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The Uses of Hunger
Stalin's Solution of the Peasant and the National Question in Ukraine, 1932-1933

Introduction

In 1931-1933 hunger killed in the Soviet Union approximately six million people: three to four died in Ukraine, 1.3 to 1.5 in Kazakhstan, and several hundred thousand in Northern Caucasus and in the Volga region. Suffering and starvation haunted the whole country, but for a handful of key cities, where, however, life became grim and miserable.

Yet up until 1986, when Robert Conquest published his *Harvest of Sorrow*, [1] research on the Ukrainian famine was almost non existent. Survivors' and witnesses' testimonies were not wanting, and some western historians did mention a Soviet "man-made famine," without, however, analyzing its Ukrainian, or Kazakh peculiarities. The overwhelming majority of scholars ignored the issue, textbooks on Soviet history did not refer to it, and books were published that put its very occurrence in doubt. In the USSR after 1956 Soviet historians could speak of "food difficulties," but the use of the word "famine" was forbidden. In Ukraine it was uttered officially for the first time in 1987. [2]

The impact of Conquest's book, the Soviet collapse, the possibility to gather new testimonies, and the partial, yet substantial, opening of the former Soviet archives radically altered the picture. The accumulation of new knowledge, and the collective effort of scores of scholars of many countries brought about dramatic breakthroughs in our knowledge of the causes, the dimensions, the dynamics, the responsibilities, and the geographic, and republican variations of what we now know to have been the Soviet *famines* of 1931-1934, among which the 1932-1933 Ukrainian-Kuban *Holodomor*—a term coined at the beginning of 1988 by the Ukrainian writer Oleksa Musiyenko, who fused the words *holod* (hunger, starvation) and *moryty* (to kill by starvation)—and the 1931-1933 Kazakh tragedy stand out. [3]

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[1] R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York, 1986). It was soon followed by Commission on the Ukrainian Famine, *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-33. Report to Congress*, edited by James Mace (Washington, D.C. 1988).

[2] Among published memoirs one may remember Viktor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York, 1946); Semen O. Pidhainy, ed., *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book*, vol. 2, *The Great Famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933* (Detroit, 1955); Miron Dolot, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust* (New York, 1985). In the mid-1960s Dana G. Dalrymple reviewed the available sources in "The Soviet Famine of 1932–1934," *Soviet Studies*, 15: 3 (1964): 250–84; 16: 4 (1965): 471–74. Diplomatic reports started to be published in the 1980s: Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, Bohdan S. Kordan, eds, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-33* (Kingston, 1988); Dmytro Zlepko, ed., *Der ukrainische Hunger-Holocaust* (Sonnenbühl, 1988); Andrea Graziosi, ed., "'Lettres de Char'kov'. La famine en Ukraine et dans le Caucase du Nord à travers les rapports des diplomates italiens," 1932-1934, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 1-2 (1989): 5-106 (see also the more complete *Lettere da Kharkov. La carestia in Ucraina e nel Caucaso del Nord nei rapporti dei diplomatici italiani, 1932-33* (Torino, 1991). The historians who mentioned the famine were Naum Jasny, *The Socialized Agriculture of the USSR* (Stanford, 1949); Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (London, 1969; 3rd ed., 1992); Moshe Lewin, "'Taking Grain': Soviet Policies of Agricultural Procurements before the War," (1974), now in *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985):142–77; and Zores A. Medvedev, *Soviet Agriculture* (New York, 1987).

[3] Sergei Maksudov [A. Babyonyshev], *Poteri naseleniia SSSR* (Benson, Vt., 1989); Feliks M. Rudych *et al.*, eds, *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukraïni: Ochyma istorykiv, movoiu dokumentiv* (Kyiv, 1990); Stanislav V. Kul'chyts'kyi, ed., *Kolektyvizatsiia i holod na Ukraïni, 1929–1933* (Kyiv, 1992); S.V. Kul'chyts'kyi, ed., *Holodomor 1932–1933 rr. v Ukraïni: Prychynyi naslidky* (Kyiv, 1995); N. A. Ivnitskii, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie* (Moscow, 1996); A. Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, Ma, 1996); M.K. Kozybaev *et al.*, *Nasil'stvennaia kollektivizatsiia i golod v Kazakhstane v 1931–33 gg.* (Almaty, 1998); Nikolai A. Ivnitskii, *Repressivnaia politika*

The growing consensus over the victims' number settled the issue: the *Holodomor* and Kazakh figures clearly indicate that we are not dealing with a Soviet famine with some "regional variations," but rather with a series of distinct phenomena, sharing however a common background.

There also is a growing, albeit still partial, agreement over the fact that in order to understand the *Holodomor*'s specificity it is necessary to grasp and keep together a combination of the social, i.e. the peasant, and the national factors, going beyond the divide between the "peasant" and the "national" interpretations of the famine. In fact, this combination operated also in Stalin's mind, and it is not a case if the crucial decree that in December 1932 reversed the course of the pro-Ukrainian policies in the national, language and education sphere carried the title "On Grain Procurements in Ukraine, Northern Caucasus and the Western region." [4]

In this essay, which makes use of some of my previous works, [5] I will try to reconstruct what happened in Ukraine in 1928-1933 on the basis of the best available research. This I will do from a comparative perspective, keeping an eye to both the pan-Soviet background and the "regional," and national tragedies. A short summary of the 1917-1926 events, whose knowledge is indispensable to grasp the importance of the Ukrainian question for the USSR and its leadership, opens these pages, which I conclude with a discussion of the genocide issue, whose analysis stresses the necessity of widening the focus of research to include the *Holodomor*'s consequences.

