiercely for freedom against Russia. How journalists record and represent reality is of great importance, as their reports can influence, educate, and inform the world about what is happening in Ukraine. It is due to Ukrainian journalists that the world knows the truth about what is happening in Ukraine and the horrendous crimes committed by Russia. It is essential to acknowledge the work of these correspondents who have become the world's eyes into the brutality of war.

As of September 15th, 2023, the The National Commission for State Language Standards of Ukraine has allowed for all letters in "Russia," "Russian Federation," "Russian Empire," "Moscow," and other related words to be written in lowercase. Diaspora has chosen to follow this convention throughout.

WHITE HOUSE

ANNA KO

You know, you're not grateful enough.
Mr. President, you've got to be tough!

You make it hard to do business,
Why don't you want your country in pieces?

Mr. President, we're playing cards,
It's not my problem you've not got enough guards.

I do see the war, from my bed.
I just count the numbers of the dead.

I am the hero, I will enforce peace,
You'll pay me back with a minerals lease.

Mr. President, you should thank me again.
You just surrender – that's my perfect plan.

HOW TO STAY ALIVE

After Working at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant

ANNA KOZACHUK

Mr. Tsvirkun became a 'walking reactor' at the age of 22 as he was sent to work at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, where his radiation dose went off the scale.

Now Yuriy Tsvirkun is a 60-year-old man who lives in the small Ukrainian village Kyryivka, 312 kilometers away from Chornobyl. He continues to live his life happily despite the hard times spent at the nuclear power plant.

In 2022, radiation almost caught him twice. Ukraine, his homeland, has been suffering at the hands of russian soldiers, who attacked two nuclear power

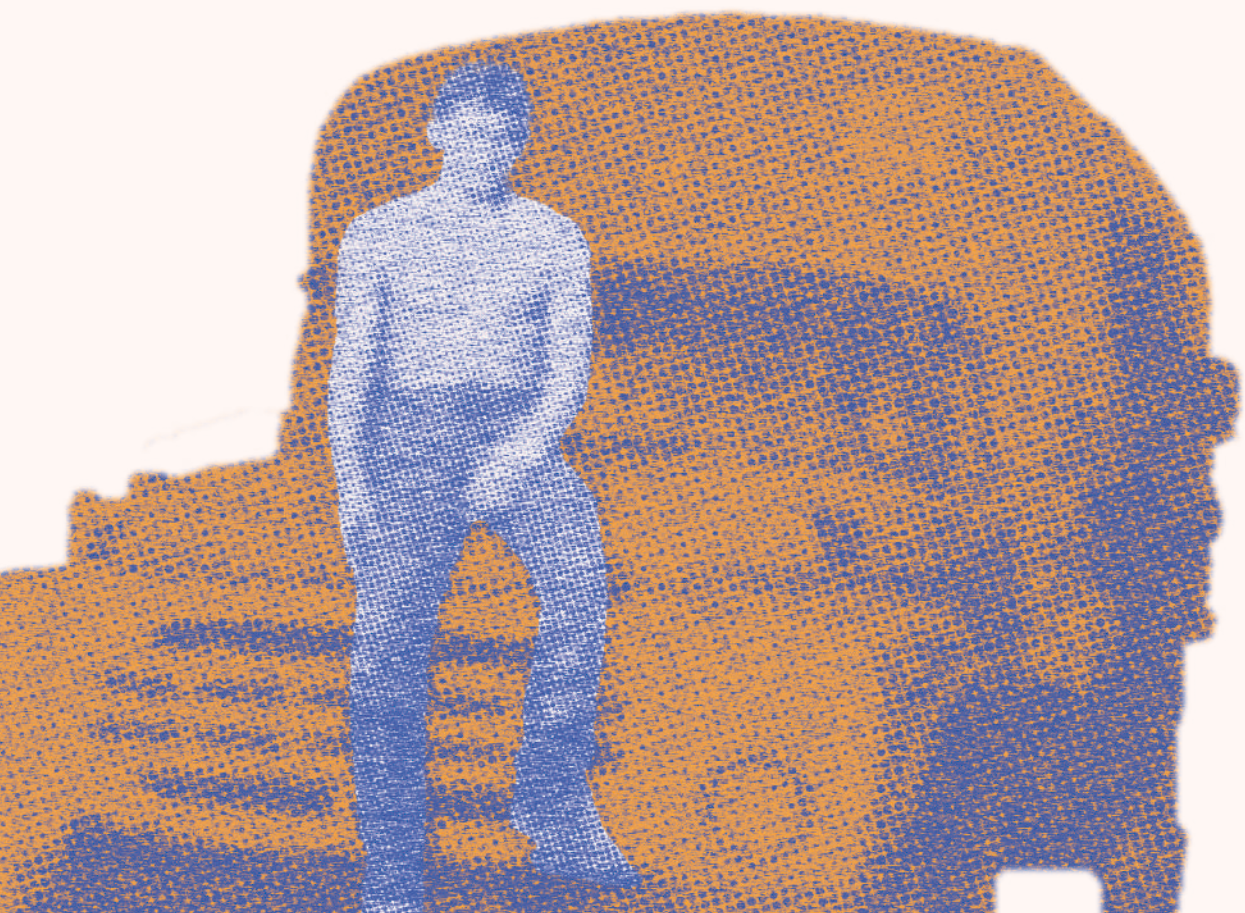
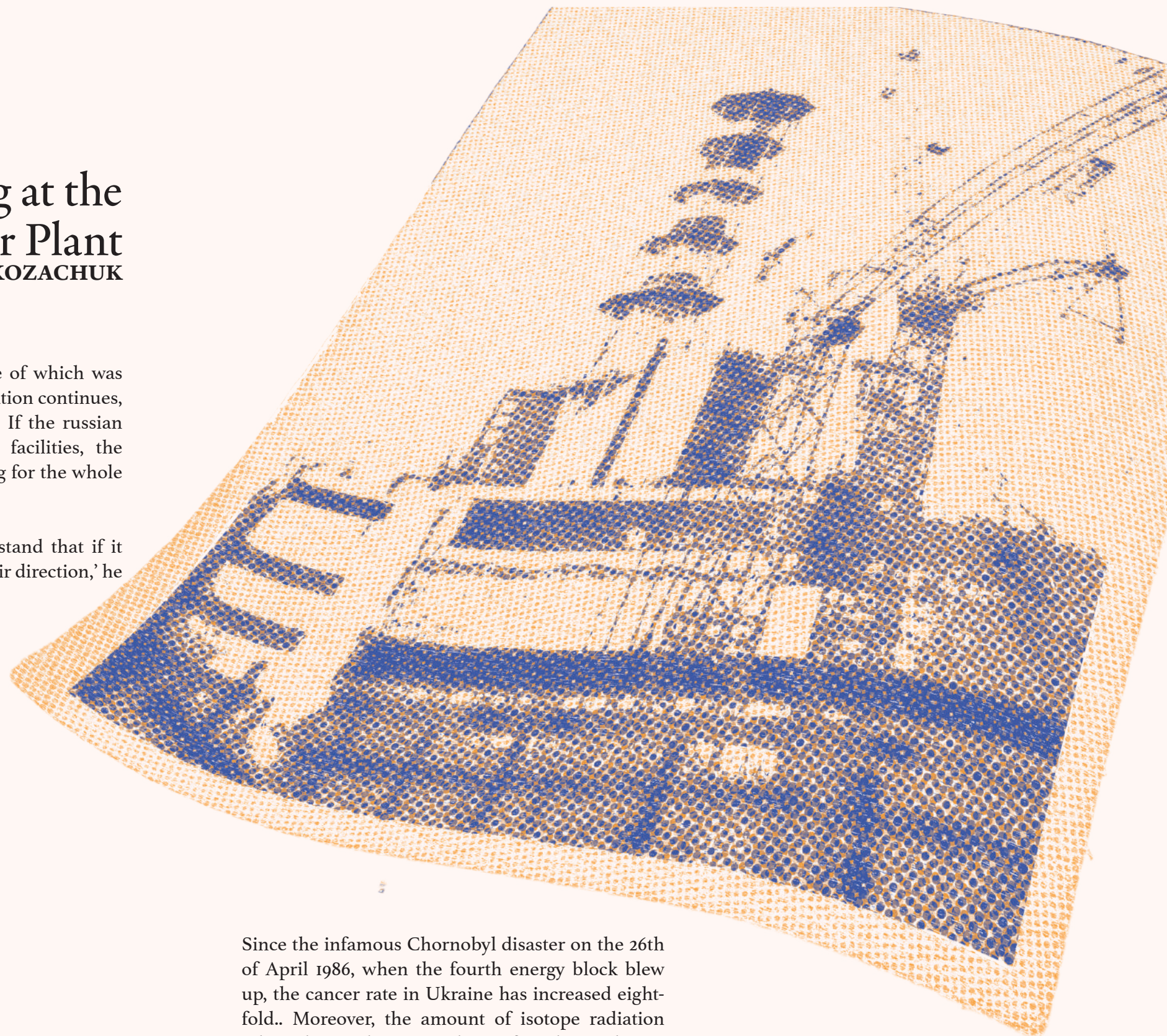
plants on the 24th of February, one of which was Chornobyl. Since the russian occupation continues, the radiation continues to increase. If the russian troops carry on targeting nuclear facilities, the consequences may become terrifying for the whole of Europe.

'They are wacky. They don't understand that if it explodes, the wind could blow in their direction,' he said.

Since the infamous Chornobyl disaster on the 26th of April 1986, when the fourth energy block blew up, the cancer rate in Ukraine has increased eight-fold. Moreover, the amount of isotope radiation released into the atmosphere after the explosion in Chornobyl was forty times higher than after the USA's bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan during World War II.

'I got to know about the explosion of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant only one or two months after it happened,' he said.

At that time Yuriy was a soldier in the Samara region, Russia, about 1800 kilometers away from Chornobyl. So, the news about the disaster found him far from home. Soldiers who returned back from Chornobyl personally told Mr. Tsvirkun about what had happened, because the Soviet Union made efforts to conceal this information from the mass media.



Ukrainian historian Ivan Kostenko, whose grandfather was also a Chornobyl liquidator—one of the people who removed the remains of the explosion—shared his opinion on why the Soviet government did not want anyone, especially abroad, to know about the tragedy on the power plant.

‘If the Soviet party says that the Soviet Union is a progressive country that builds its own communism, there could not be any problems,’ Mr Kostenko said. So, the best way to fight the problem was to conceal it.

In 1987, the year when Yuriy returned to Ukraine, he was drafted to work at the Chornobyl power plant. ‘I would never think that I could take part in the liquidation of the accident as I was only 22,’ Yuriy said. ‘I thought they would take some old people.’

He knew where he was going to go, but his thoughts were the same as those of other young boys at that age. For the first 3 days he was staying in Korosten, 159 kilometers away from Chornobyl, to help him acclimate to the radiation. He felt dizzy and had an unquenchable thirst. Then he moved to Radcha, which is 60 km closer.

