Appendix H

The following themes that have already been captured through the quantitative questionnaires and are presented here as further illustration.

9.1.1 Hard labour

As described in Chapter Two, the slave labour program devised by the Nazi reign was known as ‘Vernichtung durch Arbeit’ - ‘extermination through work’. ‘Re-settlement’ including deportation, enslavement, and assimilation were key ingredients in Soviet policy towards the Poles. The following excerpts described the conditions under which people worked long hours enduring heavy work quotas and restricted movements. For example, in Germany, Poles were not allowed on public transport, not allowed to enter theatres or church services and had to have an identifying patch with the letter P on it.

‘I then spent the next 5 years in Hanover working in a factory located in Krocpke area not far from the main railway station. The factory made ropes and cables for battleships supplying the navy for the war effort. It was a dirty job and we were treated harshly. We worked 12 hours a day from 6am to 6pm, six days a week. Sunday was our day off. We were allowed to leave the factory on our day off but had to return by 6 pm as this was when the gates were closed. We were not allowed to travel on public transport. When we left the factory we had to wear a cloth patch with the letter P on it to readily identify us as Polish. During the five years we did not received any clothing. You just had what you walked in with.’

Forced Labourer, Germany, female, interview #10

People transported to such remote areas as Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the Artic circle, endured primitive conditions and forced labour, with children as young as 12 years old working in agriculture, in kolkhozes (state farms), solkhozes (large state farms) or in the forests lumbering. The rations they received were tied to a quota of work performed. Young children and the elderly received the smallest rations as they could not work while adults received barely enough to live on. Generally, people were not use to such physically demanding work.

‘First, I worked in a market garden but I had no idea about gardening. We planted in garden beds which were about eight metres long. I got malaria. I became very ill. After the malaria I
was unfit for work in the garden, so they set me to ‘dry work’ at the brickworks. I had to make 360 bricks a day. Naturally I was unable to make that many bricks, again I was known as ‘abchaszczyk’ that is I refused to complete the quota. They sent me to a lighter job, a loathsome job where I had to mix mud, sand and manure with my bare feet’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #27

‘The camp housed one and a half thousand prisoners while there were only three workers in the kitchen. You had to work 40 hours straight followed by 8 hours sleep without any other break for resting. After working like this for three months, she couldn’t cope anymore. They transferred her to the fifth camp, to a Solkhoz (state owned farm) it was called ‘Sielanka’ about 8 kilometres from Solikamska. After a three month stay in the camp hospital she was a walking skeleton’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #35

9.1.2 Lack of food and constant hunger

Participants described periods of constant hunger, that resulted in the inadequate calorie allocation resulting in near starvation and malnutrition. This was particularly so for those in the concentration camps where it was the explicit intention of the Nazis to kill people either in the gas chambers or through starvation. There were also times when people didn’t have enough water, this was recounted by people who were released from Siberia and then travelled in cattle trucks to Uzbekistan, across the Caspian Sea to Persia where they experienced searing heat and dehydration.

‘There was a break for lunch for an hour between 12-1pm, we received a bowl of soup, it was really water with a potato in it, still with it’s peel on, dirty or a beetroot, or a handful of kasza (buckwheat) that was our lunch (main meal)’.

Concentration camp survivor, male, interview #04

‘They were sent to some barracks, terrible conditions for three days. They had to stand on some straw, there was nowhere to lie down, just stand. They had a wooden suitcase so she and her sister sat on that. They received hardly any food. They got some water with potato peels floating on the top still covered in dirt. She felt sick and nearly fainted. Another time she received a sandwich with ham in it but it was full of maggots. They received a loaf of bread to share between eight people’.

Forced labourer Germany, female, interview #69.
9.1.3 Lack of water

‘On the 16th of August 1942 we finally left Russia we travelled by ship from the port of Krasnovodsk on the Caspian sea to the port of Pahlevi in Persia (modern day Iran) there we were transported in lorries to Tehran. The journey on the ship was terrible, so many people died, we were so weak, could barely get on board the ship. It was crowded, there was little to drink, the water was dirty, we were so skinny, dirty, I was just a skeleton’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #54

9.1.4 Physical illness e.g. typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery

Participants who had been through Siberia and who had experienced malnutrition, harsh climate and primitive living conditions were susceptible to contracting a number of illnesses and disease as a result.

