

Introduction

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The idea for this book came to both of us, separately, sometime during and after the seventy-fifth anniversary (2008) of the Holodomor—the murder by hunger of millions in the 1932–33 famine in Soviet Ukraine and the Kuban region of the North Caucasus, where Ukrainians formed a large percentage of the population.

Both of us were struck by the fact that, although the amount of material relating to the Holodomor was huge and steadily growing, there was no comprehensive sourcebook on the 1932–33 Ukrainian famine for English-language readers. As a result, finding basic information on the Holodomor and deepening one's understanding of this terrible tragedy required the kind of research that most nonspecialists have neither time nor energy to pursue.

The Holodomor Reader hopes to fill these gaps. Our goal was to compile a book of readings including a wide range of materials—survivor accounts, journalistic reports, scholarly studies, literary works, and documents—that would be of value both to students and scholars, who may not be familiar with the full extent of writings on the Holodomor and related events, and to nonspecialists, who need a thorough reference work on the Ukrainian genocide.

Our personal view of the Holodomor derives from the interpretation of genocide by Rafael Lemkin, who first coined the term. In his classic 1944 study, Lemkin wrote:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.¹

In 1953, on the twentieth anniversary of the famine, Lemkin addressed the question of whether Soviet policies and actions in Ukraine constituted genocide:

[P]erhaps the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification [is] the destruction of the Ukrainian nation....

Ukraine is highly susceptible to racial murder by select parts and so the Communist tactics there have not followed the pattern taken by the German attacks against the Jews. The nation is too populous to be exterminated completely with any efficiency. However, its leadership, religious, intellectual, political, its select and

¹ Rafael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), p. 79. Reprint of 1944 edition.

determining parts, are quite small and therefore easily eliminated, and so it is upon these groups particularly that the full force of the Soviet axe has fallen, with its familiar tools of mass murder, deportation and forced labour, exile and starvation.²

Although Lemkin did not have access to the sources now available to scholars, his approach to the study and understanding of the Ukrainian famine was, in our view, sound. As he points out, the Ukrainian genocide encompassed the famine of 1932–33 as well as the destruction of Ukrainian intellectuals, writers, poets, musicians, and artists, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and the political elite. The genocide must therefore be viewed as the product of Joseph Stalin’s revolution from above, in which Ukraine and Ukrainians were regarded as a fundamental obstacle to the realization of the communist leadership’s ideological and state-building goals. Although the roots of the genocide reach into the failed national-liberation struggles of 1917–22, when Bolshevik forces, centered in Russia, crushed the Ukrainian drive for independence, Stalin’s genocidal campaign began in 1929, reached its apogee in 1932–33, and ended sometime in the 1930s, perhaps as late as the Great Terror of 1937–38.

While there are scholars and policy makers who still dispute Lemkin’s interpretation, it is our belief that expert opinion has begun decisively to shift—and will continue to shift—toward viewing the Holodomor as genocide. The opening of Soviet archives, the contributions of Ukrainian and Western scholars, the abandonment of formerly popular revisionist views of Stalin and Stalinism, and the unceasing efforts of Ukrainians in Ukraine and throughout the world have combined to produce that shift.

Consider where the famine was in the popular consciousness of the 1950s. The answer is: nowhere. Survivors, refugees, and émigrés wrote about it extensively, but primarily in Ukrainian, and their audience consisted largely of themselves. Although some Western journalists had written about the famine in the 1930s, their focus soon shifted to other stories, while Western scholars ignored the famine almost entirely. A Soviet history atlas compiled by the reputable historian Martin Gilbert in 1972, for instance, illustrates the “main area of the forced collectivization of over 5 million peasant holdings 1929–1938” and notes that “thousands of peasants were killed when they resisted (some by armed force).”³

Even in 1983, during the fiftieth anniversary of the famine, the regnant view of one of the great crimes of the twentieth century maintained that it was a minor tragedy at best and a consequence of agricultural policy gone awry at worst. It was not until 1986, with the publication of Robert Conquest’s *Harvest of Sorrow*, that the Ukrainian famine first became more widely known to the scholarly community and the English-language reading public.

The status of the famine as a nonevent or an émigré fantasy has thus changed by 180 degrees. No serious scholar or political figure now disputes that millions of Ukrainians starved to death in 1932–33. There is general agreement that the famine was avoidable and almost universal condemnation of it as a crime.

But will the view of the Holodomor as genocide gain the upper hand? We suspect that the answer is yes because expert opinion is formed on the basis of both evidence and the normative and political zeitgeist. As *The Holodomor Reader* demonstrates, the empirical evidence for

² See “Soviet Genocide in Ukraine,” pp. X–Y in this volume.

³ Martin Gilbert, *Soviet History Atlas* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979; first published in 1972 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson as part of the *Russian History Atlas*), p. 34.

regarding the Holodomor as genocide is overwhelming. If one is neutral, one is likely to be persuaded. If one is a diehard skeptic or has a political agenda, on the other hand, no amount of evidence will do the trick.

But to focus only on evidence is to misunderstand how academic expertise works in practice. Although scholars deny it, they are swayed as much, if not more, by real-world events as by dry evidence. No one today would deny the importance of women, even though the evidence—women—was always there. It took a women's movement to convince academics to see the obvious. By the same token, it was only after policy makers and business people began glorifying globalization some two decades ago that academics took notice.

In sum, experts, like all people, are swayed by life—by the zeitgeist. And the Holodomor-as-genocide thesis is just such an example of a zeitgeist-in-the-making. The currently undisputed status of the Holodomor as a mass killing will set the norm for future scholars without political agendas. As the diehards exit, their place will be taken by scholars who view the famine from the perspective of today's norm—and not yesterday's. As a growing number of experts come to regard the Holodomor as genocide, a tipping point will be reached, and scholars, like all rational beings, will accept the genocide interpretation simply because it is the zeitgeist and makes sense.