1. *Prologue, 1917-1927*

The Ukrainian national movement—headed by socialist parties—proved its strength in both the 1917 revolution, and the civil war that followed it. The great peasant insurrections of those years, and the repeated invasions of Kiev and other Ukrainian cities by peasant armies proved instead that this strength lay in the villages. [6] In 1918 this very fact allowed the Bolsheviks, who supported the peasants' demand for land, to briefly take the lead of the Ukrainian national movement's main constituency. Yet the Bolsheviks' requisitions, and pro-Russian policies, rapidly

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sovetskoi vlasti v derevne (1928–1933 gg.) (Moscow, 2000); V. Danilov, Roberta Manning, and Lynne Viola, eds, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, vol. 3, *Konets 1930–1933* (Moscow, 2001); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2001); Yuri Shapoval and Valery Vasylyev, *Komandyry velykoho holodu: Poïzdky V. Molotova i L. Kahanovycha v Ukraïnu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1932–1933 rr.* (Kyiv, 2001); Robert W. Davies, Oleg V. Khlevniuk, Edward A. Rees, eds, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931–36* (New Haven, 2003, but Moscow, 2001); Viktor V. Kondrashin and D'Ann Penner, *Golod: 1932–1933 gody v sovetskoi derevne (na materiale Povolzh'ia, Dona i Kubani)* (Samara, 2002); Volodymyr M. Lytvyn, ed., *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: Prychyny ta naslidky* (Kyiv, 2003); France Meslé and Jacques Vallin, *Mortalité et causes de décès en Ukraine au XXe siècle* (Paris, 2003); R.W. Davies and Steven G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (New York, 2004); Niccolò Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928–1934," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 45: 1–2 (2004): 137–92. Some of these new sources and part of the new scholarship are now summarized in Bohdan Klid and Alexander J. Motyl, eds, *The Holodomor Reader. A Sourcebook* (Toronto, 2012).

[4] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Larisa S. Gatagova *et al.*, eds, *TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, kniga 1, *1918-1933* (Moscow, 2005): 696-98.

[5] *Great Soviet Peasant War*; "The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian *Holodomor*: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would its Consequences be?" in H. Hryn, ed., *Hunger by design* (Cambridge, Ma, 2008): 1-20 (originally published in Ukraine in 2005); *L'Urss di Lenin and Stalin* (Bologna, 2007); "Why and in What Sense Was the Holodomor a Genocide?," in L.Y. Luciuk (ed.), *Holodomor. Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine* (Kingston, Ont., 2008): 139-158; *"Nezruchnyj klass" u modernizacijnykh proektakh*, "Ukraina moderna," 6 (2010): 9-17; my essay in the forum on Norman Naimark's *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton 2010) in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14: 3 (2012); the introduction to *After the Holodomor. The Enduring Impact of the Great Famine in the Ukraine* (Cambridge, Ma, forthcoming).

[6] Arthur E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: the second campaign, 1918-1919* (New Haven, 1963); A. Graziosi, *Bol'sheviki i krest'iane na Ukraine, 1918-199 gody* (Moscow, 1997); Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine, 1917-1922* (Toronto, 2011). Both Mikhail Bulgakov, *White Guard* (New Haven, 2008), and Alexander Barmine, *One who Survived. The Life Story of a Russian under the Soviets* (New York, 1945) vividly describe the entrance into Kiev of the Ukrainian peasant detachments in 1918-1919.

caused a reversal of the situation, and in 1919 Ukrainian peasants violently turned against the Soviet government, contributing to its dramatic defeat. This defeat played a crucial role in making Lenin shift back to his initial support for the national movements, and for adopting what could be called an anti-imperial, and thus anti-Russian, stand, especially but non solely in Ukraine. [7]

This shift laid the basis for the adoption in 1923 of the *korenizatsiia* (indigenization, from *koren'*, root) policies, which were to officially dictate the Party and the State choices in national affairs. The rights and privileges they granted to formerly oppressed nationalities pushed Terry Martin to call the 1920s USSR "an affirmative action empire," and were indeed substantial. Republican communist leaderships eagerly pursued them, trying to build a power that was at the same time socialist and national, rather than national in form and socialist in substance, as Moscow wished.

The party center allowed these leaderships ample room because it hoped to make out of Soviet Ukraine, Belarus, and of the Central Asian Republics as many models for the anti-Polish (and thus anti-Versailles) movements in the West, and for anti-imperialist ones in the East. Stalin's need of these leaderships' support in his struggle against Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Grigory Zinov'ev, also played a crucial role, the more so since the Left Opposition had taken a centralist stand.

As the party's main expert on the national question, and thanks to his experience as commissar for Nationalities during the civil war, Stalin had in fact a quite sophisticated grasp of the national problems, and of their importance for the new state. In 1923, reflecting upon the features of the newly "developed" (more than created) national Republics, he recognized the importance of Turkestan (soon to be divided into separate states) and Ukraine as role-models for the oppressed nationalities of the East and the West. However, he also stressed the dangerous weakness of the two Republics, whose apparatuses were "as remote from the language and manner of life of the people", and thus represented a problem that he then intended to cure via indigenization, and was instead to tackle in 1931-33 in a rather different way. [8]

Two years later, in 1925, Stalin explicitly linked the peasant question to the national one, showing a clear understanding of the opportunities, and the dangers, such combination possessed for the communist leadership. As he then wrote,

> the national question [is], in essence, a peasant question. Not an agrarian but a peasant question, for these are two different things. It is quite true that the national question must not be identified with the peasant question, for, in addition to peasant questions, the national question includes such questions as national culture, national statehood, etc. But it is also beyond doubt that, after all, the peasant question is the basis, the quintessence, of the national question. That explains the fact that the peasantry constitutes the main army of the national movement, that there is no powerful national movement without the peasant army, nor can there be. That is what is meant when it is said that, *in essence*, the national question is a peasant question. [9]

Opportunities, however, still seemed more relevant than dangers, and—also because of the struggle against the Opposition—Moscow continued to support Ukrainization, as shown by Stalin's 1925 decision to dispatch to Ukraine, as secretary of the local party, one of his most trusted henchmen, Lazar M. Kaganovich (whom he used again in 1932 to impose ferocious anti-Ukrainian policies), in order to speed up Ukrainization.

The same party that in 1919 had shut down many of the Ukrainian publishing houses founded in 1917-1918, and that up to 1923 had rejoiced at the "convergence" of the Ukrainian with

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[7] See for instance Lenin's theses of November, 1919, written to dictate the policies to be followed in Ukraine after its re-occupation, in Richard Pipes, ed., *The unknown Lenin. From the Secret Archives* (New Haven, 1996).

[8] "Draft Platform on the National Question for the Fourth Conference, Endorsed by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee," 9-12 June 1923, in *Works*, vol. 5, *1921-23* (Moscow, 1952-1954): 297-348; A. Graziosi, "Vneshniaia i vnutrennaia politika Stalina: o natsional'nom voprose v imperskom kontekste, 1901-1926," in *Istoriia stalinizma: itogi i problemy izucheniia* (Moscow, 2011): 215-235.