‘After eating this I drank some water and the next day I had diarrhoea and bleeding. They took me to the hospital and there were many sick children there, crying, I remember one little girl about 3 years old, her name was Basia, she was crying and wailing terribly for her mother, her mother was dead, the next morning she was dead too. Many children there were very thin and fragile, weakened…’

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #03

‘Dysentery is such a terrible illness, the smell, the uncontrollable bowel movements, in the end there was nothing to come out, just a bit of fluid and blood’… ‘From here on the 30th of April 1943 we travelled to Pakistan to Karachi, there I had another severe attack of malaria and was sent to hospital in Karachi’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #54

‘It was a hot day. I went a few kilometres along the channels to catch some fish. I caught them in my underpants. I tied up my pants and I caught these tiny ‘kijaneczki’. There was hunger so we wanted to at least eat these. When I returned my head was hurting. When my mother returned I was barely conscious. It was malaria’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #08
9.1.5 Serious illness and lack of medical care

Level of medical care was primitive with one participant who was in Siberia describing the hospital as filthy and lice infested. Participants who had been in the concentration camps described injury or illness as a death sentence. Even though there were camp doctors, their role was predominantly in the selection of who would go to the gas chamber. In such circumstances people were very vulnerable.

'I also had a very serious lung infection. The Germans started a filing system, because they were afraid of contracting the illness themselves, tuberculosis (TB) they would take people for an x-ray if they determine that there is disease in the lungs then they say the lungs are sick, then they would take you to a car and say you were going to the sanatorium. They took people four kilometres outside of Mauthausen and threw in a bottle of gas into the car, all night, the cars were travelling and of course they cleared away all the cases of TB. Here I was saved by a Pole; he determined that I could still work in the stone quarry. I had typhus and yellow fever'.

Concentration camp survivor, male, interview#04

'I was injured once near the stone quarry, I had a wound and this wound started to fester, I went to the doctor. I went to see a German doctor and he said I could go to work on one leg, there was a Spanish doctor and he said in exchange for one of the parcels I get he will heal my leg. I did not go to the surgical section instead I went to convalescing section. Some Spaniards worked there. One day I went to the toilet, they placed my leg on the stool, then stuff some paper in my mouth and started to cut out the infection from my leg. They said that if it hurts over night that is good, I screamed all night from the pain but my leg was saved. I was there for a few days.'

Concentration camp survivor, male, interview#04

9.2 Individual suffering Trauma

Trauma has been defined as an event where a person’s own physical and psychological integrity was threatened. This is in line with the first part of the DSM IV PTSD diagnosis where criteria A states ‘The person experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others’.

In terms of near death experience, the main events spoken about were bombardment and combat. Participants recounted instances where they feared for their own life and had a number of lucky escapes. One man who survived the
concentration camps described having ‘daily conversations with death’. Others who were involved in the partisan movement described being captured, interrogated, beaten or tortured. A number of women spoke of the fear of being raped, that is, they were in a situation where this was the intention of the man but somehow they managed to escape. People also described witnessing acts of violence against others, and witness people dying or dead.

9.2.1 Own experience of near death

The following extract described the participant’s near death experiences resulting from the bombardment by the allies towards the end of the war. She was in Germany as a forced labourer and described the nights of heavy bombing. A soldier who took part in the battle for Monte Cassino described heavy German bombing in Tobruk. Another woman who was a civilian during the Warsaw Uprising described living heavy German fire.