Naturally, to conclude that the Holodomor was genocide is not to diminish the suffering of other peoples who experienced genocide or to enhance the suffering of Ukrainians. It is only to call something by its right name and, as we suggest at the end of this introduction, to begin to think comparatively and practically about how such terrible events occurred and can be prevented from recurring.

Organization and Logic

Although some of the selections in this volume touch on the years before and after the Holodomor and on events not directly related to the famine itself, *The Holodomor Reader* focuses on the famine of 1932–33, both because the killings during this period reached into the millions—at the high point of the famine, some 25,000 Ukrainian peasants perished each day—and because the Holodomor is the central component of the genocide of Ukrainians. No less important, any book attempting to encompass the entirety of the genocide, along with its origins and consequences, would turn into a massive undertaking that would defeat the raison d'être of this volume: accessibility and comprehensiveness for specialists and nonspecialists.

The Holodomor Reader only tangentially addresses one of the central controversies among students of the Ukrainian famine—the number of victims. Although readers interested in the demographic issues will find excellent guidance in the selections by Oleh Wolowyna and Jacques Vallin et al. included here, it was our conscious editorial decision not to delve into the question of numbers for two reasons. First, that question tends to be exceedingly technical and, as such, is better suited to a publication aimed at a narrow band of specialists, not a general readership. Second, we believe that the question of numbers—whether three million, six million, or more—is irrelevant to and a distraction from the far more important issues that the *Reader* addresses, namely, the existential reality of the Holodomor, the enormous suffering that its victims experienced, and the genocidal nature of Stalin's assault on Ukrainian peasants. There is, however, one point of contention that the *Reader* does resolve. As readers will note from the selections by Western journalists and others traveling to Ukraine in the 1930s, it was they who first suggested that the number of victims was six million or more, based on their conversations with Soviet officials.

Materials in the *Reader* have been organized into six sections: (1) Scholarship; (2) Legal Assessments, Findings, and Resolutions; (3) Eyewitness Accounts and Memoirs; (4) Survivor Testimonies, Memoirs, Diaries, and Letters; (5) Documents; and (6) Literature. A brief bibliographic note has been added as an aid to further reading and research. The texts for all six sections have been selected from a variety of published sources (one previously unpublished memoir and document also appear here). Many are easily available, many others are not, and some are known only to specialists. A large number of materials were translated into English expressly for the *Reader*. In most instances only excerpts have been provided. We have kept footnotes to a minimum in this introductory essay and have removed footnotes from the excerpts of scholarly writings in order to save space. Those interested in further study of these writings can consult the original works.

We chose materials for all six sections with three key aims in mind.

The first was to offer a broad picture of the Holodomor by presenting a large number and variety of sources and writings on the famine. These include scholarly literature and interpretations; Soviet Communist Party, government, and secret-police documents; diplomatic reports by representatives of four European countries; writings by outside observers and eyewitnesses to the famine, mainly journalists; accounts by famine survivors, such as testimonies, memoirs, diaries, and letters; appeals by contemporaries, such as Ukrainians living outside the USSR; legal assessments; and recent declarations, findings, or conclusions reached by governments and international bodies. The section on literature contains a variety of excerpts—most never before translated into English—from novels, stories, plays, and poems dealing with the Holodomor. Many of the writings are based on the personal experiences of the authors. Some of the works focus on the famine's most harrowing features, such as cannibalism; others dwell on mundane aspects—such as the difficulty of finding, cooking, and digesting food—that only accentuate the horror of the Holodomor. All the writings convey masterfully the pervasive sense of doom that became an everyday component of the Ukrainian peasantry's existence and nonexistence.

The second aim was to introduce readers to the context and consequences of the famine and to illustrate the many different ways in which it was perceived and treated by the international community, as well as by Ukrainian communities outside Soviet Ukraine. Although the 1932–33 famine was a catastrophic event of immense proportions and a historical event of international significance, it received surprisingly little attention in the world's leading newspapers. On the one hand, the Communist Party-controlled press in the Soviet Union suppressed news of the famine, while the Soviet authorities denied that it had taken place. This policy of denial continued until the late 1980s. To make the denial effective, the Soviet authorities banned foreign journalists from traveling to Ukraine and the North Caucasus in early 1933.

Although relatively few reporters witnessed what was taking place, some journalists, such as Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones, visited Ukraine illegally at the height of the famine and published reports about it. Some Western journalists, such as the *New York Times* correspondent Walter Duranty, reported on the famine in ways that belittled its scope and significance, thereby reinforcing the Soviet policy of silence and denial. Part of the reason for such biased reporting was the ubiquity of pro-Soviet sentiments among liberal and left-leaning Western intellectuals and journalists in the 1930s. While some left-wing journalists, such as

Louis Fischer, continued to sympathize with the Soviet regime even after the famine, others, such as Harry Lang, published honest, unvarnished accounts of what they had witnessed.⁴

Other international factors worked against the famine's receiving the international attention it deserved. Official British, Italian, German, and Polish documents in this collection show that, although diplomats were fully aware of the famine and reported on it in detail, governments chose to remain silent. The Holodomor took place during the depths of the Great Depression and in a period of profound political crisis in Europe, which saw the rise of fascism and the coming to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany in early 1933. European governments, led by France, which supported the post-World War I Versailles settlement, were alarmed at Hitler's assumption of power and considered the Soviet Union a potential ally against a revanchist Germany. Moreover, shortly after coming to power, the Nazi government began enacting anti-Jewish measures, which drew the attention of the world's newspapers and shocked Europeans. At the same time, Western corporations were eager to sell machine tools to the Soviet Union, which was paying for them, in part, with grain exports at depressed prices. In late 1933 the United States government recognized the Soviet Union, and in 1934 the USSR was admitted to the League of Nations.