[9] Iosif V. Stalin, "Concerning the National Question in Yugoslavia," *Bol'shevik*, no. 7, 15 April 1925, in *Works*, vol. 7, *1925*: 69-76.

the Russian language, now strongly favored publication and education in the former: in 1927 a majority of the primary schools in the Republic had been ukrainized, and even in cities more than 40% of the students were taught in Ukrainian. Meanwhile, also because of what was being done with dictionaries, alphabet, and lexicon Ukrainian had started to diverge from Russian, and Ukrainian communist intellectuals were denouncing the "colonial" situation of their country vis-à-vis Moscow: the center, they said, absorbed local revenues, and invested them elsewhere, preferring the Urals or Western Siberia to the Donbas. Meanwhile, high republican officials discussed the need to create the economic basis for "true statehood." [10]

In 1926, however, things started to change. Ukrainian functionaries dispatched to Russia in order to set up in Ukrainian speaking areas the local national (Ukrainian) soviets contemplated by the agreements on the borders between the two Republics started to be accused of trying to build small "Khokhlands" (*khokhol,* the stereotypical Ukrainian Cossack style of haircut, is a Russian ethnic slur for Ukrainians). In April, Yuri Larin, a top Bolshevik leader that in 1917 had sung the praise for war economy and hyper-centralization, formally raised at the Executive Committee of the Federal Soviet "the Russian question in Ukraine," maintaining that Ukrainization in the cities was in fact a petlyurite policy (Symon Petlyura headed the Ukrainian national forced during the civil war). The Ukrainian leaders protested: Hryhoriy Petrovs'kyi accused Larin of using political police material, and Mykola Skrypnyk retorted that Larin had opposed Lenin's 1922 decision to form a Soviet Union, rather than a Federal Russian republic.

Stalin, who in 1922 defended the latter choice, worried more about foreign events and the Ukrainian communist leaders' evolution than about the Russians' fate in Ukraine. In that same spring of 1926, the local national-communist elite, after successfully removing some of the most faithful Moscow representatives in the Republic, had begun to agitate for Kaganovich's replacement, accusing him of opposing the request, advanced in March by the Commissar for education, Oleksander Shums'kyi, that Ukrainization be extended also to Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking main cities. Shums'kyi also supported Mykola Khvyl'ovyi, Ukraine's most important communist writer, who attacked those responsible for confining Ukrainian culture to provincialism and cultural servility, thereby reducing it to backward villages' folklore, that is to a Khokhland's culture. Ukraine, he maintained, was to look West, and could not be forced to reach the world via Moscow, and Russian culture.

In May, the success of Józef Piłsudski's coup in Poland brought to power in what Moscow then considered its most important enemy at the border a leadership that, contrary to Roman Dmowski's ethnic nationalists, aimed at building a federal Poland capable of extending eastward. Reversing the previous trend, it was now Moscow's turn to see "its" Ukraine threatened by hostile expansionist policies. It was in this climate that Petlyura was assassinated in Paris, formally in retaliation for the pogroms committed by some of his detachments in 1919 (but Petlyura had never been an anti-Semite).

When, in this new situation, the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (that is of Polish Galicia and Volhynia) came out in favor of Shums'kyi, Stalin understood that the mechanism built in previous years to attract the territories lost to Poland in 1920 had started to function backwards, and that the compromise with the nationalities which lay, together with that with peasants, at the heart of the New Economic Policy (NEP), was now generating problems rather than assuring stability. At the beginning of 1927, he therefore ordered the removal of Shums'kyi (who was to be poisoned in 1946) from Ukraine. Once more, however, the need not to alienate the powerful Ukrainian group during the final stage of the fight against Trotsky pushed Stalin toward moderation. Shums'kyi was thus replaced with Skrypnyk, who was to be the commissar for Education up until 1933, and used his powers to further Ukrainization.

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[10] J.E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge, Ma, 1983); Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (New York, 1985); Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Graziosi, *Urss di Lenin e Stalin*: 223-26; TsK *RKP(b)-VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, kniga 1, *1918-33*. I follow these texts up to the end of this section.

2. *The Assault upon Peasants and the Move against Nationalities, 1928-1931*

Stalin launched his attack on the countryside, thus laying the foundations for the end of the NEP, in January 1928, just a couple of weeks after Trotsky's final defeat. The idea was to impose to the villages a "tribute" that the state was to use to speed up the industrialization, and the rearmament of the country. [11] This tribute was to be extracted from more than 20 millions of peasant households by resorting to the requisitions, and the cruelty of the civil war. This policy immediately generated a wave of protests. Peasants fled to cities, reduced arable areas, thus laying the basis for further problems in following years, and here and there also physically resisted the special detachments' assault on their stocks. According to the political police, rural acts of mass resistance jumped from 63 in the first eight months of 1927 to 564 in the corresponding period of 1928. "Terrorist acts" and political killings also grew, while army recruits were submerged by an avalanche of angry letters from home, complaining about the new measures. The 5,000 men of the Novocherkassk garrison, for instance, received thousands of such letters in a single day. [12]

At first Stalin's initiative met with considerable resistance inside the party too, and was thus temporarily halted in the late spring of 1928. [13] The brief lull which followed, however, did not substantially alter the course of events. In a matter of months the "right" opposition was defeated and Stalin was free to pursue his former policies with renewed vigor.

Stalin thus consciously decided to reopen the conflict with the peasantry which the NEP, and the famine, had ended in 1921-1922. Their exclusion from rationing, reintroduced in 1928–29, was by itself an indirect declaration of war, [14] and there is evidence that the Soviet leadership knew what it was doing, even though it could not foresee how the conflict was to develop nor how it was going to be decided. For instance, when at the Central committee plenum of July 1928, Nikolai Bukharin (the "right" opposition leader) asked those present to imagine "a proletarian state in a petit-bourgeois country that forcibly drives the peasants into communes," Kliment Voroshilov interrupted him saying "as in 1918–1919." "Then you shall get a peasant insurrection," was Bukharin's answer. [15] It may be added that Stalin also knew that the combination of excessive requisitions with large industrial investments financed by massive exports of grain could cause in a few years an "artificial" famine. In fact, he had said so in December 1925, during a polemical exchange at the 14th party congress. [16]

In 1929 a new, and more violent wave of requisitions met with new, and more vigorous, if desperate resistance (peasant disturbances grew that year to 1,300), while the needs of industrialization—in the spring of 1929 the Party approved the most extreme variant of the first Five-Year Plan—made it imperative to seize as much grain, and other products as possible. This led Stalin, who was now free to act as he pleased, to officially launch his "revolution from above," based on the speedy mass collectivization of peasant households, preceded by the "liquidation" of the party's enemies in the countryside, targeted as "kulaks." The guiding ideas were the neutralization of the peasantry through the annihilation of its elite (dekulakization) and the

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[11] Yuri G. Fel'shtinskii, "Konfidentsial'nye besedy Bukharina," *Voprosy istorii*, 2–3 (1991):182–203; Graziosi, *L'Urss di Lenin e Stalin*: 228-252.