‘She described two incidents when she was nearly killed. One was when a large bomb fell into the dirt and made a huge whole and sprayed the place with rocks but did not explode. The bomb was about two metres from her and some others and it did not go off. Another time when she was out a plane flying low was firing bullets at her, she started to run away and hid behind a gate, the bullets went into the gate and missed her. The bombing was quite intense. The Americans would drop fliers warning people to hide. The bombs were falling everywhere; one village was hit by 150 bombs. Even the horses knelt in fear. Towards the end of the war they were using fire bombs, even bricks would melt the intensity was so great, whoever was caught by it would melt. She hid in the basement in a part that was protected. She was afraid to go into the underground shelters. She would fall into a deep sleep and awoke when the bombing had finished’.

Forced labourer, Germany, female, interview #50

‘He was in Italy from December 1943-1945 and was wounded in action on the 13th of May 1944. The first time he felt fear was in 1939 when he was 17 years old and he experienced German bombardment. The worst time was between 1941-42 in Tobruk (El Gazala) when he experienced heavy German bombardment lasting three hours. He felt as if he was drunk after the bombing. His friend was wounded in the back while he was washing his clothing in the sea, as the planes were flying very low. They were surrounded by the Germans for at least 9-11 months. The sea was to one side, the Germans on the other and the Poles in the middle. There was no water in Tobruk they had to desalinate it. His role there was as a medic, he carried the wounded, bandaged up the injured soldiers. He was on the front line,
and he had to carry ammunition and supplies. The last time he was fearful was when he was 21 years old and he was in Monte Cassino in 1943. He was wounded in 1944 he was hit in the face and leg by artillery fire while he was carrying the wounded. He kept his feelings of fear to himself; he didn’t talk about it much. He was demobilised in Italy and migrated to Argentina’.

Armed Forces, male, interview #56

‘Another close shave was during a time of heavy bombing and gunfire. She was in the streets and trying to get away. She was on the street and a man, a stranger was beside her and they hid in a gateway, he stood in front of her, and she was pressed into the gate. He was standing with his back towards her and he kept pushing into her. They were both very frightened, trying to shelter from the gunfire. As he pushed into her she tried to push him away and was about to say ‘sir can you stand next to me rather than in front, there is enough room but before she could get the words out he was hit by shrapnel from an explosion and he bore the full brunt of the explosion and was killed. Because his body shield her from the impact, nothing happened to her. He had his papers on him and she had to go and find his wife and children and tell them he was dead.’

Civilian, female, interview #64

‘We were not afraid of death as death was all around us. When you have plenty you want to live, you miss the good things in life but when you find yourself in these terrible conditions you just don’t care. On the ship I was lying under some stairs, I had a little handkerchief over my face, I just felt so weak. My mother was helped off the ship by some women, and I was just lying there unable to move. I heard my name over the loud speaker but I just couldn’t move. A Russian soldier came over to me and kicked me to see if I was still alive, I moved and he carried me off the ship and put me on a stretcher. I was taken by a medic to the hospital. There were many people who did not survive the trip.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #54

9.2.2 Combat

A number of battles were described by study participants including the September campaign 1939, the Battle for Narvik in Norway, the battle for Monte Casino and the Normandy landings including the liberation of Breda in Holland. Combat activities were also undertaken by partisans in particular during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 (see chapter two for historic overview). A number of study participants were involved in the ‘Home Army’ or ‘Armia Krajowa’ who functioned as a dominant resistance movement in German occupied Poland. The Home Army was one of the largest underground resistance movements during WWII, formed the armed wing of what
subsequently was known as the underground state. The resistance movement also fought against the Soviet occupation in the eastern regions of Poland. A number of female study participants were also involved in various clandestine operations and in all cases were captured by the Soviets and subjected to interrogation and severe punishment.

The following extracts are all taken from soldier’s accounts describing heavy combat situations. In the following two extracts both participants were captured by the Germans and were facing execution but miraculously they were both saved. The other account is from a soldier who was seriously wounded and mistakenly thought to be dead, just as he was being covered up with dirt somehow he managed to give sign of life and was rescued. Another soldier was also in the line of fire and had a lucky escape during the battle for Narvick, Norway.