Our third aim was to highlight the national characteristics and consequences of the famine and its relation to nationalism and the nationality question in the Soviet Union. Those scholars who oppose the genocide interpretation generally argue that the victims of the famine were mostly peasants who died because of the social class to which they belonged, which bore no relation to their nationality, and that the famine was a pan-Soviet phenomenon. Even if it was particularly intense in Ukraine, Ukrainian peasants were not its only victims. Finally, they argue that Stalin and the Soviet leadership did not intend to destroy a nation or an ethnic group: in their view, the famine was largely the result or byproduct of mismanagement, as well as of the chaos and brutality accompanying collectivization. In all these interpretations, the national—the specifically Ukrainian—dimension is incidental. We concur with Lemkin and many other scholars that the Ukrainian dimension was central to the Ukrainian famine.

As the United Nations Genocide Convention insists that genocide must entail the intent to destroy, at least in part, a national or ethnic group, a “national” interpretation of the Holodomor entails a demonstration that the famine affected Ukraine precisely because it was Ukrainian and that the decisions taken by the Soviet leadership with regard to Ukraine and Ukrainians before, during, and after the famine were based on that understanding. Since the main responsibility for the famine and the attacks on Ukraine's elites and cultural figures rests with Stalin, his pronouncements and actions are central to a genocide interpretation. As we argue below, Stalin's decision to embark on the intentional mass killing of Ukrainians was rooted, on the one hand, in his attempts to respond to and control critical events and achieve immediate or short-term goals and, on the other, in his understanding of communist doctrine, the nationality question, and the relation of class to nationality. By examining some of his pronouncements on these questions, we can observe how his thinking informed his decisions to attack Ukraine's political and cultural elites and intensify the famine in Ukraine and the Kuban.

Collectivization and Famine in the USSR and Ukraine

The years of the Great Depression and political instability in Europe coincided with the period in which Stalin consolidated his personal rule and turned the Soviet Union into a highly centralized

⁴ See excerpts from the writings of Louis Fischer and Harry Lang on pp. X–Y of this volume.

totalitarian state. By 1929, at the onset of the Depression, he had succeeded in sidelining his main political rivals and secured his position as undisputed leader of the Communist Party. His position, though secure, was not yet unassailable.

Nineteen twenty-nine was also the second year of the first Five-Year Plan, during which rapid industrialization and forced collectivization of agriculture took place, radically changing the existing social and economic order of the Soviet Union. The creation of collective farms was especially problematic in Ukraine and in regions such as the Kuban in southern Russia, where individual farming practices were well entrenched and most peasants were independent subsistence or small-scale farmers. In the Kuban and some areas of Ukraine, such individualism was reinforced by memories of Cossack self-rule, the national-liberation movement and armed struggles, and general resistance to Bolshevik rule in the years 1917–21.

Collectivization was accompanied by a so-called dekulakization campaign (the expropriation and exile or imprisonment of supposedly rich peasants, called kulaks, but also of those who resisted collectivization) and grain-procurement campaigns (forced deliveries or requisitions of predetermined grain quotas to the state at low, fixed prices). The dekulakization operations and the fear of being labeled kulaks, coupled with the grain-procurement campaigns, which saddled individual farmers with ruinous quotas, were means of intimidating and coercing peasants to join collectives. The Soviet authorities often used coercion, violence, and deportations to intimidate and punish farmers who resisted joining the collective farms or failed to fulfill grain-procurement quotas.

Despite the risks, many Ukrainian peasants were reluctant to join the collective farms. Those who did so were in effect consenting to the expropriation of most of their private property in exchange for integration into a nascent system of state-run agriculture. Most peasants who joined collective farms thus became highly dependent and impoverished farmhands, a condition to which they sometimes referred as a second serfdom. Unsurprisingly, many peasants resisted, especially in Ukraine and the Kuban.

Their resistance was both passive and active, resulting at times in violent acts against state officials. In turn, it was not uncommon for the Soviet authorities to respond to mass protests with brute force. The result was not unexpected. The forced collectivization of agriculture and the accompanying grain-procurement and dekulakization campaigns, the arbitrary and heavy-handed actions of state authorities against the peasantry, and peasant resistance led to great waste and chaos in the countryside, which was disastrous for agriculture.

The Bolshevik leadership touted collectivization—an ideological goal integral to the building of socialism—as part of its countrywide campaign of economic modernization. But collectivization also served the more practical purpose of creating state-controlled enterprises that allowed the collective-farm leadership and other administrative/police bodies in the countryside to supervise and manage the peasantry. Collective farms were naturally considered more reliable than individual farms in meeting grain-procurement targets. Grain collected during the procurement campaigns was meant to help finance rapid industrialization through sales abroad and to provide cheap food for the swelling cities.

But the grain levies amounted to an extremely heavy burden on the Ukrainian farmers, as the republic was assigned exceedingly high—and effectively unrealistic—targets to meet. While the quota was fulfilled in 1930 owing to a bumper crop, unfavorable climatic conditions and the chaos and waste inherent in the collectivization drive resulted in a much lower harvest in 1931. Ukraine was thus unable to meet its target, but Soviet officials continued their grain-procurement

campaigns. By December 1931 there was famine, and in the first half of 1932 deaths from starvation were observed in many parts of Ukraine.