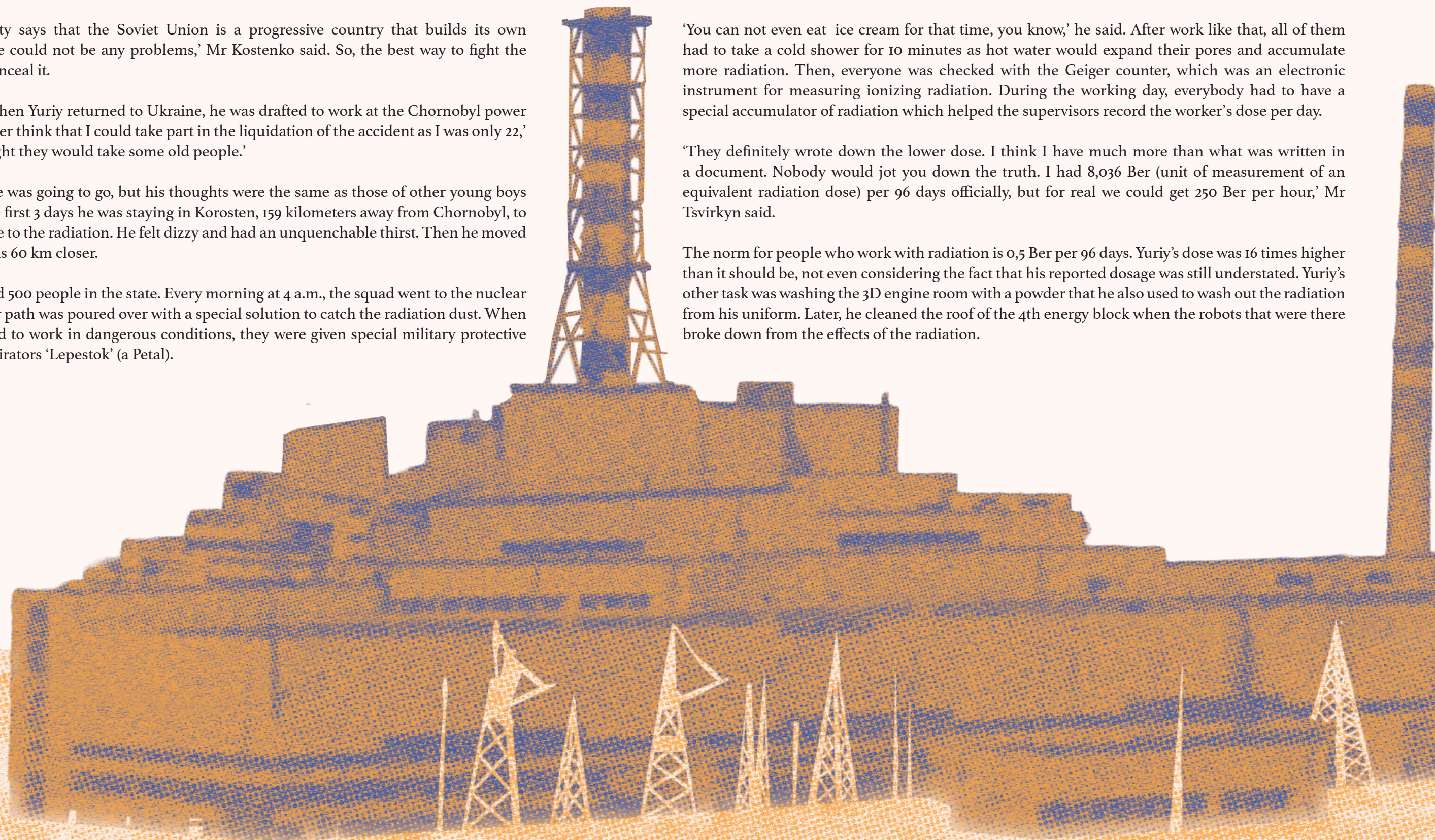
There were around 500 people in the state. Every morning at 4 a.m., the squad went to the nuclear power plant. Their path was poured over with a special solution to catch the radiation dust. When the liquidators had to work in dangerous conditions, they were given special military protective suits with the respirators ‘Lepestok’ (a Petal).

‘There were tons of them. We had to change them very often but, to be honest, nobody even paid attention to that,’ he recalled. Yuriy’s job was to take out the graphite from the concrete fragments as they radiated. The radiation was so high that he only worked for 3 minutes at a time.

‘You can not even eat ice cream for that time, you know,’ he said. After work like that, all of them had to take a cold shower for 10 minutes as hot water would expand their pores and accumulate more radiation. Then, everyone was checked with the Geiger counter, which was an electronic instrument for measuring ionizing radiation. During the working day, everybody had to have a special accumulator of radiation which helped the supervisors record the worker’s dose per day.

‘They definitely wrote down the lower dose. I think I have much more than what was written in a document. Nobody would jot you down the truth. I had 8,036 Ber (unit of measurement of an equivalent radiation dose) per 96 days officially, but for real we could get 250 Ber per hour,’ Mr Tsvirkyn said.

The norm for people who work with radiation is 0,5 Ber per 96 days. Yuriy’s dose was 16 times higher than it should be, not even considering the fact that his reported dosage was still understated. Yuriy’s other task was washing the 3D engine room with a powder that he also used to wash out the radiation from his uniform. Later, he cleaned the roof of the 4th energy block when the robots that were there broke down from the effects of the radiation.



‘Those robots just died. We put them aside and worked instead. They could not work in those conditions, but we, humans, worked,’ he said. Nevertheless, this dangerous job was well paid. Yuriy Tsvirkun got a fivefold increased salary. Unfortunately, he did not remember the exact number.

As for the food there, Mr Tsvirkun recalls it positively. There were lots of different delicacies like salmon, cod liver, condensed and chocolate milk, chocolate, and fresh fruits. At that time, all the mentioned food was a pure luxury that the average Ukrainian could not afford.

On weekends, Yuriy always had some kind of entertainment, like listening to the choir or watching film demonstrations, so that he didn’t feel as much tension, despite the unusual conditions. Yuriy also mentioned that there was a doctor, who supported him, saying the needed phrase for that moment: ‘Think less, live a life as you did it before.’

Now, Yuriy is a pensioner. He receives 250 Hryvnias (5 €) a month for being a former Chornobyl liquidator. ‘It won’t be so offensive to me if they don’t give it at all,’ he said.

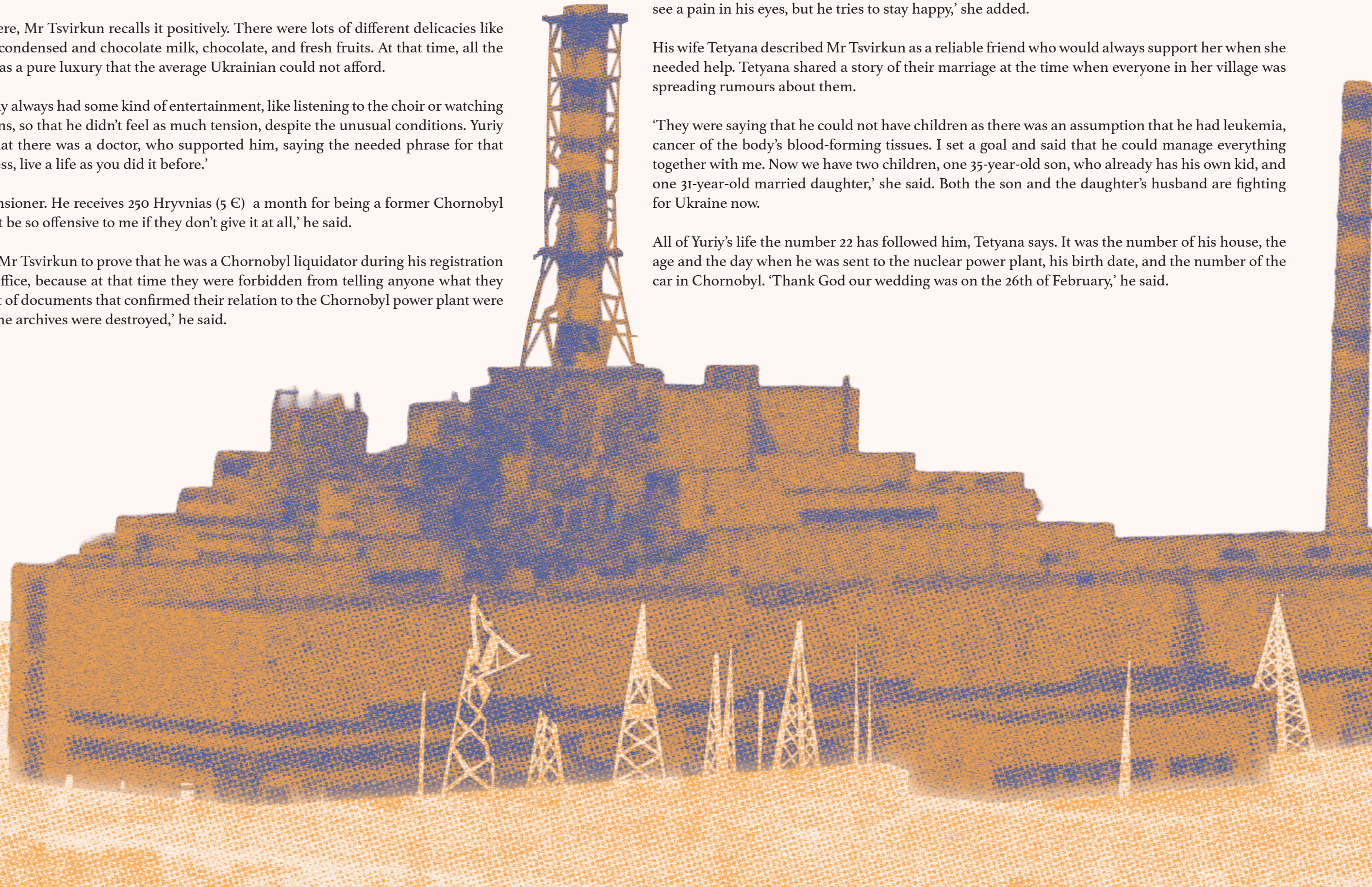
It was difficult for Mr Tsvirkun to prove that he was a Chornobyl liquidator during his registration at the pensioner office, because at that time they were forbidden from telling anyone what they did there and most of documents that confirmed their relation to the Chornobyl power plant were demolished. ‘All the archives were destroyed,’ he said.

Yuriy remains positive. After he endured Chornobyl, he started to appreciate his life, friendship and supportive family more than ever. ‘When everybody at school was asking me if my dad was a liquidator, I replied “yes,” being so proud of my father,’ his daughter Juliana said. ‘Sometimes I can see a pain in his eyes, but he tries to stay happy,’ she added.

His wife Tetyana described Mr Tsvirkun as a reliable friend who would always support her when she needed help. Tetyana shared a story of their marriage at the time when everyone in her village was spreading rumours about them.

‘They were saying that he could not have children as there was an assumption that he had leukemia, cancer of the body’s blood-forming tissues. I set a goal and said that he could manage everything together with me. Now we have two children, one 35-year-old son, who already has his own kid, and one 31-year-old married daughter,’ she said. Both the son and the daughter’s husband are fighting for Ukraine now.

All of Yuriy’s life the number 22 has followed him, Tetyana says. It was the number of his house, the age and the day when he was sent to the nuclear power plant, his birth date, and the number of the car in Chornobyl. ‘Thank God our wedding was on the 26th of February,’ he said.



FATHER LAND

PAVLO DYACHENKO

War became my father.
If a father is the one
who teaches you
how to hold your face still,
to fight tears

at a dead January parade,
to carry a candle,
not for birthday cake
but for the ninth year of grief.

My new father is stern.
He speaks of death.
He kicks you out of the house
Destroying the era, building a new one
He punishes us, over and over,
For the legacy of our forefathers

The father enticingly tells me of his old mates
The air raid will tell me about enemies
Father will teach me to speak correctly
Even if my whole life I spoke my enemy's tongue

Війна мені замінила батька.
Ну, якщо батько вчить мати серйозне обличчя,
тримати сльози на мертвому параді січня,
тримати не святкову свічку на дев'ятиріччя.

Батько новий мій доволі суворий.
Розкаже про смерть. Вижене з дому.
Розтроще етап, почавши новий.
Каратиме знову і знову, за покоління мого
народу.

Батько розкаже про друзів своїх минулих
благально,
про ворогів розповість тривога.
Батько навчить розмовляти правильно,
навіть якщо все життя я розмовляв мовою ворога.

OLEKSANDR KOBZAR

TOADS, NATIONALISTS, MANKURTS, AND THE QUESTION OF CAN I LOVE UKRAINE?

Ukrainians have, perhaps more than any other people, become keen observers of European politics since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Every election in Europe has direct consequences for Ukraine in terms of the support it receives, so Ukrainians feel the developments in regional and global politics particularly acutely — often painfully.

Recent presidential elections in Poland and Romania proved to be a mixed bag for Ukraine, with unfriendly right-wing populists securing a victory in Poland while losing in Romania. In many ways, these two elections were international events. After winning the presidency in Romania, centrist politician Nicușor Dan travelled to Poland to campaign for Rafał Trzaskowski of the governing centrist coalition, while the loser George Simion did the same for Karol Nawrocki of the national conservative PiS party. The government of Hungary also involved itself in both elections, backing Nawrocki at the Conservative Political Action Conference, organised by the US Republican Party in Budapest. Even more curiously, the former football hooligan Simion, whose illustrious CV includes the infamous desecration of a cemetery of the Székely Magyars (ethnic Hungarians) in Romanian Transylvania, received cautious boosts from Viktor Orbán, the toad in Budapest, and Simion returned the favour.

It isn't strange for pro-Europeans in different countries to collaborate across national borders

based on their shared ideology of transnational cooperation. But the emergence of an organised right-wing nationalist international (a transnational organisation of political parties/movements with a shared ideology), with a common vocabulary of anti-globalism, anti-Europeanism, and anti-liberalism, is more counter-intuitive. These international nationalists also tend to partake in culture war issues that originate in the West, regardless of the local relevance of these issues. Anti-globalism is now global, and nationalists kiss the rings of national enemies as long as they share a similar ideology. What gives?