[12] Andrea Romano, Nonna Tarkhova, eds, *Krasnaia armiia i kollektivizatsiia derevni v SSSR, 1928–1933. Sbornik dokumentov iz fondov RGVA* (Napoli, 1997).

[13] M. Lewin, *La paysannerie et le pouvoir soviétique, 1928–1930* (Paris, 1968); Graziosi, *L'Urss di Lenin e Stalin*: 241.

[14] While it is true that during WWI peasants had been excluded from rationing all over Europe, no State then tried to take their land and their animals and to rob them of the greater part of their produce. In the conditions obtaining in the USSR during the 1930s, this exclusion, maintained up to the abolition of rationing at the end of 1934, meant that the Soviet state had formally decided not to consider the peasants as members of its own constituency.

[15] Miklós Kun, *Bukharin, ego druz'ia i vragi* (Moscow, 1992): 247.

[16] "Iz 'Pis'ma k Fedoru'," *Politicheskii dnevnik*, 25 (October, 1966): 148 ff. In the summer of 1928 the fact that the Stalinist policies could provoke a famine was openly discussed (in Fel'shtinskii, ed., "Konfidentsial'nye:" 198).

gathering of the highest possible number of families in relatively few large collective units more easily squeezed by the state (collectivization). Besides, the kulaks' properties made for an attractive booty in a land that, at the end of 1929, was being stripped bare: the state seized 22,4% of the crop, as against the 12-14% of the NEP years, and according to the Jewish Telegraph Agency "everything that could be exported or sold abroad" had already disappeared from Ukraine. [17]

At first, the national-communist leaderships, including the Ukrainian one, supported Stalin's anti-peasant about-face, and were blind to its obvious centralist, and anti-national implications. An important role was played by the disillusions all nationalist elites experienced in their relationships with their own peasantry during the civil war. Many hoped that a speedy industrialization and urbanization would build, in a few years, a much firmer basis for the national effort while solving once and for all the "accursed" problem of the colonial character of the republics' most important urban centers via the arrival in predominantly Russian cities of "ethnic" peasants from the surrounding countryside.

Ukrainian national communists were also reassured by the fact that indigenization policies did change, but were not discontinued. The assault launched in 1929 against the Ukrainian intelligentsia, often of bourgeois origins, was more than balanced in their eyes by the official praise of Ukrainization, then extended to Ukrainian communities of the Volga, Far East, Kazakhstan, and above all of the Kuban, in Northern Caucasus. Here Ukrainian national districts, with hundreds of thousand inhabitants, were being organized, while Stalin himself sung the praise of Ukrainization in a grandiose festival of Ukrainian culture organized in Moscow.

Industrialization, however, pushed the center to extend its power in a growing number of fields. In 1929, for instance, control over institutions of higher learning was transferred from Republican to Moscow Commissariats. Skrypnyk was assured they were not going to be Russified, yet—even though the percentage of students of Ukrainian origin continued to grow—the trend towards Russification was soon unmistakable. Above all, the attack on Ukrainian top intellectuals, and their Westernizing attitudes, did not stop. In July 1929 Serhii Efremov, an important literary critic, was charged with membership in an organization, the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (SVU), that was in fact a political police's creature, and in September the GPU "uncovered" a similar organization in Belarus too. By the end of the year, more than 700 people had been arrested, while Mykhaylo Hrushevs'kyi, the first president of the Ukrainian republic, whom the national communist leaders had convinced to return to Ukraine, was subjected to increased harassment, and forced to move to Moscow.

In January, 1930, Stalin personally wrote the Ukrainian Politburo demanding a prompt trial, and detailing the indictments it was to be based upon: the accused were to be charged with preparing an insurrection aiming at opening the doors to foreign invasion, with terrorism, and with plotting to poison communist leaders, under the pretext of curing them. Doctors were thus to be involved. Stalin also asked to give the trial maximum publicity, and not just in Ukraine. The pressures put on the arrested—who were forced to confess to imaginary crimes, and to indicate as imaginary associates—thus grew, as did arrests. The Ukrainian autocephalous Church was forced to disband, and many members of the Ukrainian Academy, historians, scientists, doctors, former leaders of the Ukrainian socialist parties etc. were jailed.

Thus started the process which led the Ukrainian national-communist leadership to slowly but radically change its mind over the following two years, under the impact of the new wave of centralism, and of the havoc wrought upon the countryside, and thus upon the Ukrainian "ethnic" element, by dekulakization and collectivization. The former contemplated the arrest and sometimes the liquidation of the men of the first of the three categories into which approximately one million "kulak" families were divided. The fate of these families depended precisely on the category to which they were assigned. Those in the first one, deprived of their men, were deported to distant

[17] Marco Carynnyk, "Day for Night. The Death and Life of Oleksandr Dovzhenko," *Kino-Kolo*, 22 (2004).

regions. This was also the destination of the men and the families of the second category, while those of the third were to be deported within the boundaries of their own region.

The attack was executed with great determination and rapidity between November 1929 and February 1930. The official balance sheet of dekulakization speaks of thousands of repressed and, often, liquidated people in the very first weeks, and of 381,000 families with 1.8 million members deported to distant regions in 1930–31. 64,000 of these families came from Ukraine, 52,000 from Western Siberia, 30,000 from the lower Volga, and 28,000 from the Urals. Their destinations were the special villages administered after 1931 by the OGPU.