‘Towards the end of the second month of the Uprising there was no real command left, either they were wounded or they had been killed. We were in a very dangerous position it was in a school on Woronicz Street in Mokotow (Suburb of Warsaw). I went there as a volunteer of course with the boys. As a result of heavy fire my other arm was hit and I was in a situation where I couldn’t move either arm. The bones had been fractured and my hands just hung there. Well nothing. Both hands were of no use but I was still alive and that was my eight escape. They took me to hospital. The hospital was in a basement of a private residency. They organised a hospital there and we lay on these mattresses on the ground because there were no beds. They collected the mattresses from neighbouring houses so we lay there. And the Germans came and captured this street and they asked everyone to leave the basement. They were afraid to go down into the basement. Since they ordered us to get out we got out and near the entrance a German soldier stood with a machine gun and he is standing there and looking. He is looking at me and I am looking back at him. I don’t know what he thought of me but he didn’t have a threatening expression on his face, he seemed to have an expression of curiosity. I was also looking at him and thinking to myself ‘well, well the war is over for me but I wonder what awaits you’. In any case, once they got us out of the basement they made us stand with our face to the wall and there were two machine guns pointing at our back. So I said to myself ‘this is it they will finish us off’. Why? Why because they killed all soldiers they captured on the spot from the Home Army, they didn’t keep anyone. So I think to myself ‘well the moment has come and for us too.’ It was very unpleasant but what could I do? I had to stand. But again a miracle. At the last minute, a German came running and stopped the execution from going ahead and they didn’t kill us. Later we found out that at that moment they had signed the capitulation of Mokotow, so they stopped killing us. So that was lucky escape number 9’.
He joined the army at 16 and was in the officer cadet school in Torun from the age of 16-19 years. When the war broke out, he was in the infantry. He was an explosive expert. He placed explosives in key German positions such as buildings, bridges. Once they were about to detonate a bomb and destroy a bridge, they told people not to go onto the bridge but some people didn't listen and the bridge was destroyed together with the people. He fought outside of Warsaw took part in the Battle of the Bzura\(^1\). When they had reached Warsaw, just outside Warsaw, he was seriously wounded and captured by the Germans. They thought he was dead and the soldiers were digging trenches to bury the dead. His body was carried into the trench and they started to cover him with dirt. There were two Poles standing around and one spotted his ID book and pulled it out of his pocket. They were looking at the stamps in it commenting to each other, 'oh I was there, I was there' then they saw his eyes and face move. They dropped the book and ran away, they ran to the German officer and said 'he's alive, he's alive'. So they pulled him out of the trench and took him to hospital. He was in the prison hospital for 11 months – he was moved to Germany where he worked on a farm from August 1940-May 1945.

\(^1\) this battle was fought near the river Bzura and lasted from the 9-19 September 1939 there was heavy fighting with quite high German casualities, Poles recaptured a few towns only to receive the full force of the Germans 17th of September some 300 aircraft and heavy artillery, most units capitulated or were captured from 18-22 September.

\[\text{Armed forces, male, interview #38}\]

‘During the battle for Narvik, I was on a patrol. I was walking around like in a dream. I felt fearless that no-one could hurt me. Germans opened fire, others in my company ran away but I stayed on. A grenade hit my helmet, at the back of my head and bounced off. Then another hit my day-pack and exploded the contents of it. The force sent me hurling down a ravine. The drop was about 1000 metres and everything was covered in snow. A bush was growing on the edge of the drop and as I fell towards it the bush catapulted me back up again and I rolled down the mountain right into the middle of my company. Everyone exclaimed in surprise ‘where did you come from’? I was treated for minor wounds to my arms. On inspection I saw all the holes in my cap and was amazed to still be alive’.

\[\text{Armed forces, male, interview #37}\]