This catastrophic situation caused alarm among Ukraine's officials, especially at the lower levels of the Party and government. In June 1932 two of Ukraine's leading communists and high-ranking government officials, Vlas Chubar and Hryhorii Petrovsky, wrote letters to Viacheslav Molotov, the head of the Soviet government, and Stalin, the head of the Communist Party, requesting relief and the reduction of grain-procurement targets for that year.⁵

Instead of taking measures to correct or reverse policies that had brought on the disaster and to avert an even greater catastrophe, Stalin reacted with scorn and anger to the Ukrainian leadership's plea for help. In a letter of 15 June to his lieutenant Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin insisted on maintaining the procurement targets, writing that "Ukraine has been given more than enough."⁶ Moreover, he blamed the unfolding crisis on Ukrainian officials.

In a letter of 11 August 1932 to Kaganovich (see excerpts in this volume on pp. X–Y), Stalin expressed concern over the opposition to grain-procurement targets in the Ukrainian Party and the overall reliability of Ukraine's Communist Party and leadership, noting the strength of nationalism in the country. Nationalists were referred to as Petliurites (followers of Symon Petliura, a political and military leader of the period of Ukrainian independence). Showing that he was following events in Ukraine closely, Stalin expressed fears that "[a]s soon as the situation gets worse," oppositional elements would coalesce, and Ukraine might be lost. Here, Stalin implicitly recognized the possibility of Ukraine's secession. Stalin also made known his intention to replace some of Ukraine's top leaders.

This letter was written four days after the promulgation of the so-called Five Ears of Corn Law, which declared all collective-farm property equivalent to state property and introduced draconian sentences, even death, for stealing state property. This meant that starving peasants now faced potential execution for taking grain to feed themselves and their families (see excerpts from the edict on pp. X–Y of this volume). While the 1932 grain levy for Ukraine was eventually lowered three times, the revisions were symbolic, as they did nothing to reduce the highly unrealistic quota to a level that would prevent mass starvation from breaking out in late 1932. Not only was the ruinous levy maintained, but in the second half of 1932 Stalin and the Soviet leadership took additional steps to coerce Ukrainian peasants into parting with their remaining grain. These included blockading entire villages and banning trade. Stalin also directed his wrath against those lower-ranking government and Party officials who tried to aid the starving peasantry. Many local officials and collective-farm administrators in Ukraine were removed from their posts; some were arrested and summarily executed.

In addition to applying pressure on Ukraine's lowest Party and administrative cadres, Stalin began replacing some of the country's mid- and upper-level leaders in September 1932. Earlier, in the first part of July, he had sent his lieutenants Molotov and Kaganovich to a plenum of the Communist Party of Ukraine called to discuss the agricultural crisis in order to pressure Party leaders to confirm the 1932 grain quota for Ukraine. In October 1932 he dispatched his two enforcers again—this time to Ukraine and the Kuban, heading special teams—to oversee and direct Communist Party and government officials during the grain-procurement campaigns.⁷ Their primary task was to squeeze as much grain as possible from the malnourished, exhausted,

⁵ See excerpts from their letters on pp. X–Y of this volume.

⁶ See excerpts from this letter on pp. X–Y of this volume.

⁷ Pavel Postyshev, who would soon be appointed Stalin's personal representative in Ukraine, headed a special team sent to the lower Volga region of Russia in December 1932.

and starving peasantry. To assist in the drive, thousands of communist cadres from Ukraine and Russia were mobilized to find grain that the peasants had stored in order to survive the winter and spring. Procurement teams often took all foodstuffs, not only grain, from peasant homes.

While famine also broke out in other parts of the Soviet Union in 1932–33, it was, unsurprisingly, especially intense in Ukraine and the Kuban. The large spike in Ukrainian deaths in late 1932 and the first half of 1933 was a consequence of the deliberate decisions and actions of Stalin and his close lieutenants Molotov and Kaganovich—decisions that pertained exclusively to Ukraine and the Kuban or were prompted in whole or in part as a response to developments there. Two of these were particularly important: first, the resolution of 14 December 1932,⁸ which revised and rolled back measures promoting the use of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine and the Kuban and criticized officials for improperly implementing cultural Ukrainization and facilitating nationalism, and, second, the order of 22 January 1933⁹ that prevented peasants from leaving Ukraine and the Kuban for other areas of the Soviet Union to seek food. The resolution adopted by the Politburo of the AUCP(B) on 1 January 1933, threatening Ukraine’s peasants with draconian punishments for “misappropriating and concealing grain,” is also significant.¹⁰

By early 1933, at the height of the famine, the repressive machinery of the Soviet state had turned against Ukraine’s Communist Party officials, who were accused of nationalism. On 24 January 1933 Stalin appointed his trusted lieutenant Pavel Postyshev as the Ukrainian Party’s second secretary, a post that effectively allowed him to act as Stalin’s plenipotentiary in Ukraine. Prior to Postyshev’s appointment, Stalin had replaced Ukraine’s secret-police chief with a more trustworthy and ruthless figure, Vsevolod Balytsky, who had held that position earlier. Postyshev immediately spearheaded a reign of terror against Ukraine’s cultural and educational personnel and other communists. Mykola Khvyliovy, a leading communist writer, and Ukraine’s most prominent old Bolshevik and champion of Ukrainization, Mykola Skrypnyk, committed suicide in protest in May and July 1933, respectively.

The intensification of the famine in Ukraine and the Kuban thus took place against the background of and in conjunction with the complete rollback of Ukrainization in the Kuban, the beginning of its revision and curtailment in Ukraine, and the start of a campaign of concerted attacks on Ukraine’s autonomous-minded communist political and cultural elites. The result was their partial destruction and the loss of any meaningful cultural and political autonomy that Ukraine and its Communist Party still enjoyed. In the Kuban, residents of several Cossack towns (stanitsas) regarded as particularly incorrigible were deported north, and the entire region was subject to de-Ukrainization and Russification.

Stalin’s Views on the Nationality Question

The period encompassing the attacks on Ukraine’s elites and the famine coincided with Stalin’s shift toward a more centralist and Russocentric state, which was accompanied by the promotion of Russian nationalism, messianism, and xenophobia. That shift was rooted in his long-standing views on the nationality question.