In the wake of dekulakization came collectivization, which reached its first peak in February 1930 when close to eight million families were collectivized. Violence and terror were the usual methods: it is striking to read OGPU reports which conform to the descriptions left by the victims to the point that they are almost interchangeable. [18]

At the end of February, when up to 60 percent of the peasant households were collectivized, the Soviet leaders deluded themselves that success was near. At that point, however, under the stimulus of repeated requisitions and claims for tax arrears, the villages had united, overcoming their initial divisions. Since mid-February they were actively opposing the attack launched by the state.

The mounting wave of peasant resistance is well documented by the data the OGPU compiled for the party's top leadership: in 1930 there were 13,754 peasant disturbances (10 times the figure of the previous year) with 2.5 million participants in the 10,000 disturbances for which data were gathered. 402 of them, with four real revolts, took place in January; 1,048, including 37 revolts, in February; 6,528, with 80 revolts, in March; and 1,992, with 24 revolts, in April. To these collective actions we must add the approximately 4,000 acts of individual "terrorism," including 1,200 murders . More than 7,380 of these disturbances were directed against collectivization, 2,339 against the arrest or the deportation of "anti-Soviet elements," and 1,487 against the closing of churches. Lack of food (1,220), seizure of seed grain (544), and forced delivery of grain and other foodstuffs (456) were the next most significant causes of peasant actions.

The most affected "region" was Ukraine, with 4,098 demonstrations, in which well over a million peasants participated (29.7 percent and 38.7 percent of the respective totals). The Central Black Earth Region, which included Tambov (the site of one of the civil war's most important peasant anti-Bolshevik insurrection, the *Antonovshchina*), followed with 1,373 disturbances attended by more than 300,000 people, while the Northern Caucasus totaled 1,061 demonstrations and 250,000 rioters. The Middle Volga, the Moscow region, Western Siberia, and the Tatar Republic, with more than 500 mass demonstrations each, came next. For many reasons, the role of women and of their riots, which the OGPU put at 3,712, was crucial. [19]

The continuities, down to the geographical one, of this resistance with civil war insurrections—and sometimes even with 1905 agitations—are striking. In fact, they also struck the OGPU officials. In the Ukrainian reports, for example, we read that the rebellious villages were often the same that Semen Budënny's cavalry had "cut" 50 percent in 1920, while Iosif Vareikis, the Black Earth party secretary, noted that anti-collectivization revolts were stronger in the *Antonovshchina* strongholds. In the North, as well as in the Moscow and Leningrad regions, instead, peasants did not resist much. These were grain-consuming areas, whose inhabitants lived off seasonal work in the cities and in industry, with but a few well-off peasants. The state, therefore, was not much interested in requisitions, because it knew there was anyway but little to be seized.

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[18] Compare the OGPU reports published by Danilov with the testimonies collected in *Black Deeds of the Kremlin*.

[19] *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, vol. 2, *Noiabr' 1929-Dekabr' 1930*; A. Graziosi, "Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine de février-mars 1930," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 3 (1994): 437-632; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York, 1996); Isabelle Ohayon, *La sédentarisation des Kazakhs dans l'URSS de Staline: Collectivisation et changement social, 1928–1945* (Paris, 2006).

The program of these revolts was also strikingly similar to the civil war's one, even though the new situation pushed the peasants to add new demands to the 1918–21 list. Again, the OGPU reports present us with an unequivocal picture: the peasants demanded the return of the collectivized and requisitioned goods, and of the deported families, the disbanding of the Communist youth (unanimously considered a spying and provoking organization), respect for their religious feelings and practices, free elections of the village soviets, a stop to the requisitions, and free trade. Everywhere resounded a clear "No" to the return of serfdom, this being the name peasants gave to collectivization according to the political police.

Since peasants had been disarmed in previous years, demonstrations were mostly peaceful. Repressions was harsh, but not comparable to the one carried out during the civil war, also because scores of thousands of "kulaks" had been shot or arrested beforehand. Hundreds were killed, possibly thousands if Northern Caucasus is considered. Arrests and deportations involved instead hundreds of thousand. In spite of this fundamental difference, in matters of repression too there were strong elements of continuity with 1918–22. Those who had directed the operations then were still in charge in 1930—Vsevolod Balitskii in Ukraine, and Efim Evdokimov in the Northern Caucasus with the Dzerzhinsky division. As the latter case shows, special units were again employed to quell the revolts. The government called in regular troops only on rare occasions.

In Ukraine, as in other non-Russian areas, nationalist slogans were heard in the resistance's strongholds. In Central Asia—where *basmachi* (the civil war fighters-bandits) were once more at work—and Northern Caucasus (Chechnya in particular), big armed revolts occurred: the three largest Kazakh ones, for instance, could count on 2,000 to 4,500 fighters each. Moscow, however, worried more about what happened at the Ukrainian Western border, where local revolts swept away Soviet power for weeks, and peasants sung the praise of Ukrainian independence, confirming in Stalin's eyes the soundness of the theory which saw in the villages nationalism's natural reservoir and breeding ground. Peasants of Polish stock organized and led marches of entire villages, like that of Sulomna, toward the border with Poland, and thousands of Soviet citizens fled to neighboring countries, forcing the Politburo to order the immediate deportation of "kulak" families, starting with those of "Polish nationality," from border districts.

For Moscow it was not just a question of loosing face –after all official propaganda maintained that socialism was being built in a happy countryside. Stalin feared a repetition of the 1919 Ukrainian scene: large peasant revolts in the rear, opening the way to external enemies, and to Piłsudski in particular, who, as in 1920, could invade the country, this time with real British and French support. Yet, even though Warsaw knew quite well that Ukrainian peasants hated Bolshevism, and possibly longed for a Ukrainian People Republic (the name of Petlyura's state), Piłsudski also knew he did not have the forces needed for such an operation, and that most of the underground Polish and Ukrainian nationalist organizations uncovered by the GPU were non-existent GPU concoctions, feeding, and thus satisfying, Stalin's fears.