9.2.3 Physical injury caused by shrapnel, bullet wound

A number of people were seriously wounded as a result of activities in the partisan movement fighting against the Germans. Others experienced serious injury as the result of being caught in the cross-fire, for example being hit by shrapnel. During the occupation there was lack of medical supplies and personal which meant that it was very difficult to receive proper medical care.
‘The 1st of August I had my own platoon with 83 men. We received an order to capture the racetrack on Sluzewiec in Warsaw and surprisingly we did. The Germans were retreating into the stands and from above they were shooting at us with their machine guns. They also received supplies from the air force, the German air force, and tanks were nearby and they moved into the Sluzewiec so that in the end we had to retreat. But before retreating we started to attack the stands. They were firing from above and I got a bullet in my arm, I was wounded. Suddenly my right arm became immobile, it didn’t want to move, blood was pouring everywhere, and there was a young boy next to me about 15, 16 years old. I looked at him and was wondering why he has such a strange expression on his face. I soon realised why he had such an expression because the bullet had hit an artery and the blood was spurting out like a fountain. When I was wounded the tip of the bullet broke off - the so called ‘dum, dum’. When the end of the bullet is sharp it goes through the flesh easily but when the tip is blunt then it shatters and there is a large wound. I had a huge wound on my back. This was my fifth escape. We captured a few German prisoners, examined their ammunition and saw the blunted bullets. This was not seen very favourably’.

Armed forces and partisan, male, interview #38

‘She was in Warsaw during the Warsaw Uprising, she took part in the Home Army administering first-aid. She had been wounded by German gun-fire and received a bullet to the groin. She was rushed to a hospital by friends. The doctor had no anaesthetic and just pulled out the bullet and bandaged her up. There was nowhere to lie in the hospital as there were no beds she would have been in greater danger by staying in the hospital so she went into hiding’.

Civilian and partisan, female, interview #64

9.2.4 Acts of violence against the person, torture, beating

Following their arrests a number of people described being beaten or tortured either at the hands of their German or Soviet captors.

‘She met a young seventeen year old girl named Fela from Sochaczew who was also cycling and on her way to Zyrardowa. They rode together. Once they got to the square they had to get off their bicycles as it was getting dark and it was hard to see where they were going. All of a sudden, they were met with very bright lights shining upon them. It was a group of Russian soldiers from the counterintelligence unit. They demanded their documents. Maria showed hers, they looked at them and then asked her to move aside. Fela didn’t have any documents so they took her in as well. Maria was more implicated and had more to fear than
Fela did. They took the girls and their things to a basement. In the evenings and late at night Maria was interrogated. After about a month and a half they let Fela go home but kept Maria and transferred her to another division. A new interrogator slapped her in the face numerous times, pull her arms from her back over her head, stretching them out, threw her onto the ground and started to jump on her, breaking her ribs in the process. He organized a number of days and nights without food or water, and arranged to shine a light bulb close to her eyes. On the fifth day, she pretended to faint. It was Easter Saturday. He stopped maltreating her. There was a military trial. They read out the sentence ‘eight years hard labour and three years without any rights as a citizen’. This was on the 9th of May 1945.

Partisans, female, interview #35

‘Nothing came of this as once the Russians come to ‘liberate us’ they captured about 20 or more of us to Sokolki Bialostockiej about 30 kilometres from Dabrowy. They gave us coffee from this rusted caldron, about 15 grams of bread made of sawdust. It was inedible. We are on the clay floor one next to the other. They interrogated us sometimes 3-4 times a day. I remember this large Russian, a bothersome man sitting there over me, beating me so that I would admit that I was in the partisans. Then they took the next lot of people, if people did not admit to their involvement, they transported them to an even worse prison. The worst was in Poznan but I don’t remember the name of it. One day this man came from Sidry, 15 kilometres from Sokolka in order to interrogate me. I was 17 years old at the time and he took needles, heated them up and put them into my heels (participant upset, crying). I admitted to nothing. Others came into our cells and mocked us that we were so skinny. Another man who had no teeth came and took me to his office. He told me he was from Lodz and that the Germans had knocked out all his teeth. He brought me a plate of sorrel and some bread and told me to eat this quickly. I took the bread for the others. He made sure no-one could see. He worked for the Russians like some other Poles who didn’t realise what kind of regime this was. This happened about three times. We were there for about 6-7 months. Some people lost all their teeth, while others were taken to the jail in Poznan. One friend, they took him and his son and jailed them for 7 years’.