Stalin was the Bolshevik Party’s acknowledged authority on the subject. In his early years as a revolutionary Marxist, Stalin, who was a Georgian, had witnessed the strength of nationalist sentiment among his compatriots, including Georgian Marxists, and was well aware

⁸ See excerpts from this resolution on pp. X–Y of this volume.

⁹ See excerpts from this order on pp. X–Y of this volume.

¹⁰ See excerpts from this resolution on pp. X–Y of this volume.

of the potential implications of national feeling among the non-Russian peoples. He wrote theoretical works on the nationality question as it related to Russia dating back to prerevolutionary years and was responsible for nationality affairs in the first Soviet government.

Given this orientation and responsibility, Stalin was well aware of developments in Ukraine during the revolutionary period and civil war of 1917–20, including the country's struggle for independence under the Central Rada and successive governments. Stalin participated in major decisions concerning Ukraine and wrote articles justifying Bolshevik policy toward it, including intervention by Bolshevik forces, and denounced the Central Rada.¹¹ To him, the peasantry and the independence movement were the main obstacles to the establishment of Bolshevik rule in Ukraine. Stalin was also fully cognizant that the Bolsheviks had a more solid base of support in Russia than in the non-Russian periphery of the former Russian Empire, including Ukraine.

Writing in October 1919, Stalin made the following observation on the geographic and economic bases of support for and opposition to the Bolsheviks, as well as their relation to nationality:

As the civil war developed, the areas of revolution and counter-revolution became sharply defined. Inner Russia, with its industrial and cultural and political centres, Moscow and Petrograd, and with its nationally homogeneous population, principally Russian, became the base of the revolution. The border regions of Russia, however, chiefly the southern and eastern border regions, which have no major industrial or cultural and political centres, and whose inhabitants are nationally heterogeneous to a high degree—consisting, on the one hand, of privileged Cossack colonizers, and, on the other, of subject Tatars, Bashkirs and Kirghiz (in the east) and Ukrainians, Chechens, Ingush and other, Moslem, peoples—became the base of counter-revolution.¹²

At the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), held in April 1923, Stalin argued that questions of nationality and class were closely intertwined in the Bolshevik-ruled territories. “The class essence of the nationality question,” he concluded, “consists in determining the interrelationship...between the proletariat of the former state nation and the peasantry of the formerly oppressed nationalities.”¹³ In 1925, in a polemic with a Yugoslav communist, Stalin again drew attention to the close interrelation between social status and the nationality question. Here he declared that “the peasant question is the basis, the quintessence, of the national question.... [T]here is no powerful national movement without the peasant army, nor can there be.”¹⁴

In these three comments Stalin recognized that the class base of support for Bolshevik rule was in large part ethnically Russian and consisted primarily of the proletariat based in central or “Inner Russia,” as he described it. Stalin also understood that largely peasant-based nations, such as Ukraine, could come into conflict with nations, such as Russia, where the Bolshevik regime's base of support lay with the Russian proletariat. Moreover, Stalin recognized

¹¹ Several such articles appear in J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953).

¹² Stalin, “The Military Situation in the South,” in *Works*, 4: 297–98.

¹³ See *Dvenadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b) 17–25 apreliia 1923 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1968), p. 481.

¹⁴ Stalin, “Concerning the National Question in Yugoslavia. Speech delivered in the Yugoslav Commission of the E.C.C.I., March 30, 1925,” in *Works*, vol. 7 (1954), pp. 71–72.

that an oppressed peasantry could be mobilized to form the central component of the armed forces of a national-liberation movement.¹⁵

The 1923 Congress of the Russian Communist Party, which discussed the nationality question at length, adopted the policy known as indigenization (*korenizatsiia*), intended as a means of building support for Soviet rule—fragile at the time—and as a concession to and regulator of the national aspirations and cultural needs of the non-Russians. In Ukraine, *korenizatsiia* resulted in linguistic Ukrainization and affirmative action in state hiring policies and recruitment to the Communist Party. Ukrainization was also seen as a means of attaining foreign-policy goals by showcasing cultural development in Soviet Ukraine to Ukrainians living under Polish rule, who suffered cultural and other forms of discrimination, with the aim of creating pro-Soviet sentiment among them. Earlier, in 1921, in an attempt to reconcile the peasantry to Soviet rule, the Communist Party had adopted the New Economic Policy, which allowed for private farming and the disposition of surplus grain on the market after farmers paid a tax in kind to the state. These economic and cultural/linguistic concessions reconciled most Ukrainians to Soviet rule.

Limited autonomy in cultural affairs and state support for the Ukrainian language and cultural development led, however, to a national self-assertiveness that alarmed Stalin. In 1926, in an important intervention that demonstrated his close attention to the implementation and consequences of nationality policy in Ukraine, Stalin chastised Oleksandr Shumsky, a communist leader who was then Ukraine's minister of education, and Mykola Khvyliovy, a prominent communist writer. In his reprimand, contained in a letter to Kaganovich (then Ukraine's first Party secretary) and other Ukrainian communist leaders, Stalin criticized Shumsky for seeking to Ukrainize the Russian proletariat in Ukraine by force and expressed concern that Ukrainization could “assume the character of a struggle to alienate Ukrainian culture and public life from general Soviet culture and public life, the character of a struggle against ‘Moscow’ in general, against the Russians in general, against Russian culture and its highest achievement—Leninism.” This, Stalin claimed, was “becoming an increasingly real danger in Ukraine,” even among some Ukrainian communists. Stalin next turned his invective against Khvyliovy: “At a time when the proletarians of Western Europe and their Communist Parties are in sympathy with ‘Moscow,’ this citadel of the international revolutionary movement and of Leninism, at a time when the proletarians of Western Europe look with admiration at the flag that flies over Moscow, the Ukrainian communist Khvyliovy has nothing better to say in favour of ‘Moscow’ than to call on the Ukrainian leaders to get away from ‘Moscow’ ‘as fast as possible.’”¹⁶