The specter of a major Ukrainian revolt, opening the door to a new invasion, thus was one of the main motives behind Stalin's early March decision to call forced collectivization to a temporary halt, accusing local cadres of "excesses" he had in fact demanded. We know that this specter, born out of the 1919 experience, haunted Stalin already at the beginning of the year, when he asked to make out of it the pillar of the SVU trial, which opened in Kharkov's opera theater in March against 45 defendants. Moscow's "Pravda" devoted scores of articles to its proceedings, thus transforming the trial into a symbolic indictment of the dangers of nationalism, and launching a precise signal about the boundaries that national-communist leaders were not to trespass in order to avoid to be involved in such an accusation. Always in March, a seriously worried Skrypnyk begged Stanislav Kosior, the Party secretary in Ukraine, to make sure that the positive aspects of the Ukrainian Academy's activities were also stressed at the trial. His request, however, was denied, indicating Moscow's intention to eliminate the very possibility of an autonomous high Ukrainian culture.

In that same spring, for the first time after the 1920 war with Poland, the regime made open use of Russian nationalism as a tool to keep control over a country that the assault launched in 1928

had economically, socially, and psychologically unsettled. The appeal to Russian pride, which Stalin formalized in his speech to economic executives of February 1931, then became a stable component of state policies, and Stalinist ideology. This implied a re-orientation of national policies, and a different appreciation of indigenization, which had upset many of the Russians living outside of Russia, who now heard Moscow extolling their role, and their history.

In primary education and promotions from the ranks, however, Ukrainization was still expanding: the publication of books in Ukrainian, which had started to grow in 1923, reached for example in 1931 a peak (77% of the titles' total), after which it soon started to decline. And always in 1931 the percentage of members of Russian origins in the Ukrainian party, which in 1922 stood at 72%, dropped to 52%, while the number of "ethnic" Ukrainians living in cities or working in industry was rapidly growing, proving in the eyes of national communist leaders the virtues of Stalinist industrialization: in 1932 ethnic Ukrainians passed for the first time the 50% mark in the population of a majority of Ukrainian cities. In the sphere of culture, however, and not only in the high circles already shaken by the SVU trial, things stood in quite different terms. Ukrainization thus lost its status, and was deprived of its ambitions and content, indicating the reduction of Ukrainian culture to a subordinate role, if not to mere folklore.

Other Ukrainian nationalities did not fare much better. The attack against the NEP, and the liquidation, and often the arrest, of *nepmeny* translated in Ukraine into an attack against diaspora communities (in 1926 Ukraine more than 40% of traders, artisans, shopkeepers, and small industrialists were of Jewish, Armenian or Greek nationality). Jews, in particular, also suffered because of the assault on religion, and therefore on synagogues and rabbis, of 1927-1930, while the *Shtetl*, that traditionally survived by providing services to peasant villages, were economically devastated by the peasants' pauperization.

In other words, the compromise the regime signed with nationalities in 1923 changed its nature, and was emasculated, but was not canceled, as happened instead to those with the peasants, the markets, money and the bourgeois specialists. Rather, its remaining vitality, and thus the richness of its content, varied according to geopolitical considerations, and Moscow's fears. These were higher on the Western border, and especially in relation to Ukraine. Where—as in the Caucasus, Central Asia or the Far North—the borders' nature, the limited dimensions of the nationalities involved, or their lower political and cultural "development" did not raise particular problems, indigenization continued more or less to follow its course.

Stalin's March retreat, and the 1930 good crop (three to five million tons larger than in 1929, in spite of the disruption caused by collectivization) seemed to calm the situation. However, a few months after the harvest, when peasants' stocks shrank and speedy industrialization made the state's needs grow, the struggle between the village and the state—which had succeeded in taking almost 30% of the crop, and was thus able to export 4,8 million tons of grain—reached new heights. Once more, the latter focused its attention upon grain growing areas: at the end of 1930 Ukraine, Northern Caucasus and the Volga regions were given the target of collectivizing 80% of peasant families by June, 1931, while in the whole country their number was to double from 6.5 to almost 13 millions, approximately 50% of the total. Yet new waves of arrests, deportations, forced collectivization, "excesses" and mass and individual acts of resistance, both active and passive (the new *kolkhozniki* worked much less than their old peasant selves), thus hit the countryside, and especially the above mentioned "regions," while the peasants were left with but two choices: either join a kolkhoz, and give it 30-60% of their time and work for no remuneration at all, or try to flee to cities and industry.

The 1931 harvest provided for but a short lull, also because this time the crop was not a good one, and villages feared for their future. Procurements thus became a warlike operation, accompanied by violence and arrests, raising concerns, and doubts, even among local party leaders, especially in national areas. At the October plenum some openly said that weather and food difficulties required lowering the procurement targets. Worried about feeding the cities and the army, and obsessed with hard currency problems, and thus with export capacity, Stalin harshly

answered through Anastas Mikoyan that "the question of how much is left to eat and for other needs is not important. What is important is to tell kolkhoz that they have to meet the state's needs first; their own ones will have to wait." Procurements were thus to be conducted independently of the peasants' conditions, and the peasants' toil was to be remunerated only if something was left after the state had taken what it needed (approx. 40% of the harvest, more in grain growing regions).

In 1932 the USSR was thus able to export almost five million tons of grain. In the countryside, however, the havoc brought upon the villages presented its bill: the liquidation of the ablest peasants ("kulaks"), the loss of a large part of the livestock (peasants often slaughtered, sold or ate their animals rather than giving them to the kolkhoz), the consumption of existing stocks and reserves, the bad organization and the malfunctioning, to say the least, of the newly born kolkhoz could not but deeply affect the productive capacity and the spirit of the rural population, and thus production itself all over the country.

The situation, however, had begun to considerably diverge in different areas. In grain producing ones, where the state had concentrated its requisition efforts, food difficulties and peasant unrest were more intense, and in the early spring of 1932 pockets of actual famine started to appear, as they had in 1921, after the 1920 great requisition campaign. It was in Kazakhstan, though, that the situation first precipitated.