Partisan, female, interview#13

‘Only a few months ago I found out from reading the Polish weekly that the fourth cell was the execution cell where they shot people using silencing guns some 360 people. The interrogations were very unpleasant, always at night. The guards were terrible; they were cruel to us, frightened us and wouldn’t allow us to sleep. Each cell had a very large lamp that was brightly lit and directed into one’s eyes. When I appealed to the inspector who came once a month, whether they couldn’t change the lamp to a smaller one they did changed it but to one that was twice the size. The lesson wasn’t wasted. We had this vile watchman who terrified us, he was cruel and sadistic towards us. When the next month’s inspection occurred we were asked ‘are there any requests’? Yes that watchman he is so good, can he
be rostered on all the time? That bandit! We never saw him again. I was there for 18 months. After handing down the sentence, eight years hard labour in Central Asia, they asked whether I would be seeking an amnesty from Stalin? No I won’t. And why not? Because I have no intention to stay there that long. I thought I would get way with it.’

Partisan, female, interview #27

9.2.5 Threat of harm – sense of danger

This sense of danger seemed to be most apparent for women who expressed the fear of being raped or sexually assaulted. The examples cited are of close escapes, where the participant described fear that they were in imminent danger of being sexually assaulted.

'I kept receiving letters to go to the Arbeitsamt –the employment office. I was afraid to go, I did not want to be sent to Germany. The letters said if I did not go there would be repercussions for my family. A friend of mine, Halina was working for a German family and they treated her quite well. I said to her can’t you put a good word in for me and get me a similar job. If I went to the Arbeitsamt they would send me anywhere. My friend organised this and I was recommended to another German family. My main task was housework and I was there for about one year. The mother of the family liked me because I did want I was told and she kept testing me, a piece of jewellery would be lying on the floor and I was sweeping or mopping the floor and I would show her what I found and return the ring or whatever piece of jewellery. Her husband was another matter. One day in the afternoon he grabbed me and forced me on to the bed and was forcing himself onto me. My mother had always told me if a boy makes unwanted advances on you that you kneel him in the groin and this is what I did. First I started yelling and screaming and his daughter, she was 13 years old and was doing her homework in the next room ran in to see what the commotion was and that’s when I kneed him and ran away, crying and thinking what do they want from me, why is this happening to me.’

Forced Labourer, female, interview #66

‘The German official- like a mayor of the Town called her over to his car and offered to give her a lift, instead he took her to the town hall. There were many rooms there, he took her into one and wanted to rape her, somehow she managed to get away from him, he was drunk and fumbled around, the place was patrolled by guards and two German Shepherds’.

Forced Labourer, female, interview #01

‘We slept there all night and in the morning heard the Russian soldiers coming. I wanted to sleep more but we heard Polish and Russian soldiers. These soldiers had liberated the town.'
There were some Hungarian women with us, they could not understand Russian. We knew what was going on. We knew that the Russian soldiers raped and killed women so we stayed quiet and left our hiding spot. The Hungarian women did not know what was happening and they were raped and killed, it upsets me thinking about this’.

Concentration camp survivor, female, interview #17.

‘She had a few close escapes from the Russian soldiers. They were notorious for raping women. She was walking home with a friend. It was after the curfew hour when a Russian soldier started to harass them. He followed them home and they started to run so he ran after them, he shot at them and finally she made it home but she couldn’t open the gate, trying desperately to open the gate to the yard and finally did and got inside just as he was approaching. She quickly closed the gate and now he couldn’t open it. Her legs had turned to jelly afterwards. Her sister also had a lucky escape when there was heavy bombing by the allies, she hid in the forest, Russian soldiers were approaching but she was there with another Polish man and he bought them off with some vodka’.