The above passages demonstrate that Stalin was concerned not only with expressions of cultural autonomy by Ukraine's communist writers, such as Khvyliovy, and with some of Ukraine's political leaders, who were dissatisfied with the slow pace of de-Russifying Ukraine's cities. His comments reveal concern over the unity of the Soviet Union and indicate his support for Russian cultural supremacy as well as, implicitly, for Russian primacy in and leadership of the international communist movement. Stalin's criticisms represent an early manifestation of a fusion of Marxism and Russian nationalism, which becomes more evident in his pronouncements beginning in 1930. Stalin's intervention also presaged the possibility of his taking more decisive

¹⁵ See the excerpt from an article by Andrea Graziosi (pp. X–Y of this volume), who links the peasant and national questions.

¹⁶ See Stalin, “To Comrade Kaganovich and the Other Members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, Ukrainian C.P.(B.),” in *Works*, vol. 8 (1954), pp. 160–61.

measures against Ukraine's political leadership and cultural figures, which actually began in 1929.

That year the Soviet authorities arrested scores of Ukrainian noncommunist intellectuals, some of whom were associated with Ukraine's independence-era governments, cultural workers, and members of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, who were accused of belonging to a fictitious underground organization called the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (Spilka vyzvolennia Ukraïny, SVU). They were indicted in the SVU show trial of 1930—the preparations for which Stalin followed, even providing a directive—and sentenced to imprisonment.¹⁷

In June 1930, in the wake of the trial, Stalin expressed his concern over the national assertiveness of non-Russians in a report to the Sixteenth Communist Party Congress. There he described “local nationalism” (the national assertiveness or nationalism of the non-Russians) as an attempt “to isolate and segregate oneself within the shell of one's own nation.... The danger of this deviation is that it cultivates bourgeois nationalism, weakens the unity of the working people of the different nations of the U.S.S.R. and plays into the hands of the interventionists.... The Party's task is to wage a determined struggle against this deviation....”¹⁸

Although Stalin continued to pay lip service to the notion that Russian chauvinism remained the greatest danger within the Party, his flagging of the danger of local nationalism proved ominous. These passages repeated themes contained in his criticisms of Shumsky and Khvylioviy, while the call for the Party to launch a “determined struggle” against “local nationalism” signaled that active measures against Ukrainian and other non-Russian nationalism would continue. In 1931 additional repressive measures were implemented against Ukrainian intellectuals. This time the arrested individuals were accused of belonging to the fictitious Ukrainian National Center, which allegedly maintained ties abroad (in the province of Galicia, then under Polish rule) with the Ukrainian Military Organization.

Stalin also began expressing Russian nationalist views more explicitly. In a letter of December 1930 to the writer Demian Bedny, he criticized the latter for expressing anti-Russian views and characterized Russia as the center of the world revolutionary movement. “In all countries,” Stalin wrote, “the revolutionary workers unanimously applaud the Soviet working class, and first and foremost the *Russian* working class, the vanguard of the Soviet workers, as their recognized leader....” The leadership of workers' movements abroad, Stalin claimed, was “eagerly studying the highly instructive history of Russia's working class, its past and the past of Russia.... All this fills (cannot but fill!) the hearts of the Russian workers with a feeling of revolutionary national pride that can move mountains and perform miracles.”¹⁹

Nationalist sentiments are also evident in Stalin's address of February 1931 to the First All-Union Conference of Managers of Socialist Industry. Elaborating on whether the tempo of accelerated industrialization should be moderated, Stalin argued that slowing the pace “would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten.... No, we refuse to be beaten! One

¹⁷ See Stalin's telegram to the Ukrainian Politburo in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 253.

¹⁸ See his “Political Report of the Central Committee to the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. (B.),” in *Works*, vol. 12 (1955), pp. 382–83.

¹⁹ Stalin, “To Comrade Demyan Bedny. (Excerpts from a Letter),” in *Works*, vol. 13 (1955), pp. 25–26.

feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness....” Stalin further emphasized the achievement of statehood and its maintenance: “In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have had one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will uphold its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence?”²⁰

Stalin continued his praise of Russians, emphasizing the theme of Russia as a leading nation, in a speech given at a reception on 2 May 1933, following May Day celebrations. In his address Stalin characterized Russians as “the fundamental world nationality” that “first raised the Soviet flag against the entire world. The Russian nation is the most talented nation in the world.”²¹

While Stalin was promoting Russian nationalism, the Communist Party of Ukraine declared at its November 1933 plenum that in Ukraine local nationalism constituted a greater danger than Russian chauvinism. This decision reversed the long-standing official line adopted by the Russian Communist Party at its 1923 congress, where Russian chauvinism, not local nationalism, was declared to be the greater danger in the realm of nationality relations. The 1933 plenum resolution made reference to the 14 December 1932 resolution of the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) and the 24 January 1933 Politburo decision to replace members of Ukraine’s top leadership.²² Stalin himself declared Ukrainian nationalism the chief danger in Ukraine in his report of January 1934 to the Seventeenth Party Congress and stressed that under current circumstances it posed a danger to the Soviet state.²³ The shift in rhetoric obviously justified the assaults that had already taken place against so-called Ukrainian nationalists, now including Ukrainian communists, and presaged further repressions, which Stalin now implicitly linked to the defense and preservation of the Soviet state. The 1932–33 Ukrainian and Kuban famine raged, then, at the same time that Stalin was turning to Russian nationalism and conducting a campaign, begun in 1929, against Ukrainian nationalism.