As Niccolò Pianciola proved, the terrible famine cum epidemics that was to wipe out more than one third of the indigenous population was not the outcome of compulsory "sedentarization," that as a mass campaign was never implemented. Rather, grain and livestock procurements were the prime factors behind the tragedy, as in the rest of the country. The decision to seize most of the Kazakh herds—also to replenish the stocks, devastated by collectivization, of the main Russian and Ukrainian agricultural regions—was of special importance. The similarities between the Kazakh and Ukrainian (or the Northern Caucasus) tragedies did not stop at causes: as it was to happen in Ukraine, Kazakhs were at times prevented from escaping famine-struck regions or seeking aid in cities or towns. Yet, there were also important differences: kolkhoz played but a minor role, and the fate of the indigenous population was often dictated by indifference rather than intention: while it's true that local, Slavic officials preferred their kin in the distribution of scares resources, Moscow never pursued a conscious anti-Kazakh policy, also because the strength of local national-communists, and the dangers posed by the borders with China, were not even comparable with the Ukrainian ones. [20]

3. *1932-33: Crisis and* Holodomor

In early 1932 Moscow realized that peasants, and especially those of grain-producing areas such as Ukraine, Northern Caucasus and the Volga regions, were not doing what the state expected from them. As usual Stalin interpreted their actions, which were a direct response to excessive requisitions, as a plot, orchestrated by enemies. The lists of "kulak bandits" and "leaders of kulak insurrections" whose death sentence was sanctioned by the Politburo in March and April are but an indicator of the repression which followed. In spite of the 1931 decision to stop them, deportations too started again to grow: in April the Politburo decided to deport 38,300 families, 6,000 of which from Ukraine. Eventually, more that 70,000 peasants were deported, followed by another 200,000 in 1933, so that the 1930-1933 official grand total reached the 2,25 million mark. This without considering the peasants who were first exiled within the boundaries of their region. When speaking

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[20] N. Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera. Colonizzazione agricola, sterminio dei nomadi e costruzione statale in Asia central, 1905-1936* (Roma, 2009); Ohayon, *Sédentarisation des Kazakhs*; Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine, 1921-1934*, PhD dissertation (Yale University, 2011). Of special importance is Turar Ryskulov's (a Kazakh communist leader) detailed letter to Stalin of March 9, 1933, in *Sovetskoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska, 1928-1941* (Moscow, 1999): 204-225.

among themselves, Stalinist leaders quoted even higher figures: Stalin spoke of 10 million exiled peasants, and at the end of his life Molotov boasted of even higher data.

Meanwhile, the already mentioned, clearly visible pockets of famine were pushing the regime to adopt measures to alleviate the situation, following—on a much reduced scale—what Lenin had done in the spring of 1921. At the end of March, for example, the Politburo prohibited the seizing of individual livestock, thus de facto allowing peasant families to keep a cow, whose milk was essential to the children's survival. It also lowered the procurement target for meat and grain, and in early May kolkhoz, and *kolkhozniki*, were authorized to sell on the market what they could *after* fulfilling their obligations to the state. Since most peasants had very little, or nothing, to sell, the "kolkhoz markets," which were later to play an important role in Soviet history, started their adventure on a very low key.

Above all, Stalin consented to buying a limited amount of grain in the Far East and in Iran. He thus tried to appease peasants before the gathering of the crop, and proved he knew which measures were needed in order to counter the crisis looming ahead. Contrary to what Lenin had done in 1921, however, Stalin decided to do just the barest minimum, without altering the basic course of his policies. The country's conditions thus continued to deteriorate. Later in the spring, while in Kazakhstan even Slavic colonists began to die, the sowing area of the country's best agricultural regions shrank significantly as a result of the peasants' physical exhaustion and lack of motivation, as well as of the great reduction in livestock (especially horses), and of the kolkhoz's abysmal organization.

By mid-May in Ukraine only eight million hectares had been sowed, as against the 15,9 of 1930 and the 12,3 of 1931, and local officials, village school teachers and party cadres had already begun to inform the center about the seriousness of the famines affecting the areas where the requisition brigades had concentrated their efforts. Always in May, rumors about the sale of human flesh in city markets circulated in Kiev barracks; and in June the OGPU reported that in Ukraine sowing was taking place in extremely tense conditions, peasants killed themselves in order to avoid death by starvation, and cannibalism was becoming more and more frequent.

On June 10, the Ukrainian premier, Vlas Chubar', wrote Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov stressing how bad the situation was: at least 100 districts (*raiony*) needed food help, and there were growing difficulties in meeting the cities' bread requirements. Soon afterwards, the Ukrainian President, Petrovs'kyi—who in April had written Stalin of villages starving because of local requisition "excesses"—wrote the Ukrainian party secretary, Kosior, that the situation required telling Stalin that procurements in Ukraine had to stop. Both Chubar' and Petrovs'kyi used the word famine (*golod*), which was officially banned.

Such pressures, and the news about famines' victims reaching into the scores of thousands, pushed Stalin to make some concessions: in a letter to Kaganovich, for example, he mentioned the need to lower—"for a sense of justice"—procurements in Ukraine's most difficult areas, keeping also in mind the needs of border districts. Such reductions—he added—were anyway to be of a local, and limited nature.

More importantly, however, Stalin began to convince himself that the difficulties his anti-peasant policies were encountering in Ukraine depended on the fact that local officials were abetting the villages' resistance because of "national" reasons. As Martin showed, [21] Stalin was in fact the first to give the famine a "national interpretation," anticipating Ukrainian nationalists. At the beginning, he ranted in private against Republican leaders, whom he considered responsible for a crisis they had not met with the necessary resolve. On July 2, for example, he wrote Kaganovich and Molotov that Chubar's corrupted and opportunistic essence and Kosior's rotten diplomacy and criminally frivolous attitude toward his job were ruining Ukraine. It was therefore necessary for them to be present at the 3rd Ukrainian party conference, which was to be forced to adopt a

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[21] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*: 273-308.

Bolshevik stand, defeating Petrovs'kyi's and Chubar's hypocritical self-criticism, and Kosior's silence. [22]

Under the pressure of the villages' desperate conditions, the Ukrainian party was in fact leaning against Moscow. At the conference, which opened on July 6 in Kharkov, many delegates, whose speeches were to be censored in the official minutes, spoke of requisition brigades who forced peasants to sit naked in the snow in order to squeeze them of all their belongings, and of bloated people who could not raise for work. Chubar' invited local cadres not to accept orders independently of their consequences, and implied that the crisis's responsibility lay with Moscow's policies, and not with the Ukrainian government's or the peasants' behavior. Skrypnyk, who still headed the commissariat for Education, was even blunter:

> What is the reason for our current failures, our current situation? How is it possible that Ukraine, in spite of a not particularly bad harvest..., has to deal with food difficulties in many districts? Since January I have driven through more than thirty districts… I heard the following answer... "The communists are at fault for the nonfulfillment of the grain-procurement plan, for the poor food situation; the communists took the grain, and that is why there is no grain to live on… that is why there is famine in certain localities." [23]

As Stalin hoped, however, the conference finally followed Molotov and Kaganovich, who switched its focus from complaints against Moscow to the duties communists had towards the state. As Molotov was later to repeat, "even if today we are facing, especially in grain producing areas, the famine specter... procurements have to be carried out at all costs," as required by the need to avoid a large-scale repetition of the spring's food-riots in industrial cities, and to honor German loans.