A clue may be their incessant references to 'globalists' and 'globalism.' Every time I hear the word I'm reminded of Stalin's 'rootless cosmopolitanism' — a similar slur he directed at intellectuals (most often Jews) he saw as harbouring 'un-Soviet' attitudes and influenced by western ideas. The Stalinist term and the modern term make essentially the same accusation: that the subjects of their insults are 'un-rooted' from their origins, nations, and societies. The accusers in turn brand themselves as the most 'rooted' and national, and thus the only ones fit to take the reins of power on behalf of the people. There may be a kernel of truth in the nationalist's argument that unproductive attitudes of self-hatred and self-abasement do abound in Eastern European society, but the irony is that these accusers are themselves 'rootless', in that they fail to accept and

about national culture are kitsch—and often remain tantalisingly disconnected from the practice of cultural production and consumption. What's more, their list of grievances are globally shared, and unreflective of local issues. This all betrays a shallow, unserious, and impress-ionistic understanding of the complexities of the history, culture, and politics of those they claim to represent.

Being in diaspora and coming from a magical land that I sometimes jokingly refer to as *Zamordor'ya* (the land beyond Mordor), I've frequently been confronted by the nagging question of whether or not I've become a self-hating Zamordorian. A *xanzjian* ('traitor to the Xan'), in the Standard Zamordorian tongue. Someone who is *çon-jaŋ mäj-və*, who worships the exotic and sucks up to the foreign. The Kyrgyz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov, in his 1980 novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, wrote of the *mankurts* — slaves without memory who retain no connection to their families and tribes. The term *mankurt* has since taken on a life of its own in Central Asia and the broader post-Soviet space, often being used to denote the most russified people who have abandoned their national heritage and ancestral language, and hold no loyalty to their homelands. Ukrainians will be well-aware of how lively the topic of memory, language, and heritage is discussed in their own country, and of how sometimes one feels pressed between the ghost of the ethno-linguistic bigot Iryna Farion and the living visage of the russophile mayor of Odesa Hennadii Trukhanov (vocally in favour of retaining the city's statue of the russian *tsarina* Yekaterina II,

and gave his daughter the same name). As someone who keeps the company of *skhidniaky* ('easterners'), I feel that I can relate to some part of the struggle many of them experience. I was educated in Standard Zamordorian, and cannot speak but a few words of my grandparents' language (which is dismissively referred to by official discourse as a 'dialect'). Am I a *mankurt*? Are we *mankurts*? What if Simion, and Orbán, and Stalin, and the ursine *vozhd'-vedmid'* ('führer-bear') of the Zamordors'ka Narodna Respublika ('Zamordorian People's Republic') were right, and we really are globalists and rootless cosmopolitans? And will we all inevitably lose to the supposedly robustly-rooted bigots?

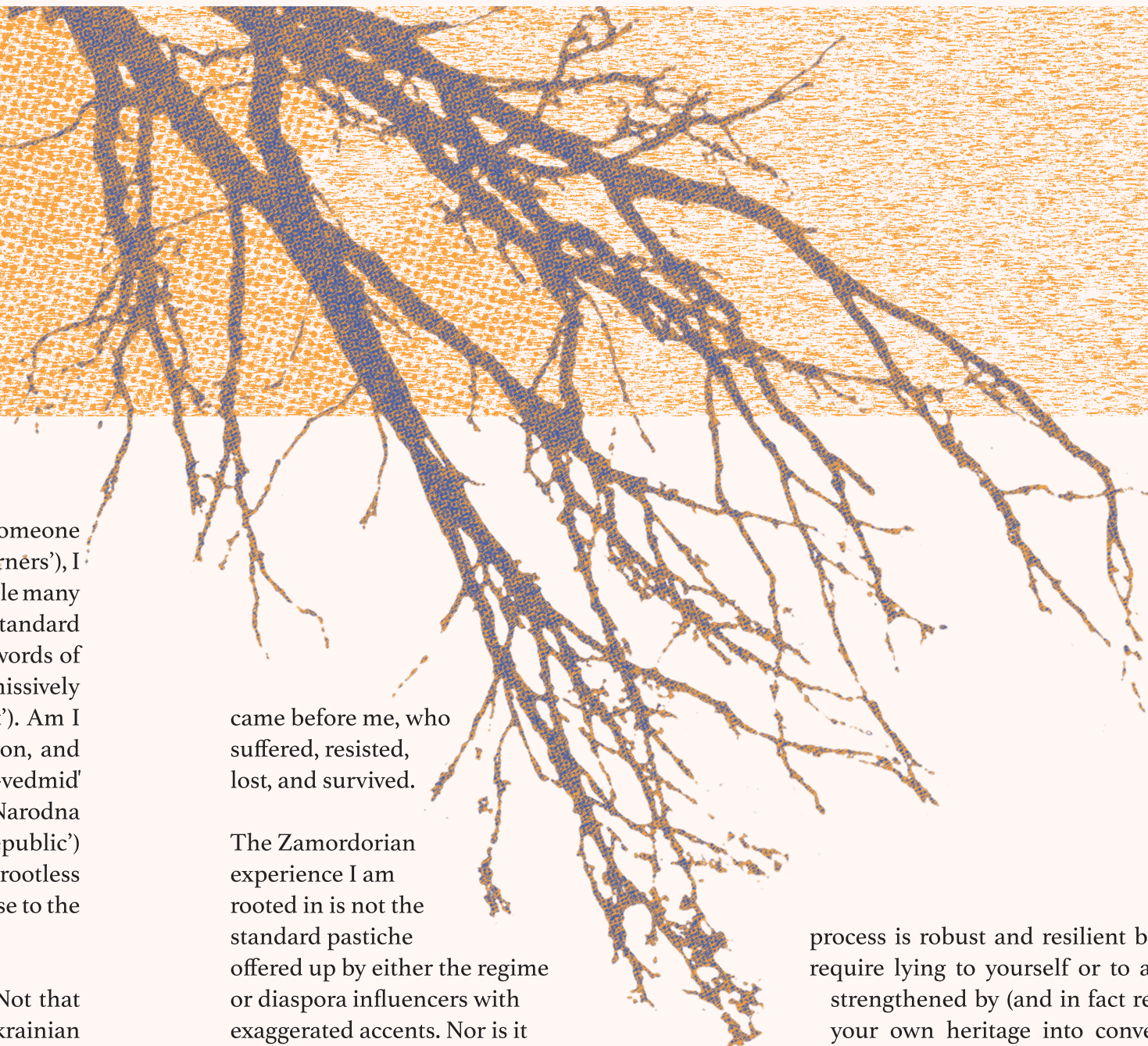
The answer I can give is a resounding no. Not that we should be content with relegating Ukrainian literature to the dustbin, or replacing Ukrainian-language artists like Vakarchuk and Kompanichenko with *homines sovietici* ('Soviet people') like Kobzon and Gurchenko, but we do not have to be unrooted. There is no curse on us. Rather, I argue, we can be 'rooted cosmopolitans'. My family survived our Zamordorian version of the Holodomor (man-made famine in Ukraine in 1932-33) because they were fishermen. My father became a student, then a dissident, then an academic. I grew up as a good patriotic little *mankurt*, like everybody around me did, but when my father gave me a book about our Holodomor, my orientation changed rapidly. As a Zamordorian, I support Ukraine, write about Ukraine, about the Holodomor, about genocide, about repression, and about resistance — because I am rooted in the heritage and memory of those who

came before me, who suffered, resisted, lost, and survived.

The Zamordorian experience I am rooted in is not the standard pastiche offered up by either the regime or diaspora influencers with exaggerated accents. Nor is it representative in many ways. But how can you be rooted in anyone else's idea of a heritage when it's not your own? Moreover, heritage and roots are not simply given to you by birth, like the anti-globalist nationalists like to claim. Nor are they obtained by toeing the line and pretending someone else's shallow idea of heritage is your own, like Stalin would have you do. You are given some things, others you must dig up yourself out of the obscurity of forgetting and indifference, then there are things you can build and create yourself to add on to the rest. The choice of what to dig up and what to build up is in your hands. What's more, by delving into your own history, you become more rooted than if you had simply pretended to have always been rooted in some arbitrary way. The rooted cosmopolitanism that comes from such a

process is robust and resilient because it doesn't require lying to yourself or to anyone else. It is strengthened by (and in fact requires) bringing your own heritage into conversation and co-existence with different heritages and finding common ground. Doing something with the roots you have and planting new ones where none have existed before, is all that we can do, but much more than many will ever consider.

Toads may croak in their swamps and bears may rub their behinds on trees. Let them—we are neither toads nor bears, and we shouldn't pretend to be. Let no one tell you that you cannot choose to love Ukraine because of what languages your parents spoke, or that you are a globalist pawn because you march for who you love under a rainbow flag to jeers and mockery. Let no one tell you that you are a rootless cosmopolitan because you have seen more and known more than the meager portion of sky that a frog sees from the bottom of a well.



WHAT IS IT LIKE, YOUR UKRAINIAN LIFE?

KIRA SANTALOVA

It's waking up at 6.30,

to go swim in the lake, just nearby.

It's drinking tea from a big metal bottle,

and it tastes slightly like coffee.

It's celebrating kids who were born the same month,

baking a cake and sharing it in class.

It's doing assigned reading on a summer vacation,

wondering what has been lost in translation.

It's making a batch of Easter buns with your grandma, and bringing them to the family table.

It's watering your growing strawberries,

picking cherries, and making jams.

It's getting tanned by the summer sun,

just laying in your backyard.

It's drinking more cups of tea

than you could've drank water.

It's going out to meet with your friend

When you have no money to spend

It's when your cousin is just 'a sister' —

and it isn't wrong — it's our way of thinking.

It's buying a cake on a random Tuesday,

Sitting on the grass, letting the fresh air fill your lungs.

It's so many things

— some of them silly, some might seem odd —

and no dictionary will ever have enough words.

It's so many things,

and so many more.