Civilian, female, interview #59

9.2.6 Witness to death

A number of study participants described witnessing the death of others. This was commonly reported among people who had served in the Armed Forces

‘He joined the army in 1942 and served in the 10th mounted rifles regiment of the First Polish Armoured Division. He fought in France, Belgium and Holland. The division moved some 100km before liberating Breda. He wasn’t sure whether he killed anyone but he saw a lot of dead bodies and people being killed. He drove armoured tanks, there were five other people inside, once his friend went out to drive instead of him and never returned. He was involved in face to face combat with the Germans, involved in heavy combat, and awarded a military cross for bravery. He witnessed an incident when they were on the front line and an American tank ran his friend over and killed him – so called friendly fire.

Siberian and Armed Forces, male, interview #21

‘She saw many dead bodies, corpses on the side of the road. They were then collected in a cart and buried somewhere. She saw a woman huddled over a corpse wrapped in a blanket, it turned out later that the body was that of her son. She later became their teacher. People of all ages died from starvation or disease.’

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #43
9.3 Individual psychological and emotional responses

9.3.1 Fear, apprehension, anxiety

People described feeling fear, their legs ‘turning to jelly’ in relation to bombing and combat. For some the fear remained with them after the war as in the excerpt of the young girl who had heard stories of women being raped by the Russian soldiers that later she developed into a fear of men.

‘1939, when the war broke out, the Germans conducted heavy bombing. They even bombed the farmers as they worked in the fields. I remember being with a friend in a field, we hid in a trench and there were some bushes there, the plane flew very low and started firing on us. The Germans bombarded us quite often, people fled with various things or sometimes empty-handed. I feared that they would kill me. I asked my friend ‘Irena are you alive’ she replied ‘yes I’m alive’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #03

‘I remember having this fear of people. I had heard all these stories from the women about the Russian soldiers and how they raped women that when my mother was out working I was so afraid to be left in the house that I slept in the shrubs outside. I was less afraid of the wolves that were around than staying in the house. This fear stayed with me for a long time, I remember at school when I was back in Poland, the girls would arrange to meet a boy in the park on their own, I could not image doing this, I would never do this’.

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #08

9.3.2 Anger

One man described feeling angry and wishing to retaliate but he knew that he had to contain these feelings otherwise he would be killed.

‘He decided he would try this job so he volunteered. It was hard work he had to lift heavy crates. He was a bit chubby and the German soldier, who was overseeing the men said ‘are you asleep, move, you lazy pig’. He couldn’t do anything. The crates were too heavy for one man to lift. The soldier kicked him in the butt as well as the other men there. He felt angry inside but couldn’t do anything about it as he would be shot if he tried to retaliate’.

Forced Labourer, male interview #68

‘One time he decided to escape from the farmer and went to work for another one. This other
one was very cruel, he hit the workers, he knew if he hit him he would hit back so he only
stayed a week and went back to the original farmer who was happy to see him back. He told
him he had been to Poland on a holiday even though the farmer hadn’t given him permission.
He wasn’t allowed to listen to the radio. During the Warsaw Uprising the farmer vented his
anger at him. He called him all these names ‘Polish bandit’ and he wanted to beat him up.
He described an incident when he was cutting a certain type of grain; it had to be cut slowly
so the head of grain wouldn’t fall off. He did this carefully at a slow pace. The German farmer
was anger with him for doing so little. He came over and grabbed the scythe and said ‘I’ll
show you how it’s done’. Then he took the scythe back off the German and showed him that
he can do it just as well. The farmer grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. He dropped the
scythe to the ground and when he moved away from the farmer, he stepped on the scythe
and cut his foot. Blood was pouring everywhere. He pushed the farmer away and he fell to
the ground. He had a walking stick so he picked it up and was going to hand it to the farmer.
Instead, the farmer grabbed the walking stick and was about to hit him with it so he took it
back off him and threw it into the river. The farmer never forgave him for this. The farmer
could have reported him to the police for this incident but then he would have lost a good
worker’.

Forced labourer, male, interview#48

9.3.3 Humiliation
The following extracts described the humiliation resulting from the physical
deprivation described earlier.

‘When the girls were selected for work, the German women came around and looked them
over, she felt like they were cattle for inspection. When she was taken to work, she felt like a
prisoner’.