Stalin’s pronouncements in the 1930s effectively expanded the rhetorical boundaries of what was politically acceptable and correct. He could do so not only because his firm grip on power allowed for some leeway but also because Russian nationalism already existed within the Communist Party and throughout much of Russian society. Russians could also feel a sense of pride in the achievements of industrialization during the first Five-Year Plan, which Stalin and the Soviet leadership accentuated. While consolidating personal power, building an industrial powerhouse, and collectivizing agriculture, Stalin was, according to his vision, also building socialism in one country. The Soviet socialist state he was building continued to retain the form of a federal, socialist state, but in content it was becoming increasingly centralized and Russian.

²⁰ “The Tasks of Business Executives. Speech Delivered at the First All-Union Conference of Leading Personnel of Socialist Industry, February 4, 1931,” *ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

²¹ V. A. Nevezhin, comp., *Zastol'nye rechi Stalina. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow and St. Petersburg: AIRO-XX, 2003), p. 44.

²² See the excerpt from “The Results and Immediate Tasks of the National Policy in the Ukraine. Resolution Adopted by the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of Ukraine on the Report of Comrade S. V. Kosior (November 22, 1933)” in this volume, pp. X–Y.

²³ See Stalin’s “Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.), January 26, 1934,” in *Works*, vol. 13 (1954), p. 369.

The Case for Genocide

The agricultural crisis in the Soviet Union came to a head by mid-1932. Up to this point, as noted by Andrea Graziosi (see pp. X–Y in this volume), the Ukrainian and Kuban famines can be regarded as part of a pan-Soviet famine caused largely by the general chaos associated with the collectivization drive, excessive grain-procurement quotas, and other accompanying measures. The result in Ukraine and the Kuban was a disastrous grain crop in 1932, which forecast the return of famine in the second half of 1932. It is at this point that the case for the specificity of the famines in Ukraine and the Kuban becomes obvious and the case for genocide becomes persuasive.

According to Graziosi:

In those places where the “peasant question” was complicated—that is, strengthened and thus made more dangerous by the national one (let us remember that Stalin explicitly linked the two questions in his writings on nationalism, and that the Soviet leadership had seen this hypothesis confirmed by the Ukrainian countryside’s great social and national revolts of 1919, repeated, albeit on a lesser scale, in early 1930)—the resort to hunger was more ruthless and the lesson much harsher....

Famine thus took on forms and dimensions much bigger than it would have if nature had followed its course. It was less intense, in terms of both drought and the area it affected, than the 1921–22 famine (the 1932 crop, though quite low, was still higher than the 1945 crop, when there were no comparable mass hunger-related deaths), yet it caused three to four times as many victims—essentially because of political decisions that aimed at saving the regime from the crisis to which its very policies had led and at assuring the victory of the “great offensive” launched four years previously.

The awareness that in Ukraine and Kuban the peasant question also was a national question determined the need to deal with and “solve” these questions together. In order to make sure that such a “solution” was there to stay, it was complemented by the decision to get rid of the national elites and their policies, which were suspected, as we know, of abetting peasants....

These measures were accompanied, and followed, by a wave of anti-Ukrainian terror, which already presented some of the traits that were later to characterize the 1937–38 “mass operations.” Thus ended the national-communist experiment born of the civil war, with the suicide in 1933 of important leaders such as Mykola Skrypnyk and writers such as Mykola Khvylioviy as well as the repression of thousands of its cadres.²⁴

The crux of the matter is that the policies of Stalin and the Soviet leadership in the second half of 1932 and early 1933 knowingly deepened the famine. Stalin’s view, as we have seen, was that questions of nationality and class could coincide, merge, or fuse, and that national and social groups could be virtually identical. Stalin’s statements also demonstrate his awareness that the decisions he took in 1932 and in the first part of 1933 would intensify the famine in Ukraine and the Kuban, crush Ukrainian peasants and elites, and thereby help him attain a variety of important political and social goals.

²⁴ See pp. X–Y of this volume.

As a potent center of resistance to Stalin's plans, Ukraine had to be crushed. Stalin destroyed, and clearly intended to destroy, a significant portion of Ukraine's most active cultural and political elite—especially the supporters of Ukraine's political and cultural rights—and terrorized the rest into conformity and passivity. Stalin was also fully aware of the national characteristics of collectivization in Ukraine and the Kuban and of the national dimensions of the 1932–33 famine there. Concurrently, he brought Ukrainization policies under central government control, thereby preparing the ground for their reversal in Ukraine and complete cancellation in the Kuban, which thereafter lost most traces of its Ukrainian roots. Throughout the 1930s, increasing state promotion of Russian language and culture was coupled with policies that served to reduce Ukrainian language and culture to second-rate or provincial status. In Stalin's view, the policies he was adopting facilitated and accelerated the consolidation of the Soviet state and society, whose dominant culture was to be Russian. The long-term goal was the total integration of the Kuban as a Russian territory and the eventual Russification of the Ukrainian people in order to deprive them of the potential to establish a state of their own with a full-fledged culture.

Stalin was also fully aware that resistance to collectivization and grain-procurement policies was especially strong in Ukraine and the Kuban. The famine thus served as punishment of a recalcitrant, individualistic peasantry that resisted Stalin's collectivist vision of agriculture. By intensifying the famine, Stalin weakened the peasantry as a potentially disruptive social force. His Marxist suspicion of the peasantry as a class permeated with petty-bourgeois values was reinforced by the belief that Ukrainian peasants in particular could be disloyal to the Soviet state because of their resistance to Soviet forces in 1917–20, when they frequently gave strong support to Ukrainian nationalist leaders and opposed the imposition of Bolshevik rule. The Kuban Cossacks also strongly resisted Bolshevik rule and had shown support for the Ukrainian national cause.