CONTESTED REMEMBRANCE

Legal and Political Challenges in Acknowledging the Holodomor

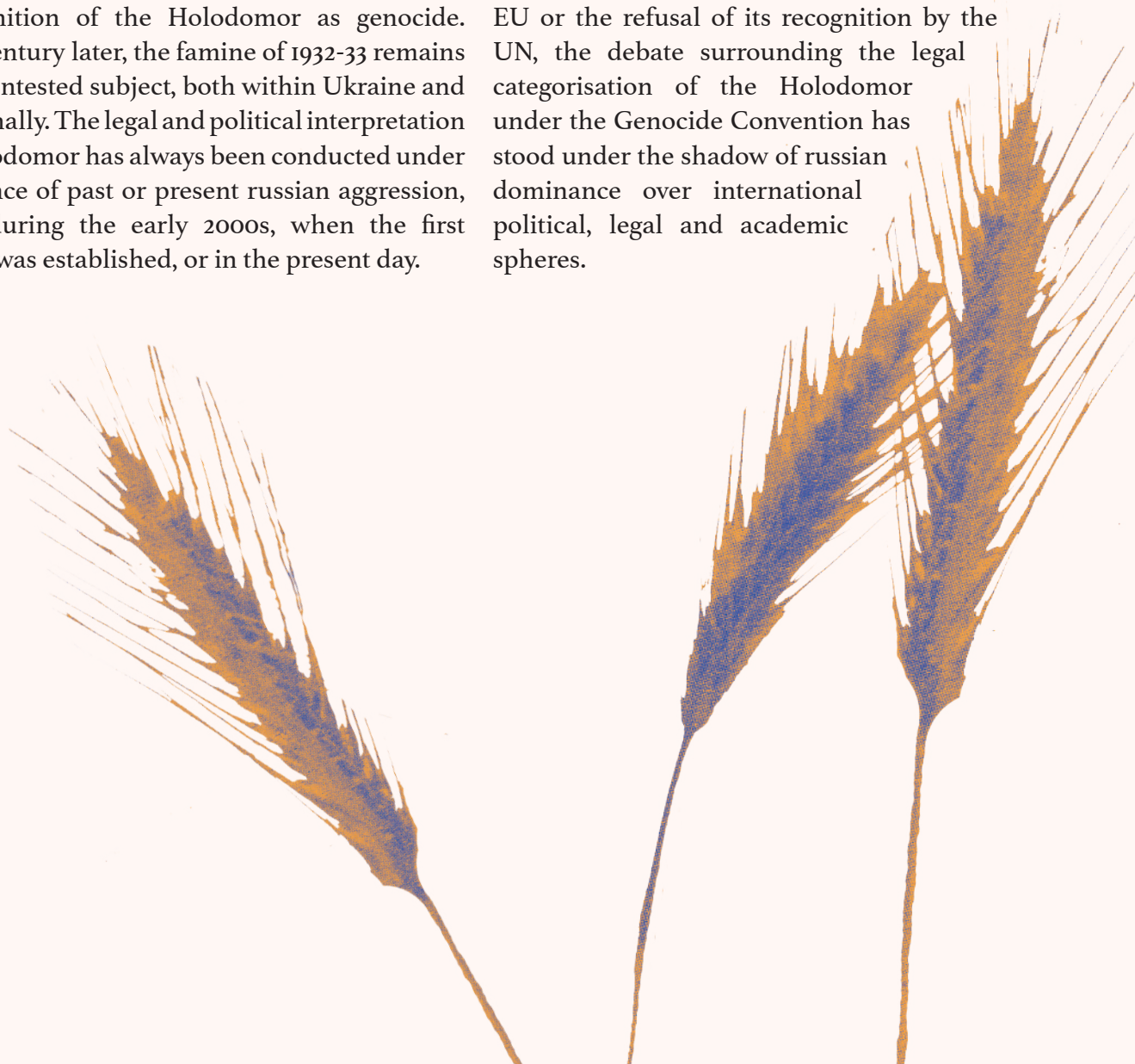
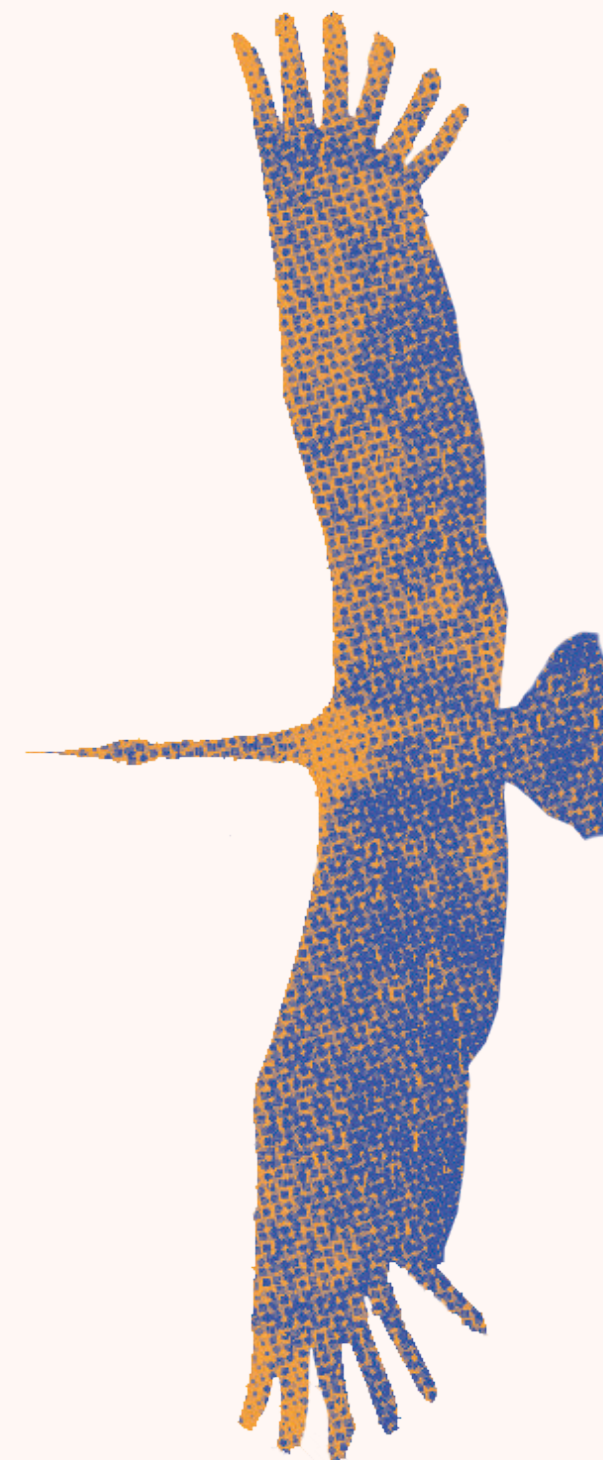
MATILDA MOLODYNski STOKES

In Ukraine, memory is political. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ongoing debate over the recognition of the Holodomor as genocide. Nearly a century later, the famine of 1932-33 remains a highly contested subject, both within Ukraine and internationally. The legal and political interpretation of the Holodomor has always been conducted under the influence of past or present russian aggression, whether during the early 2000s, when the first memorial was established, or in the present day.

Whether in the context of recognition of the genocidal nature of the Holodomor by the EU or the refusal of its recognition by the UN, the debate surrounding the legal categorisation of the Holodomor under the Genocide Convention has stood under the shadow of russian dominance over international political, legal and academic spheres.

I first came across the Holodomor during my studies at the University of Warsaw. After enrolling on a course that promised to guide us through the complex field of both historical and contemporary Ukrainian politics, I logged on every week to a lecture delivered by a fantastic professor who, still teaching from Kyiv, had taken up a temporary position in Poland due to the invasion. As we were taken through Ukraine's long history of erasure and subjugation by its neighbours — and, most importantly, due to the professor's insistence on highlighting this point — I began to realise the parallels between historical injustice and russia's war in Ukraine today. It is because of historical and contemporary efforts to minimise and suppress the Ukrainian language, culture and national identity that the writing of Ukraine's history is vital in ensuring these aims of erasure do not succeed. I therefore hope to make a small contribution to this effort here, with a discussion of how denial has functioned as a barrier to the recognition of the Holodomor as an act of genocide.

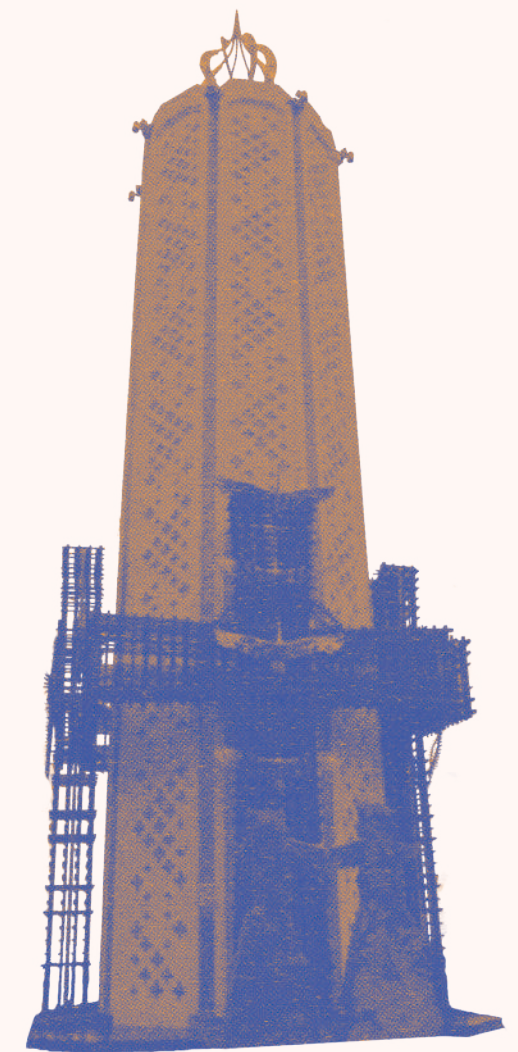
The key aspect of the Holodomor period (1932-1933) that sets it apart from the earlier (1921-1923) and later (1946-1947) famines is its artificial and intentional nature. Marc Jansen (2017), among others, addresses this in his scholarship, asserting that although many claim that poor harvests and weather conditions played a role in the famine, the primary cause was 'chaos following the forced collectivisation of agriculture,' a policy implemented by the Soviet regime. Moscow had rejected requests from Ukrainian officials to reduce grain quotas and instead pursued a policy of searching Ukrainian collectivised farms, confiscating any last 'hidden' remnants of grain that had been kept for survival (Jansen, 2017). The level of starvation reached by May 1933, the time when 'little help' had arrived, had driven people to desperation (Jansen, 2017).



There are those scholars and those within the political field who reject the categorisation of the Holodomor as a genocide. Often, this view is held by those within the modern Russian political sphere. This piece will primarily focus on examples of the denial of the event's genocidal character within the international legal sphere. To thoroughly discuss the role the Soviet government played in exacerbating the famine and the extent to which its intent can be proven, we must analyse the context in which the Holodomor famine occurred. Mark Von Hagen (2013) asserts that during the 1910s in Ukraine numerous instances of violence had occurred against Ukrainian intellectuals, that Russian military forces would often persecute those who were heard speaking the Ukrainian language, and that a policy of annihilation of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, including the abolition of Ukrainian language education, had been pursued in the region. This demonstrates a similar policy of eliminating specific groups within Ukrainian society. Additionally, Von Hagen (2016) analyses the policy of forced collectivisation, and the 'famines that accompanied it,' in terms of its links with the rise of the NKVD and the Gulag, linking Holodomor and other tools of violent oppression.

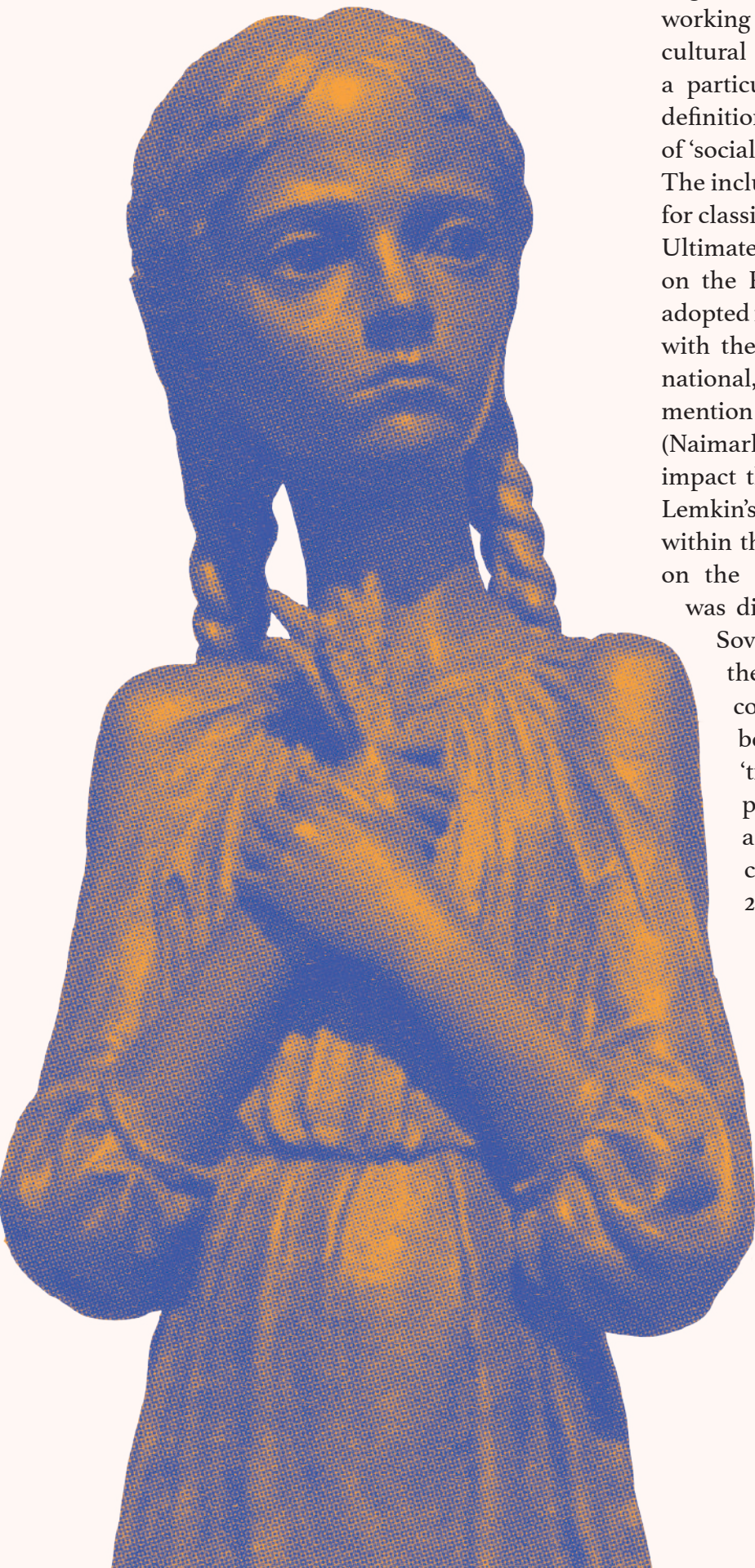
The intention of the Soviet authorities regarding the Holodomor has been identified by many scholars as being to finally 'crush the peasants' resistance' to collectivisation (Khiterer, 2020). In 1930, approximately 6,000 peasant revolts occurred in the Soviet Union, with nearly 2,000 of these taking place in Ukraine (Khiterer, 2020). It is due to this, and the later policies of confiscation and refusal of aid to certain Ukrainian regions, that led scholars to conclude that the famine was a targeted event against Ukrainian peasants. The Soviet authorities were intent on isolating and containing famine within Ukraine, such as with Stalin personally drafting a letter demanding the closure of borders to prevent victims of starvation from entering more prosperous regions in 1933 (Kulchytskyi, 2012). It is clear from this that ethnicity and nationality, based on the frequency of dissent, were the criteria against which the Soviet authorities determined the extent of aid distribution.