Forced labourer, female, Interview#01

‘She remembered once that she had no underpants. She had to go to a lady to get a ration of
material to make some. The lady said to her to prove she had no pants. She found this
humiliating’.

Forced labourer, female, interview #69

‘We had no gloves or protective clothing and the glass fragments would go into the skin and
we would have this prickling sensation in our hands and upper body. As a consequence of
this I developed an infection - a rash on my hands. I was only 15 years old at the time. I
showed the supervisor this rash and was sent to an infectious hospital. The rash was on my
hands and arms but for some reason I was given a gynaecological examination when it was
not called for as this had nothing to do with the rash. This examination caused my hymen to be broken which was a further humiliation as I came from a Catholic conservative upbringing and one’s virginity was very important’.

Forced labourer, female, Interview #10

9.4 Family trauma

The following excerpts described the death of parents and siblings. People who had endured the Exiled to the Soviet Union described loved ones dying as a result of disease, starvation. People who lived under the Nazi occupation described the murder of family members as the victims of Nazi aggression. One man recounted how his whole family were murdered at the hands of Ukrainian partisans who participated in ethnic cleansing in the Eastern Territories of Poland.

9.4.1 Death of other family members (parents and siblings)

‘All men of military age tried to enlist and get their family out of Uzbekistan to Iran Persia. While my father was away working, my mother got sick with typhoid and was taken to hospital in Romietan some 15kms away. She died there. In the meantime, my sister and I also became sick with typhoid. I don’t remember how long I was sick but we were taken to the hospital. My father came to the hospital and he was also sick. There were many sick people in the hospital and few beds. I remember sharing a bed with my father who was so hot, he was burning from the fever. I can’t remember how long we were there. My father was so thirsty someone from our village gave him some buttermilk to drink, he drank and drank. The next morning there was a spare bed so he was moved there. That same morning my father died. I was the first to know, my sister was in the woman’s section. I went to tell her.’

Exiled to the Soviet Union, male, interview #46

‘Then to Uzbekistan this is where her brother died. They didn’t have any more things to exchange for food. He died of starvation. The cart came around and collected all the dead bodies. Those who could stand walked away.’

Exiled to the Soviet Union, female, interview #41

‘In 1943 (the Germans) liquidated the ghetto and during this time my mother, my sister and her children and my sister-in-law and her children were taken to a death camp as they had children. They only took those who were young and could work to Plaszow (Labour camp – later turned into a concentration camp). My sister, my brother and myself were taken to Plaszowie, whereas the other transport took my family to the ovens. I don’t know where, it
could have been to Auschwitz or somewhere else, I don’t know. They (the Germans) knew that the Russian army was advancing, so to remove any trace of us we were sent back to Sztuthoff. I knew that my sister did not survive. She remained with the rest of the people, only the group of 50 chosen survived, while the rest 2000 people were pushed into the sea and drowned. They ordered people to jump into the water and they fired onto the crowd. When I returned to Krakow, that is when I found out that my sister and the other friends I left behind, had been drowned by the Germans. There were 2000 people there and only 50 survived.’

Concentration camp survivor, female, interview #17

‘In Dzialosz we were there until the 5th of September without food, water, I already had an infant, we called him Henryk. He was born on the 15th of July 1942, only 6 weeks old. It was terrible. From there they transported us by train to some place I have no idea where we were going. We were travelling for a number of days. My child was dying in agony on this journey.’

Concentration camp survivor, male, interview #36

During his time in Germany he received a letter from his cousin that his whole family had been murdered by a gang of Ukrainians. His parents and two brothers were dead. He was devastated, in shock. He couldn’t help thinking why they hadn’t run away. People knew what was coming. Someone even enticed a neighbour to visit his family home so that he would also be murdered. Everything was ransacked, burnt to the ground. His brothers were shot. Two to three men came to his house and did this. His cousin wrote all this in a letter and somehow it found him in Germany. There was no stamp on the envelope he didn’t know how it got there.

Forced labourer, male, interview #61
Author/s: Evert, Helen

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