Acts of resistance to Soviet rule continued throughout the 1920s and resumed with the onset of forced collectivization, dekulakization, and grain procurement in 1930. Particularly alarming to Stalin and the Soviet leadership was the potential of mass social discontent in the early 1930s to merge with or turn into a national-liberation movement at a time when the Soviet state was experiencing vast hardships and was not yet fully consolidated. Because the peasant nation resisted, while its intellectuals and political leaders abetted national deviations that provided a theoretical justification for Ukrainian autonomy, Ukraine took on particular importance in the plans of Stalin and the Soviet leadership. In addition, the Ukrainian elites, who could have risen to the defense of the Ukrainian peasantry, had to be silenced or cowed into submission. The agricultural crisis gave Stalin the opportunity to subdue the Ukrainian peasantry and consolidate his control over the autonomist wing and other unreliable elements in the Communist Party of Ukraine. The result was genocide—the intentional destruction of significant parts of the Ukrainian peasantry and the political, cultural, and religious elites—not because they were peasants and elites but because they were distinctly Ukrainian peasants and Ukrainian elites who resisted Stalin or stood in his way.

As Nicolas Werth argues:

Up until the summer of 1932, the Ukrainian famine, already rearing its head, resembled the other famines that had started earlier elsewhere. However, from this point forward, the nature of the Ukrainian famine changed, with Stalin deciding to use hunger as a weapon, to aggravate the famine that was just beginning. Choosing to instrumentalize the famine, Stalin intentionally amplified it in order to punish the Ukrainian peasants who

rejected the “new serfdom” and to break “Ukrainian nationalism,” which he saw as a threat to his goal of constructing a centralized and dictatorial Soviet state. And while hunger hit the peasants harder than any other group, resulting in the death of millions in atrocious conditions, another form of repression, of a police nature, struck others in Ukraine at the same moment—the political and intellectual elites, from village teachers to national leaders, via the intelligentsia. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians were arrested and punished with camp sentences. In December 1932, two secret Politburo decrees put an end in Ukraine, and *only in Ukraine*, to the “indigenization” policy applied to Party cadres since 1923 in all of the federal republics: “Ukrainian nationalism” was firmly condemned....

This specifically anti-Ukrainian assault makes it possible to define the totality of intentional political actions taken from late summer 1932 by the Stalinist regime against the Ukrainian peasantry as genocide. With hunger as its deadly arm, the regime sought to punish and terrorize the peasants, resulting in fatalities exceeding four million people in Ukraine and the northern Caucasus. That being said, the *Holodomor* was very different from the Holocaust. It did not seek to exterminate the Ukrainian nation in its entirety, and it did not involve the direct murder of its victims. The *Holodomor* was conceived and fashioned on the basis of political reasoning and not of ethnic or racial ideology. However, by the sheer number of its victims, the *Holodomor*, seen again in its historical context, is the only European event of the 20th century that can be compared to the two other genocides, the Armenian and the Holocaust.²⁵

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

Although the Holodomor occurred some eighty years ago, its consequences for Ukraine and Ukrainians are still very much in evidence. Kuban Ukrainians have ceased to exist as a separate national entity within Russia. Ukrainians in Ukraine, meanwhile, suffered devastating population losses (compounded by the brutal Nazi occupation of Ukraine during World War II) that affected later birth and mortality rates, economic development, and political culture. In particular, Ukrainians not only experienced a genocidal trauma, but in the decades that followed they were compelled to pretend that it had never happened—a form of denial that distorted the national mentality and produced or reinforced a variety of post-genocidal syndromes ranging from historical amnesia to substance dependence to broken families to dysfunctional gender relations. Although Ukraine today is an independent country, the long-term viability of the Ukrainian language and culture in Ukraine, and possibly of Ukraine’s sovereignty itself, is still open to question—owing in no small measure to the terrible consequences of the Holodomor and the concurrent destruction of Ukrainian elites. No book can reverse history, but we trust and hope that *The Holodomor Reader* will promote understanding of the famine-genocide and, perhaps, help ameliorate some of its terrible consequences.

We also hope that *The Holodomor Reader* will spur specialists and nonspecialists to examine the Holodomor comparatively in relation to other genocides and other famines. We trust and hope that students of the Holodomor will increasingly investigate its origins, development, and consequences in comparison with other genocides, such as those that befell Jews, Armenians, Cambodians, Rwandans, Sudanese, and others. Comparative studies are always better served by a larger number of cases, and inclusion of the Holodomor can only enhance

²⁵ See pp.X–Y in this volume.

scholarly investigation of the dynamics of genocides. We also trust and hope that a greater understanding of the Ukrainian genocide will improve the effectiveness of measures taken against regimes that deliberately employ famine to destroy populations and bend them to their will. If we understand how and why genocides occur, we will be in a better position to prevent their recurrence.

A volume such as this can be produced only with the assistance of many people. In particular, we wish to thank Jars Balan, Marco Carynnyk, Iryna Fedoriw, Roma Franko, Andrea Graziosi, Liudmyla Hrynevych, Vladyslav Hrynevych, Halyna Klid, Cheryl Madden, Rajan Menon, Maksym Motorenko, Alla Parkhomenko, Ihor Piddubny, Roman Serbyn, Myroslav Shkandrij, Lida Somchynsky, Myroslav Yurkevich, Larysa Zaleska-Onyshkevych, and two anonymous reviewers for their assistance, suggestions, and criticism. The map showing the death toll of the Holodomor, reproduced by permission of the Kashtan Press (Kingston, Ontario, Canada), was redrawn for this volume by Wendy Johnson of Johnson Cartographics (Edmonton). Naturally, we assume full responsibility for the book's shortcomings, while hoping that they will spur others to correct them in subsequent works on the Ukrainian genocide.