Recognition of the genocidal nature of the Holodomor by Ukrainian political actors preceded international recognition of the severity of the event. In her scholarship, Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2014) describes the year 2006, in which the Ukrainian parliament passed the 'Law on the Holodomor of 1932-33 in Ukraine', declaring the Holodomor as an act of genocide against Ukrainian civilians. The move was opposed by the Party of Regions, which proposed to replace the word 'genocide' with 'crime against humanity,' and the Communist Party, which denied that the famine was artificially created (Zhurzhenko, 2014). To curb dissent to the classification by the government as a genocide, Yushchenko, in 2007, proposed a new law criminalising the 'denial of the Holodomor as a Genocide', although the law was not supported by parliament (Zhurzhenko, 2014).



In November 2008, a national monument to the victims of the Holodomor, known as the 'Candle of Memory,' was unveiled in Kyiv as part of an official commemoration of the Holodomor's 75th anniversary. This ceremony included the establishment of The Memorial in Commemoration of Famine Victims in Ukraine, which, as its name suggests, did not commit to naming the Holodomor as a genocide (Zhurzhenko, 2014). In 2019, the museum was renamed the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide in recognition of its genocidal nature (Holodomor Museum Kyiv, 2023). Although this form of memorial was successful in Kyiv, a 'major conflict' between the regional administration and the mayor emerged in 2007 regarding the memorialisation of victims in the Kharkiv region (Zhurzhenko, 2014). There were disagreements in the Kharkiv regional assembly regarding the memorial, with the most significant obstacle being that the majority of the assembly (aligned with the Party of Regions) officially rejected the definition of the Holodomor as a genocide (Zhurzhenko, 2014).





The international political and academic reaction to the proposition of the Holodomor as a genocide was of a similar controversial nature to that within the Ukrainian context. The United Nations' definition of genocide is based primarily on Raphael Lemkin's working definition, which links mass killing and cultural genocide. Norman Naimark (2015) places a particular focus on Soviet dissent to Lemkin's definition, as well as their rejection of the inclusion of 'social and political groups' within the definition. The inclusion of these two types of groups is crucial for classifying the Holodomor under this definition. Ultimately, due to this dissent, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, adopted in 1948, defined genocide as 'acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group', lacking mention of social, political and national groups (Naimark, 2015). Naimark (2015) analyses the further impact that Soviet international influence had on Lemkin's quest for recognition of the Holodomor within the genocide convention, as his 1953 speech on the subject, 'Soviet Genocide and Ukraine', was dismissed mainly due to his 'extreme anti-Soviet and anti-Communist rhetoric'. Due to the adoption of this version of the genocide convention, the Holodomor continues to be recognised by the United Nations as a 'tragedy', a 'horror', an 'atrocities', as a 'tragic page in global history', but is not deemed as falling under the scope of the genocide convention (Holodomor Museum Kyiv, 2023).

The path to recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide has been controversial politically, legally and academically since the beginning of the atrocity. Russian influence over the Ukrainian societal and political sphere has continued to impact domestic discussions surrounding the recognition and memorialisation of both the event and the victims of the Holodomor. The international influence wielded by Russia has indeed succeeded in the implementation of definitions of genocide that fit their agenda of denial. Although, thankfully, in many academic circles, attempts to obfuscate the intention behind genocidal governmental policies have been cast aside. Scholars have instead chosen to analyse in depth evidence of oppressive and intentional Soviet policy towards groups of Ukrainian civilians during the 20th century and have placed the Holodomor within this context. Ultimately, the battle for the recognition of the Holodomor is not only about the past. Its recognition allows us to name injustice, remember the dead, and resist erasure of Ukraine's history in the present day.

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UNTITLED

ANNA KO

я люблю як ніколи твої щирі очі,
запам'ятаю назавжди ці безсонні ночі.
всередині цупко оселився страх,
що ніколи більше не побачу рідний дах.
кожен день, як наступає південь,
ввижається, ніби крокує орда.
кожна новина сьогодні нагальна,
кожна ніч неначе остання.
мені шкода, що не обійнялись тоді сильніше.
шкода, бо щось дурне було тоді важливіше.
я не цінувала досі свободи,
сьогодні ж військові захищають наші води.
я думала війна—лише історія.
недалеко ж скрипить під танками колія.

UNTITLED

ANNA KO

I love your sincere eyes more than ever,
I will remember these sleepless nights forever.
Fear settled deeply in my brain,
That I will never see my home again.
Every day as darkness falls,
It feels like a horde is marching round the walls.
All the news today is vital,
Every night feels like survival.
I'm sorry that we didn't hug each other more,
It's a pity, as something stupid was what we adored.
I didn't value freedom until now,
The military today protects our ground.
I thought that war was just the past —
Not far away, tanks roll through rust.

EXECUTED RENAISSANCE:

The Generation of Talents Killed by the Soviet Regime

ALISA BYSTRYTSKA

When Ukrainians talk about russian imperialism, they are referring to a long-term history of cultural appropriation, repressions, and the consequences of such atrocities.

Almost 100 years ago, the whole generation of Ukrainian poets, writers, and artists was killed, repressed, or silenced by the Soviet regime. The 'Executed Renaissance' (Rozstriliane Vidrodzhennia) refers to a vibrant yet brutally repressed cultural and intellectual movement in Ukraine during the 1920s and 1930s. It was a period known for cultural achievements and flourishing artistic movements under the early Soviet regime, and then violently repressed during Stalin's Great Terror. The movement is remembered today as a symbol of Ukrainian national resilience under Soviet rule.

Right after the russian revolution and Ukraine's brief independence (1917–1921), the Soviet regime created a tricky policy of Ukrainisation, which was the promotion of the Ukrainian language and culture as part of the regime's efforts to gain control over opposition to the Soviet Union. This policy encouraged the emergence of a new generation of Ukrainian writers, poets, artists,

and intellectuals eager to promote the culture, eliminate the narrative of the 'poor', and foster creativity with movements. This opportunity allowed poets to write in their native language. Artists also had a chance to get recognition for their talents, and playwrights gained the staging skills to showcase the richness of Ukrainian theatre.

Figures such as Mykola Khvylovy, Les Kurbas, Valerian Pidmohyl'ny, Mykola Kulish, and Mykhailo Semenko became well-known Ukrainians through the burst of creativity in literature, theatre, visual arts, and philosophy. Most of the representatives of the Executed Renaissance



claimed that their mission was to educate future generations on new moral and ethical principles and to raise national art to a higher artistic level.

This period also saw the founding of key institutions such as the Berezil Theatre, led by Les Kurbas, and

literary groups like VAPLITE (Free Academy of Proletarian Literature), which debated Ukraine's cultural trajectory and its place in the global literary landscape.

One of the greatest symbols of the Executed Renaissance is the Slovo House in Kharkiv (then the capital of Soviet Ukraine). Built in 1927 specifically for Ukrainian writers to live in, it was a modernist building where nearly all of Ukraine's leading literary minds resided. 'Slovo' means 'word' in Ukrainian, reflecting the creative purpose of the residence. The state offered apartments in the Slovo House as part of its effort to elevate Ukrainian culture under the Ukrainisation policy. The building became a hub of artistic exchange, intellectual debate, and literary innovation. But it was also a gilded cage.

As the Soviet repression intensified in the 1930s, the Slovo House became a trap. The walls that once nurtured creativity now witnessed arrests, surveillance, and fear. The NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) agents infiltrated the building, and one by one, its residents were taken — often in the middle of the night — never to return.

Among those who lived in the Slovo House and were repressed were Mykola Khvylovy, who died by suicide in 1933 as a protest against the growing Soviet repression, and Mykola Kulish, who was executed in 1937 in the Sandarmokh forest massif, the Republic of Karelia, Russia, which became an execution site for the thousands of victims of Stalin's Great Terror.

Today, the Slovo House is remembered as both a monument to cultural brilliance and a site of mass repression. It stands as a haunting reminder of how creativity and state violence coexisted under totalitarian rule.

Despite the initial support, the Soviet Regime began to consider literature and art as one of the areas of the 'cultural front'. The wave of mass repressions against cultural figures of the movement began in May 1933, after the authorities had arrested Mykhailo Yalovyi — a Ukrainian poet-futurist, a playwright and a prose writer. Mykhailo was arrested on charges of espionage and organising an assassination attempt

on the second secretary of the Communist Party, Pavlo Postyshov. This arrest was the last straw for Mykola Khvylovy, who committed suicide in a protest on 13th of May, 1933. On that day, he invited his friends over. At the end of the gathering, he told them that he would show them how a proletarian writer should work in the current conditions and went into another room. Instead of presenting a new work, a few moments later, a shot rang out, killing the writer. In his suicide note, he said: 'Yalovy's arrest was the execution of an entire generation. For what? For being the most sincere communists? I don't understand anything...' ('The suicide note', 2021).

The massacre of Ukrainian artists culminated in 1937. From 27 October to 4 November, to 'over fulfil the plan' to destroy the 'enemies of the people' on the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution, NKVD executioners shot 1111 prisoners of the Solovetskiy special purpose camp in the Sandarmokh (Kotubei-Gerutska, 2022). More than 250 of them were the representatives of the Executed Renaissance. According to the researchers, the prisoners were 'prepared' for the execution in three rooms of their barracks. Their personality was checked in the first room, and the prisoners were undressed. In the second room, they were tied up, and in the third room, they were beaten on the head to make

them lose consciousness. Then, the prisoners were loaded onto trucks and transported towards the Sandarmokh. The half-alive prisoners were thrown into large pits, and a member of the execution brigade — Mikhail Matveyev — personally shot each prisoner in the head.

The term 'Executed Renaissance' was popularised in 1959 by Ukrainian literary critic Yurii Lavrinenko, who compiled a landmark anthology of Ukrainian literature from 1917 to 1933, published in the West. The book served as a memorial and a call to restore Ukraine's lost literary heritage. For decades, Soviet authorities suppressed knowledge of these figures, censoring their works and rewriting cultural history. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during 'perestroika' (political reform movement by Mykhailo Gorbachov, the last leader of the Soviet Union) and following Ukraine's independence in 1991, did a full reevaluation of the period begin.

Today, the Executed Renaissance is recognised as one of the most crucial and tragic periods in Ukrainian cultural history. Here, in Scotland, the Executed Renaissance wasn't left without attention. On the 31st of May 2025, 'shevchenko.philia', a non-

profit organisation that promotes Ukrainian culture in Scotland, hosted a tribute exhibition dedicated to the Executed Renaissance, followed by the documentary screening of 'Slovo House' (2017) by Taras Tomenko. The exhibition included a memorial plaque of every artist affected by the regime, documents from NKVD describing their searches and arrests, the exploration of literary organisations and magazines that existed at the time and a much more in-depth description of this significant period. As Arina Tishchenko, who came up with the idea of such exhibition, explains: 'When I first learnt about the Executed Renaissance, I kept coming back to the figures of the period and philosophy of their art... One thing was always clear — Ukrainian culture would have looked completely different if thousands of people had not been killed or imprisoned in the 1930s. Wrapping the only reason — Ukrainian identity — in false denunciations, accusations, and solemn speeches for everyone and no one. It was important for me to make it clear to the locals how much art was destroyed and how barbaric it was. I did not have a question about organising this event, the idea came to me organically, as something that went without saying, leaving me no choice but to bring it to life.'

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SILLY DREAM

MARYNA
SANTALOVA

it's holding me —
tying my hands, closing my eyes.
'sleep, girl, it's warm here—
let me show you around'.

tighter and tighter
it's tying the knots;
the longer I hide—
the further I fall.

taken into captivity
by the tricks of my mind,
deeper and deeper into oblivion—
I've gone very far.

a forgotten anthem
stuck in my thoughts.
dreaming of something charming;
my legs can no longer walk.

dreaming of flower fields,
clear skies and no ceilings—
in this silly dream
I feel the freest.

THE WAR DOESN'T RIDE THE RAILS

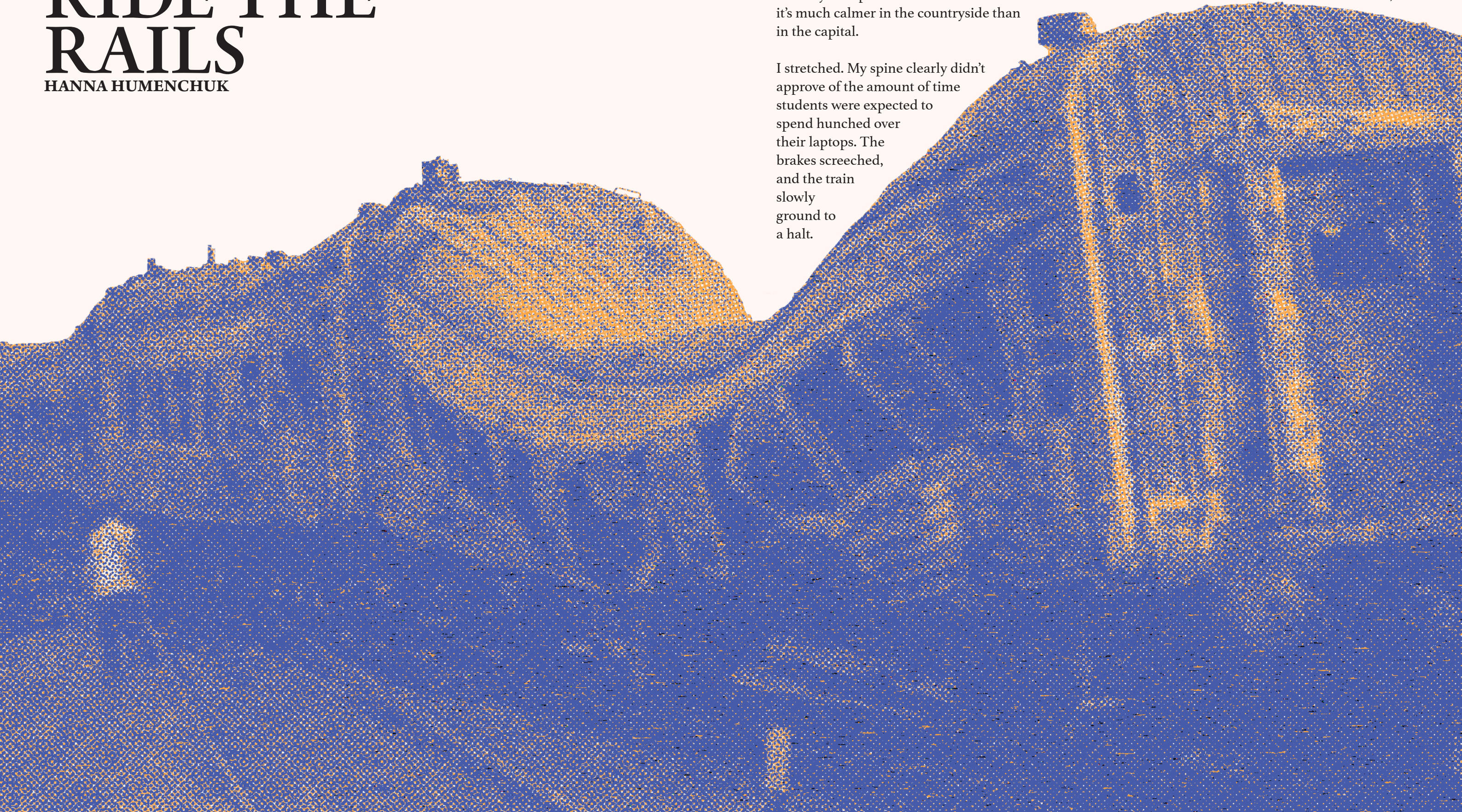
HANNA HUMENCHUK

The rhythmic clatter of the train lulled me. I rubbed my dry eyes, trying to weave a coherent thought as I stared at the half-finished university essay on my laptop screen. It had to be done by the end of next week. But for now, a weekend awaited me—away from the chaos of Kyiv, with its constant air alarms and missile strikes. To be honest, there is no truly safe place in Ukraine now. But still it's much calmer in the countryside than in the capital.

I stretched. My spine clearly didn't approve of the amount of time students were expected to spend hunched over their laptops. The brakes screeched, and the train slowly ground to a halt.

'Fastiv, dear passengers!' bellowed a portly, sweaty conductor as he rushed through the old and tired third-class carriage.

New passengers entered, heads turning every which way in search of their seats. After a few minutes, an elderly woman settled into the seat across from me,



long skirt and carrying a large checkered bag.

‘Good afternoon,’ I nodded politely.
‘And a good afternoon to you, child,’ she replied.

The train started moving again. My earbuds had finally died, so I tucked them away and went back to watching the trees flicker past the window. The woman clearly saw my empty ears as an invitation to talk.

‘So you’re... a student, I suppose?’ she said as she wiped her nose with a cotton handkerchief, then tucked it into her pocket. ‘I am,’ I replied, eyes still fixed on the window.

I didn’t feel like chatting. I didn’t want to spend the next two hours hearing about grandkids, ungrateful youth, and government subsidies.

her have onions as well...

She clicked her needles busily, and I found peace in the quiet, even if it came with the scent of eggs and meat. Minutes passed. The train rumbled on, and my eyes drifted to the rhythm of the knitting in her hands. She noticed my gaze and smiled.

‘I’m knitting this for my grandson,’ she said gently.
‘That’s very sweet,’ I replied—and I meant it. Her eyes sparkled with joy.
‘He’s turning two soon. I’m on my way to see him for his birthday. Got him a gift, an expensive one, been saving from my pension. And I’m knitting him this little outfit too.’
‘Sounds lovely,’ I nodded.
‘Oh yes,’ she brightened, clearly happy I was finally engaging. ‘He’s a good

‘I knew it! So young, and with a laptop too—must be a student!’ she continued cheerfully.

I sighed inwardly and silently scolded myself for not charging my earbuds.

‘You see, my youngest daughter’s finishing her second year. That’s why I can always tell who’s a student,’ she added with a grin. I forced a weak smile in return.

‘What year are you in?’ She studied me with curiosity.
‘First,’ I replied curtly.

She must have sensed my disinterest because she fell silent and pulled out some knitting. And just as I caught the pungent smell—boiled eggs, and probably sausages too.

Of course: third-class carriage, heat, and eggs with sausages. Classic. Please, God, don’t let

boy. But lately a little bit naughty, not listening to his mama—my daughter, Solomiya.’

She fished a phone from her pocket, the kind with a flip cover, and looked ready to show me photos. I sighed internally again and braced myself for the parade of baby pictures. In adulthood, there’s an unwritten rule: you pretend to be fascinated by photos of other people’s children, no matter how little you care. So I leaned in with a polite smile.

‘He’s adorable,’ I told her. She nodded, pleased, and swiped to the next photo.
‘And here’s a vest I made him last month. Pretty, right?’ ‘Very pretty,’ I said, wondering how many babies and vests I still had to compliment. She kept swiping. I kept watching. And then—suddenly—a photo of a young man in military uniform appeared. Smiling broadly, rifle in hand. Dust lined the creases around his eyes. His face was

unshaven. I must’ve reacted, because she glanced at the screen and said, ‘Oh, that’s my son-in-law Andrii.’ I looked at her, then back at the screen. The man looked barely older than a teenager.
‘He was killed at the beginning of June. Not even forty days yet...,’ she added softly.

Something thudded in my chest. I looked at the woman—really looked at her—for the first time.

‘Honestly,’ she continued, her voice hollow and far away, ‘I thought Solomiya would lose her mind. She was home alone when they told her. Oh, she was screaming and crying desperately... I thought I’d lose my daughter too.’

I heard her voice as though through water. My eyes stayed fixed on the soldier’s face. She swiped again. A young woman stared back at us from the screen—barely older than me, red-rimmed eyes, a black mourning band on her forehead. Her face pale, almost blue. A chubby little boy leaned against her shoulder. I wanted to say something. To that mother. To the woman sitting in front of me, who carried her daughter’s grief as though it were her own. But the relentless years of war had bred a strange immunity in me.

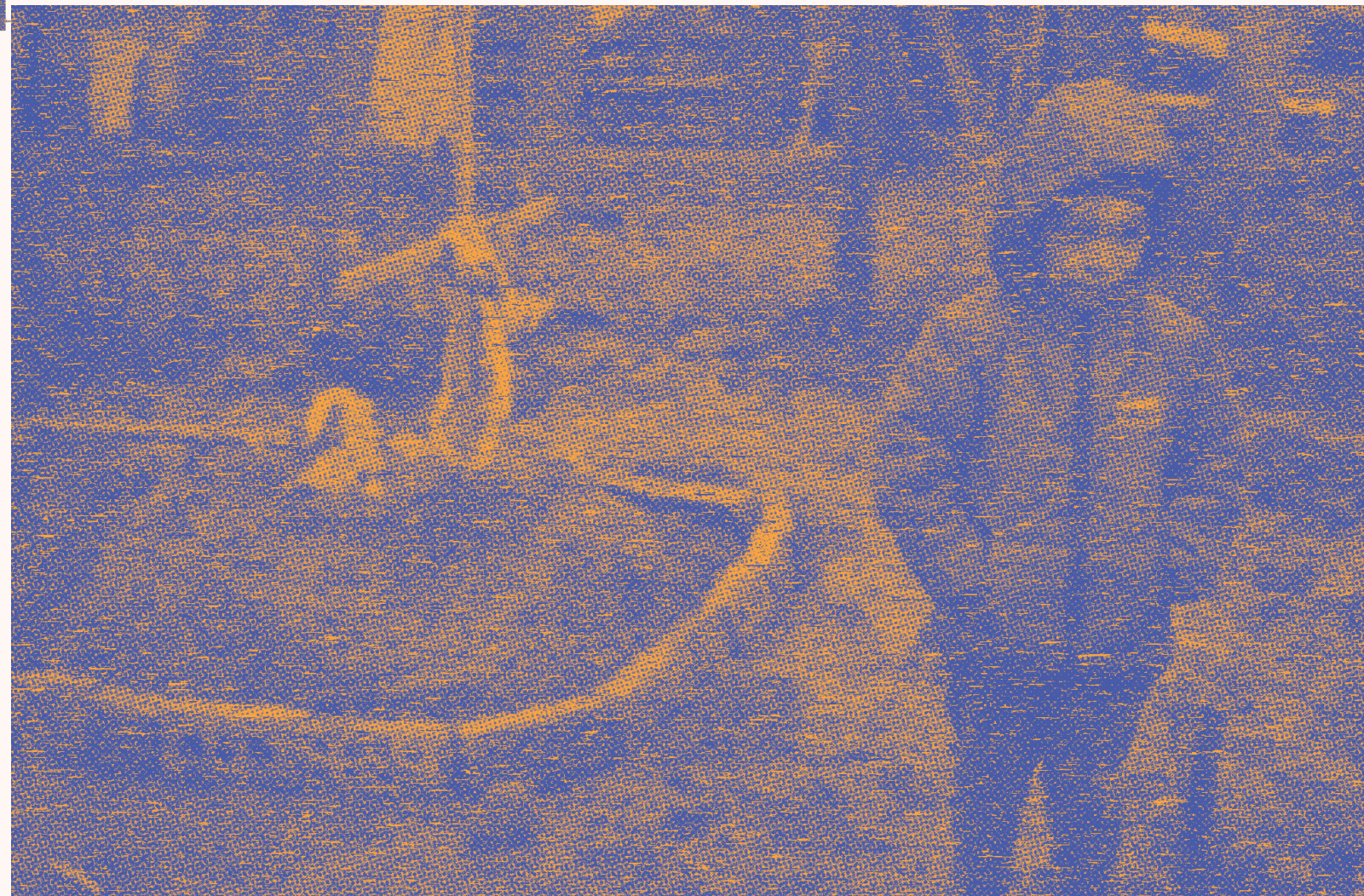
Not numbness—no. I felt it all. Deeply, truly. But if you let yourself break over every fallen soldier, every wounded civilian—you’ll end up in a psychiatric ward before long. My tongue forgot how to move.

‘May Andrii rest in peace,’ I muttered, barely audible. ‘Thank you...’ she sighed. ‘He would’ve turned twenty-three this August. Dropped out of law school and volunteered for the front. The first time he was given leave, he and my daughter got married. You see, they were in such a hurry to live...’

She paused.

‘Then came Tymofiy. Andrii saw his child maybe three times. And now... now Tymofiy visits his father at the cemetery. Kisses the cross on his grave, my sweet boy. Kisses it, and looks up at the sky—because that’s where his daddy is. And Solomiya...

She’s like a ghost now. Only that kid keeps her alive. If it weren’t for him, I’d have buried not just my son-in-law, but my daughter too.’



I glanced from the photo to the woman. I had no words. Nothing I could say would be enough. Her grandson would never know their father—so I could travel to see mine. So I could write an essay and forget, sometimes, that the war was still here. That soldier should've finished his education. Should've lived out his youth, travelled the world. Raised his kids—children who might never have been born if war hadn't breathed down their parents' necks, urging them to live decades in a single year.

I found myself wanting to see another photo of Tymofiy. That child suddenly felt like part of me. Even the stench of eggs stopped bothering me. She composed herself and swiped again. I hoped to see the boy—his knitted pants and his vests. Instead, a photo appeared: another man, framed in black ribbon. Older. Rougher features. Thick brows. I held my breath.

'That's their godfather, Mykhailo,' she explained. 'He died this year too. He used to run a business. A missile hit his apartment in Dnipro. His wife and daughter were home. He'd just stepped out to the store or somewhere... who knows. Came back—no home, no family. Who would want to live after that? So right after the funeral, he signed up. Said: 'At least I'll be useful. I'll take revenge. I'll drive that filth off our land.'

She sighed.

'Now he's with his beloved girls... Well, Mykhailo had lived a little. He was thirty. But my son-in-law... Just a boy indeed. Imagine, only twenty-one years old.

A child, really. He didn't want to live under the tricolor. And Solomiya... She didn't stop him. She said, 'If not you, then who? This is our land. And we want to raise our children here.'

I sighed.

Twenty-one. My generation.

And yes. Solomiya was right. This is our land, our country.

But what a price we pay to call it ours...

I probably should've said something. But the woman didn't need words—just someone to listen. My thoughts were interrupted by her phone ringing.

'Hello! Yes, dear, I'm almost there. I think we're close to Koziatyn. I'll call once I get off. Yes... okay. Bye!'

She cleared her throat. Then silence spread around. I stared ahead, seeing nothing. The young female voice on the phone echoed in my mind.

'They say heroes never die,' the woman suddenly said—not to me, but to the void. 'Lies. They do die. They burn out like sparks from a fire. And their children visit cemeteries more often than playgrounds.' I nodded slowly—automatically.

'Heroes die.' I whispered, teeth clenched. 'Russia kills them.' She looked me in the eye. In her pupils, I saw rage, pain, and something else. Something vast and wordless, that lived in my own eyes too.

'I hope they all rot,' she said, each word like a nail. 'Those who kill our people. May Hell be too small for them all!' Her fury was cut short by the conductor.

'Dear passengers, Koziatyn in ten minutes!'

'Well, here's my stop.' She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief and stood, lifting her checkered bag.

'Take care, child.'

'Thank you,' I nodded. 'You too. Goodbye.'

She smiled kindly and then disappeared into the vestibule of the train.

I hugged my knees to my chest.

'May Hell be too small for them all...'

THE SCARS ARE SHOWING THE HISTORY

MARYNA SANTALOVA

The scars are showing the history
of the life you had once before.
Time is a mystery;
secrets are left in the walls.

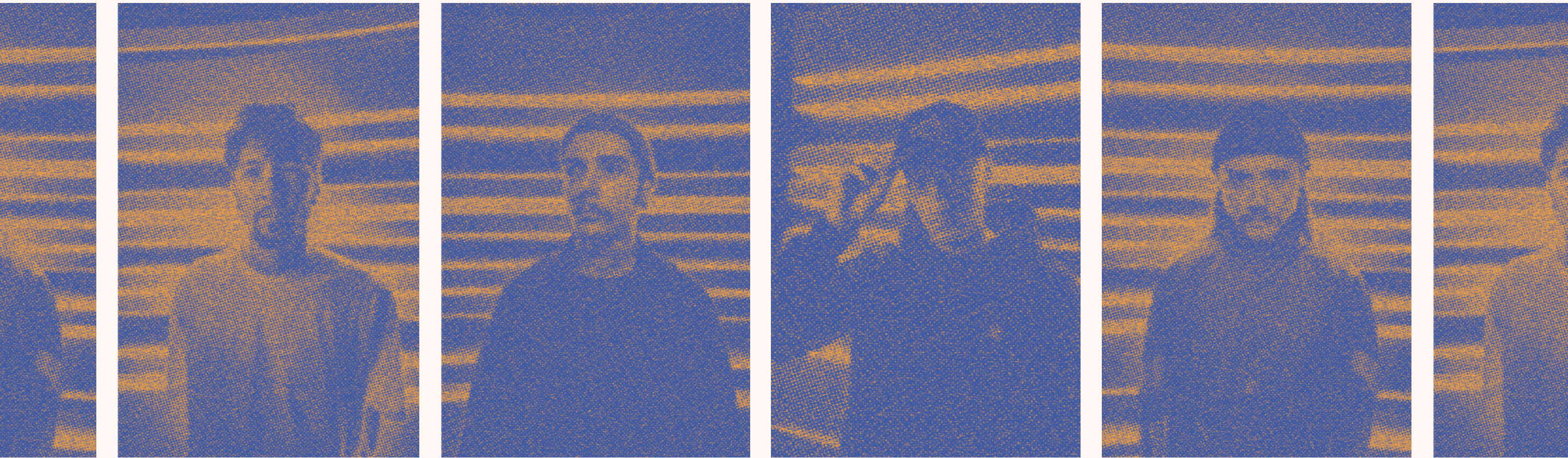
Some things you wish could have stayed,
and some you used to hide from.
Run! Run as fast as you can,
but come back when your legs start to feel sore.

The scars are showing the history,
that you wanted to keep for so long —
a growing fire in the chest of a familiar building;
a fantasy stuck in your thoughts.

That little line on the top of your arm?
It shows that the dream used to be real.
So much has been left untouched —
you never finished the story; you never started on the
list.

It's all coming back to you —
daisies on long-forgotten fields,
and rivers flowing so free —
it just can't be true.

But the scars are showing the history,
and it should not be simply erased.
Embrace the moments you carry over the distance —
a reminder that nothing was simply left there.



RIFFS RESILIENCE IN RIFFS RESILIENCE IN R

Telema and the Rise of Ukraine's Wartime Metal Scene

ARTEM PISHEL

From the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the country's cultural landscape has undergone seismic shifts. Among the most vibrant transformations has been the surge of a fiercely resilient metal scene—gritty, defiant, and deeply embedded in wartime reality. At the heart of this wave stands Telema, a metalcore outfit from Ivano-Frankivsk, whose name has become increasingly synonymous with the emotional urgency and sonic intensity of contemporary Ukrainian heavy music.

FORGED IN CRISIS

Telema emerged in 2019, founded by brothers Taras and Roman Fihol, with a clear mission: to sonically replicate the chaotic energy of basement shows and funnel it into tightly wound, cathartic recordings.

'There are no deep meanings or hidden subtexts—we just wanted to convey the atmosphere of chaos that engulfs us and the crowd when we play,' Roman once explained during an interview about their single 'Kolotnecha.'

Since the war began, their environment has dictated not only the mood of their music, but its production and distribution logistics as well. 'We've learned to adapt,' says Taras. 'You get used to playing in these conditions. The main obstacle is the Russians—everything else, we've found ways to manage.'

Recording now happens in bursts between power outages, using guitars laid down during brief electricity windows, vocals tracked with basic setups, and mixes passed across Telegram threads.

The urgency of creation mirrors the urgency of life.

CONCERTS AMID CURFEWS AND SIRENS

Live performances in wartime Ukraine are unpredictable. 'Air raid sirens can completely disrupt a show,' says Vlad, the band's bassist. 'There are times when everything is exploding with energy, and suddenly you have to evacuate to a shelter.' Despite these disruptions, the band remains committed. 'We're used to it now,' adds Roman. 'Most of our concerts are for charity. We're always contributing to fundraisers.'

Logistical challenges are also formidable. Touring across Ukraine involves curfews, shifting venues, travel restrictions, and often hauling gear across the country via train. 'Trekking with cymbals, guitars,

merch, and tech is a challenge,' Roman notes. 'But our booking agency now handles most of the hard parts, which lets us focus on the music.'

Yet even amidst such obstacles, the band continues to rise. In 2024, Telema graduated from an early slot to headlining the Dark Stage at Faine Misto, one of Ukraine's largest alternative festivals. It was a milestone that underscored their growing prominence.

CONNECTING WITH A NEW GENERATION

As foreign acts stopped touring Ukraine, local audiences turned inward—and upward. 'We see new faces at every concert,' says Taras. 'And more importantly, we see younger people, those who are still forming their musical tastes. It's rewarding to

know they're choosing our direction and sticking with us.'

This surge in local engagement has also led to a linguistic and emotional pivot. 'We switched entirely to Ukrainian lyrics after the full-scale invasion,' explains Roman. 'It allows us to be more honest and expressive. Vlad adds: 'Oddly enough, the war has had a positive effect on modern Ukrainian culture. People have rejected russian influences, and this has elevated homegrown music.'

AIMING FOR THE WORLD STAGE

Despite their local focus, the members of Telema harbour ambitions that extend far beyond Ukraine. 'Why do it otherwise?' Roman asks. 'Reaching a wider audience is essential for growth.' Taras agrees, 'We want to share our music with people abroad who may have been listening to us online for years but never had the chance to see us live.'

Asked what message they hope to deliver, the band's answer is simple and powerful: sincerity. 'We want to convey honest emotions, without melodrama,' Roman says. 'What you see onstage in Ukraine is what we'd bring to any other country.'

THE FUTURE OF UKRAINIAN METAL—AND OF TELEMA

The Ukrainian metal scene continues to evolve rapidly. 'It's growing,' Roman observes. 'And those who aren't afraid to be themselves, who don't try to conform, are the ones who'll break through.' Taras is equally optimistic. 'There are so many young bands now—breathing down our necks. That's a great sign.'

Within Telema, the focus is on refining their identity. 'Our goal is to achieve a sound that is unmistakably ours,' Roman says. Long-term? 'A European tour,' he adds with a smile. Vlad echoes the sentiment: 'We want to leave our mark on the history of Ukrainian heavy music—and, ideally, reach a global level.'

The group is already working on new material, planning releases, and hinting at surprises before the year is out. 'It's about growth and connection,' says Taras. 'We're not just writing songs—we're trying to build something lasting.'

SHATTERING STEREOTYPES, ONE BREAKDOWN AT A TIME

Among the band's quieter missions is destroying misconceptions about Ukrainian music. 'There's this stereotype that if it's Ukrainian, it must be of lower quality than American or European work,' Vlad says. 'We don't just want to break that stereotype—we want to obliterate it.'

Despite past lineup changes, Telema's creative heart has remained stable. 'The songwriting team hasn't changed,' Taras confirms. 'We've all been friends for a long time, so even the newer members fit in naturally.' As Roman puts it: 'Now we're finally all moving in the same direction.'



SOFT POWER

An Opportunity to Engage From Abroad

ANDRII KUZMA

This article looks at how Ukraine uses soft power — things like culture, values, food, and storytelling — to connect with the world, especially during the war. Instead of tanks and weapons, soft power is about winning hearts and minds. From global campaigns like Brave like Ukraine to something as simple as a bowl of borsch, Ukrainians are showing the world who they are and what they stand for. People like First Lady Olena Zelenska and chef Yevhen Klopotenko remind us that culture can be a powerful form of resistance. But soft power doesn't work on its own — it needs people to keep it alive. That can be through films, food festivals, student projects, or just talking about Ukraine. Whether you're Ukrainian or just someone who cares, there are many ways to be involved. The message is simple: soft power lives in everyday actions — and each of us can help keep Ukraine's story alive.

In 2023, Ukraine was ranked among the top 20 countries globally in terms of cultural influence and soft power, according to research by the Ukrainian Institute and the Nation Brands Index (Ukrainian Institute, 2023). At the heart of this visibility is what we call soft power — and that's exactly what I want to explore with you here: what it means, how it works, and how each of us can be part of it.

What is Soft Power?

Let's start simple. The general definition in political science says that power is the ability to get others to do what you want, through force, money, or persuasion. Soft power is when people choose to follow or support you because they're inspired, not because they're forced or payed so (Nye, 2004). The term was coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye, who noticed that cultural appeal and values often shaped international outcomes just as much as military strength. Back at my university in Bratislava, we were given a great example of Hollywood films or even McDonald's, as they don't just export products, they export a way of seeing the world, attracting millions of people to the United States of America through their global culture.

In today's world, where Ukraine is fighting a full-scale war, tanks and planes matter, but so does soft power. It's harder to measure, but just as crucial. As Ukraine's First Lady, Olena Zelenska, put it:

Dialogue and humanity is more effective than the economic and financial coercion used by our enemy. That is why we call the anniversary of the Russian attack in Ukraine differently — the anniversary of resistance, solidarity, and fortitude. The anniversary of not only armed self-defence, but also of soft power”
(City nation place, 2023).



Ukraine and Soft Power

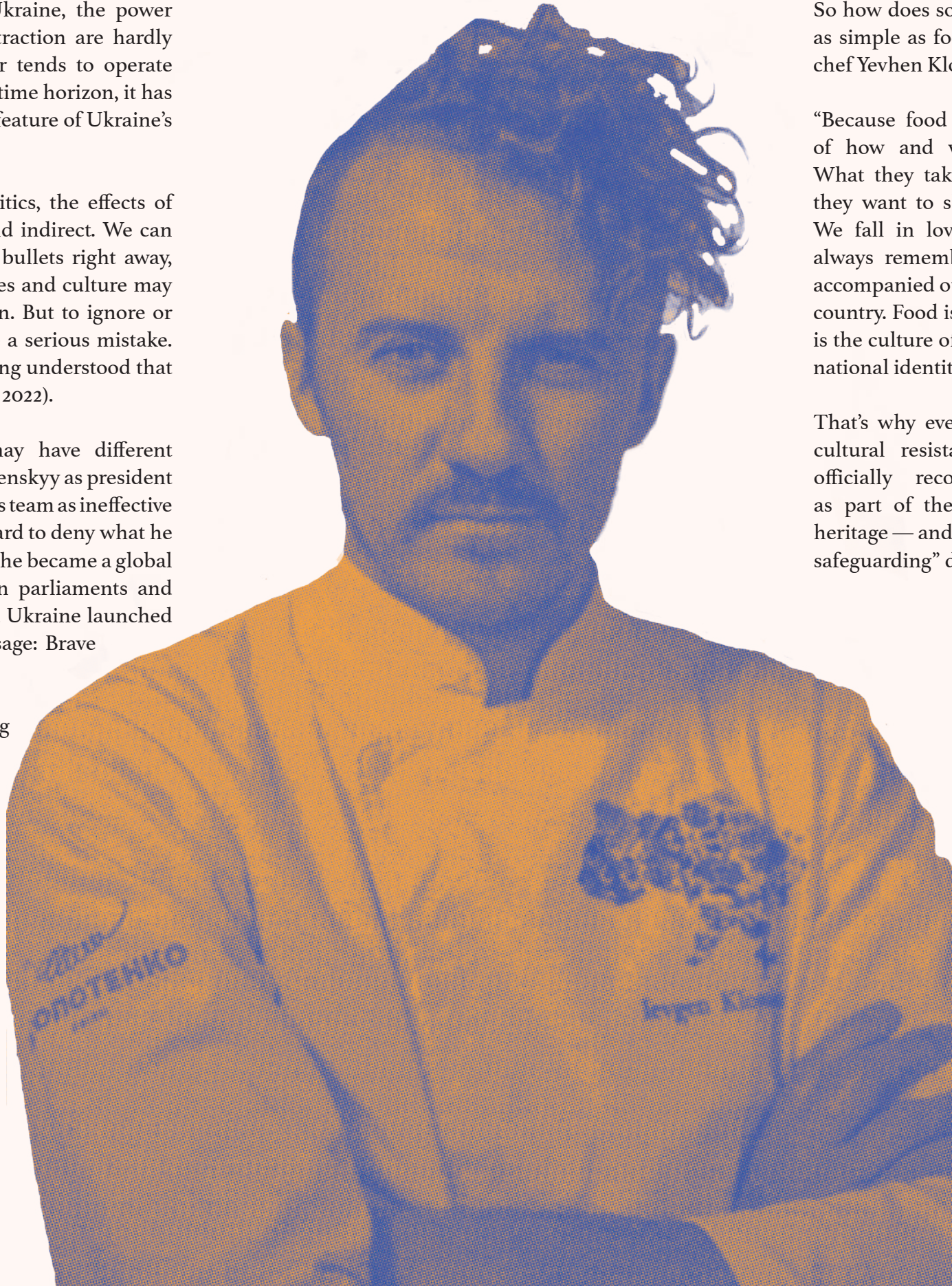
Joseph Nye also reminds us that while hard power may win battles, soft power wins narratives. He commented on war in Ukraine:

“While hard military power will decide the outcome of Russia’s war in Ukraine, the power of values, persuasion, and attraction are hardly irrelevant. Though soft power tends to operate more subtly and over a longer time horizon, it has nonetheless emerged as a key feature of Ukraine’s defense.

Likewise, in international politics, the effects of soft power tend to be slow and indirect. We can see the effects of bombs and bullets right away, whereas the attraction of values and culture may be visible only in the long run. But to ignore or neglect these effects would be a serious mistake. Smart political leaders have long understood that values can create power” (Nye, 2022).

Even though each of us may have different opinions about Volodymyr Zelenskyy as president in 2025, considering him and his team as ineffective or raising valid concerns, it’s hard to deny what he represented in 2022. That year, he became a global symbol. He was applauded in parliaments and senates around the world, and Ukraine launched a powerful international message: Brave like Ukraine.

This campaign is a striking example of soft power. We all want to be brave — so why not like Ukraine? A country that, when faced with a full-scale invasion, stood its ground and fought back against a larger army and state. Millions of Ukrainians abroad, along with the viral reach of social media, helped spread this narrative. And in 2022, they succeeded in putting Ukraine at the heart of the global conversation.

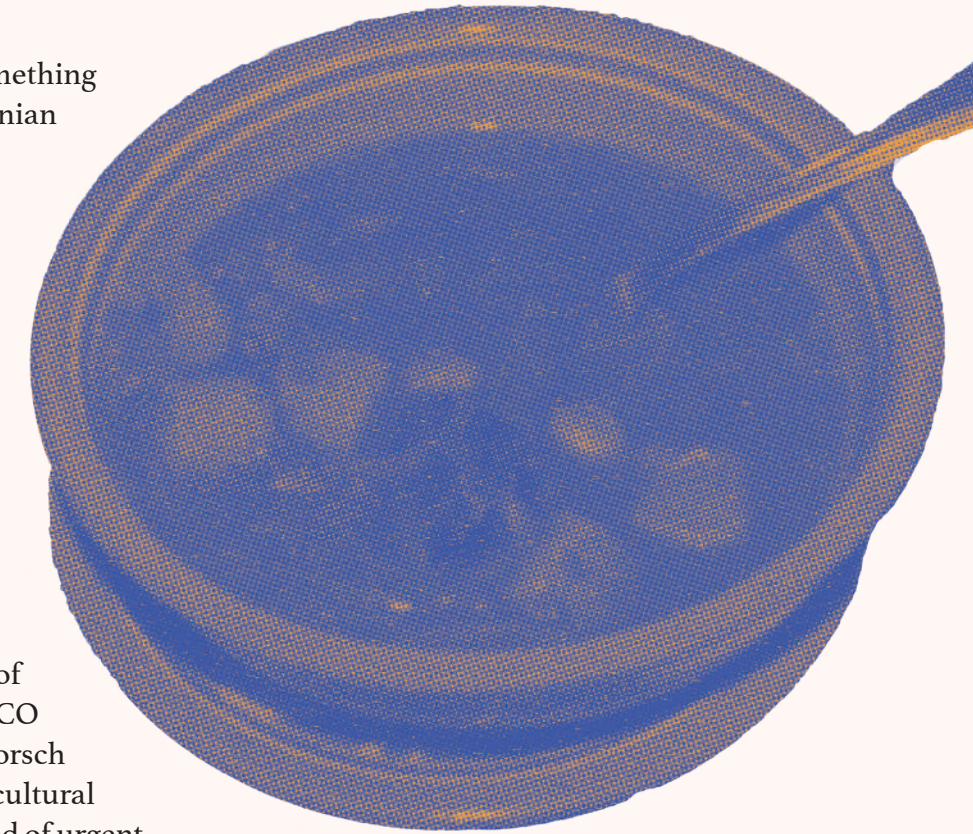


From Soup to Strategy

So how does soft power connect to something as simple as food? According to Ukrainian chef Yevhen Klopotenko:

“Because food is always a reflection of how and what people live by. What they take pride in and what they want to share with the world. We fall in love through food. We always remember the flavours that accompanied our experience in a new country. Food is the story of people. It is the culture of families. It is part of a national identity” (Fielder, 2025).

That’s why even borsch can be part of cultural resistance. In 2022, UNESCO officially recognised Ukrainian borsch as part of the country’s intangible cultural heritage — and noted that it was “in need of urgent safeguarding” due to the war.



British journalist Jez Fielder captured this perfectly: “To understand the role Ukrainian cuisine plays in this cultural war with Russia... I’ll need to eat it. And that means borsch.” (Fielder, 2025). The main goal of soft power is to show the attractiveness of a culture to others, and thereby win people over in general. Borsch is a good fit because it is associated with Ukrainian culture due to the efforts of many Ukrainians around the world.

Borsch is always noticeable, it is quite unconventional, as it can be described as “beetroot soup,” which sounds very strange at first glance. However, it is delicious (an objective opinion as a Ukrainian, haha!), and this is what makes it a pleasant memory for many people who have tried it, thus associating this experience with Ukraine. When borsch reaches foreign restaurants and homes, it carries stories with it, stories of identity, resilience, and pride. That’s soft power in action.

Fading Attention, Rising Urgency

Despite the visibility Ukraine gained in 2022–2023, recent trends show a slow decline in global attention (Ukrainian Institute, 2024). Festivals that once hosted Ukrainian programs now shift their focus. Media coverage drops. Cultural partnerships dry up. Soft power only works when it's sustained. If global audiences stop hearing Ukrainian voices, other louder voices take their place.

Researcher Anna-Maria Mandziy argues that we need long-term strategy, not one-time actions. That means strengthening institutions like the Ukrainian Institute, supporting Ukrainian Studies abroad, and investing in platforms that promote Ukrainian culture on equal terms. (Mandziy, 2023).

At the same time, Ukrainian cultural diplomacy has already shown it can work. Programs like Books Without Borders and Ukrainian Institute London's film and lecture series have sparked real conversations. They've brought Ukraine into schools, cinemas, libraries, and public squares—not as a warzone, but as a living culture.

Soft Power In The Hands

Interestingly, soft power is already in your hands, literally, if you're holding a physical copy of this magazine! This journal brings together diaspora voices and students from across Scotland who share stories about Ukraine, making it more relatable and appealing through personal experiences and knowledge. It may seem like a small gesture, but it's part of a much bigger picture, one shaped by the efforts of tens of thousands of Ukrainians around the world.

As a Ukrainian media Suspilne showed in their documentary "Soft Power: Moving Europe", Ukrainians across the world are building bridges through art, music, workshops, and activism. Their influence may be quiet, but it travels far (Suspilne, 2023).

Metaphorically, soft power is also in your hands, especially if you're Ukrainian. You can start your own initiative or join projects already happening around you. If you're a student, you have the chance to connect and collaborate with Ukrainian university societies, local organisations, attend cultural workshops, explore creative projects or volunteer. There's truly no shortage of ways to get involved.

If you're not Ukrainian - take an interest in Ukraine. This country is layered, diverse, and full of unexpected connections. Talk about Ukraine, because without voices like yours, it risks being forgotten. The fact that you've read this far already means a lot. So, thank you. Thank you for caring

Soft power lives in values and convictions. That's why Ukrainians who stand for light and justice must keep sharing their stories, culture, and truth, because that's how peace gets closer.

In conclusion, soft power is a powerful tool in the struggle for support. It works by attracting people through culture and national values. It grows through the work of individuals and the strategies of states that create an image that inspires connection and solidarity. In Ukraine's case, this means everything from local activism to global conversations about borscht. No matter where you're from, you can be part of this. Soft power is in our hands - yours and ours.

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The University of Edinburgh Ukrainian Society

“There are over 30 Ukrainian societies across the UK, and the University of Edinburgh’s Ukrainian Society stands out. What began with small fundraising events has grown into large-scale gatherings of up to 200 people, successful grant applications for major events, and even the launch of this journal, *Dïaspora*, dedicated to tell about Ukrainian community abroad.

Our core mission is to unite, represent, and encourage. The strength of our community drives everything we do. We are proactive, collaborative, and always open to new ideas and support from our members. The Ukrainian Society is built on the passion and enthusiasm of individuals connected by a shared love for Ukrainian culture. It’s this community that motivates and accelerates our efforts—enabling us to dream bigger and achieve more.”

- Taras Harasym, President



Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain

“The Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) is the largest representative body for Ukrainians and those of Ukrainian descent in the UK. We exist to develop, promote and support the interests of the Ukrainian community in Great Britain & beyond!”

- Hannah Beaton-Hawryluk, Chair of AUGB Edinburgh



WHAT WHO & WHY

Around the globe, the term 'diaspora' is used to describe dispersion; people separated from their homeland who form communities in new areas, while still preserving elements of their native culture. This definition of 'diaspora' is reflected through our logo — the letter 'D' containing a moon and a sunflower seed. While the moon represents the uniting factor, seen from anywhere on the planet, the sunflower seed represents the national flower of Ukraine, symbolising resistance and optimism.

Not only this, but the title is also a creative wordplay of two Ukrainian words: 'Dia' and 'Pora', or 'Діяти Пора', which translates to 'Time for Action'. The letter 'i' directs the reader's attention to Diia, transliteration of 'Дія', and also serves as a significant cultural symbol, being a unique letter from the Ukrainian alphabet that Russia has historically attempted to erase.

Therefore, 'Diaspora' represents not only the unique blend of culture amongst Ukrainians living abroad, but also that meaningful action can take many forms — including raising awareness and promoting Ukrainian culture through journals such as this one.