The conference's final resolutions didn't however placate Stalin, who suspected that the Ukrainians had only formally complied, a hypothesis confirmed by what Kaganovich reported to the despot, who was vacationing in the South, about what was possibly the last recorded disagreement with Stalin in a Politburo meeting. On August 2 someone, possibly Petrovs'kyi, objected to Stalin's draft of what was to become on August 7 the draconian law on the defense of state property against peasant theft. Criticism, voiced also by other leaders, focused on the second paragraph, stating that those responsible for theft of kolkhoz property were to be sentenced to death, or to 5-10 years of forced labor in presence of mitigating circumstances. On the basis of this decree, which was eventually approved in Stalin's initial draft, more than 100,000 people were sentenced in less than five months, 4,500 of them to the supreme penalty (a figure suggesting that later statistics about death sentences in the country are not reliable), by judges that confessed that their "petit-bourgeois" prejudices often caused them to agonize when sentencing a person to 10 years in the camps for the theft of a few ears of grain.

Stalin's suspicions were confirmed by OGPU reports which accused Ukrainian communist cadres to be infected with nationalism, and to act on orders from the Polish General Staff. According to the political police, at least 50 party district committees, including those of Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk (the Tsarist Ekaterinoslav thus renamed to honor Petrovs'kyi) had doubts about procurement policies, as proved by statements by local party cadres who allegedly said things like: 1. I will not carry out procurement plans; 2. It will be difficult to fulfill procurement quotas, but I know what to do: I will return my party card and become a free man; 3. To force the population to starve is criminal. It's better to return my party card, than to sentence peasants to death by starvation, etc.

On August 11, in a crucial letter to Kaganovich, Stalin wrote that Ukraine had become the main issue, that the Republic's party, state, and even political police organs teemed with nationalist agents and Polish spies, and that there was the real risk of "losing Ukraine," which should instead be transformed into a Bolshevik fortress. [24] Since on July 25 the USSR and Poland had signed a

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[22] *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence*: 152.
[23] Now in Klid and Motyl, *Holodomor Reader*: 237.
[24] O.V. Khlevniuk et al. (eds.), *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931-1936 gg* (Moscow, 2001): 273–74.

non-aggression pact, Stalin was probably exploiting a foreign threat that was not there in order to liquidate his internal enemies, and to consolidate his position, as he had repeatedly done in the past, most famously in 1927 against Trotsky.

Meanwhile the harvest, and procurements confirmed the seriousness of the situation. Out of approximately 60 million tons of grain, a figure only slightly inferior to the 1931 one, the state was able to seize only 19 tons, against the 23 of the previous years, while much of the crop rotted in the fields. Procurements were bad especially in Ukraine and in the Northern Caucasus, which gave Moscow 60% less than in 1931, going respectively from 32 to 23, and from 14 to 10%, of the procurement total. Things were bad in the Black Earth area too, and the situation was saved by Western Siberia and the Volga regions, which were brutally squeezed.

The lack of grain and other agricultural products lowered exports, causing a crisis in the balance of payments. Hard currency simply was not to be had, and the state had to suspend payments to foreign specialists and workers. Many thus left the country, compounding the situation in the newly built factories, which still needed parts, machinery, etc. Metals too could not be imported in the required quantities, and many industrial giants producing tractors, armaments, vehicles etc. stopped working for weeks at a time.

In September-October the regime thus seemed, and was, on the verge of collapse: grain reserves were low, exports at a standstill, the German bills of exchange, used in 1931 to re-launch industrialization after the 1930 crisis, were soon due, cities teemed with former peasants who deeply disliked the regime, and workers' discontent grew, making Moscow shiver at the consequences of yet another cut in food rations. In this situation even heavy industry leaders, like Sergo Ordzhonikidze, who had enjoyed maximum priority, despaired of succeeding, while in the party circulated documents attacking Stalin and his policies. On November 7th, following the celebration of the revolution's 15th anniversary, Stalin's wife committed suicide, most probably because of a combination of private and political reasons.

Above all, famine loomed ahead. Yet, as it happened in 1921-22, when famine put an end to the state's confrontation with peasants, the much more terrible hunger of 1932-33 was to save the regime after threatening its very survival. Salvation, however, was only a possibility. It materialized because of Stalin's extraordinary self-confidence, cruelty and will power: in spite of those months' terrible blows, personal ones included, he dealt with the situation by applying the preventive, category-based, and thus collective model of large scale repression which had reached its first peak with dekulakization to a number of national, social-national and political groups which in his judgement posed a threat to the regime. [25]

Already in the 1932 summer the party had once more become a target of the political police, as it had been during the fight against the oppositions. However, grain, and thus the situation in the countryside, Ukraine, and Ukrainians, Ukrainian national-communists in particular, topped the list of Stalin's worries, especially after the data about the new crop and procurements began to arrive. First Moscow started to censor even the language used in internal reports: if up to September one could find in them news about starvation and cannibalism, after that date such information disappeared because, as Kaganovich and other leaders said, such kind of reporting was just a "photograph of reality," and badly influenced party cadres, making them sensitive to human suffering, and thus inclined to give peasant bread. Then, on October 22, Stalin dispatched Molotov, Kaganovich, and Pavel Postyshev to Ukraine, Northern Caucasus, and the Volga to redress the situation (he also sent Filipp Goloshchekin in Kazakhstan a harsh telegram announcing drastic measures if procurement plans were not fulfilled).

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[25] In 2004, in a letter to the author, Oleg Khlevniuk pointed out that many of Stalin's policies had what could be called "genocidal" features. "No matter what problem arose in the country, it was solved through the application of violence directed at specific and well-defined socio-cultural or national groups of the population." These groups and the treatment inflicted on them, from preventive measures to liquidation, varied over time according to the internal and international situation and the despot's own beliefs. The *Holodomor* must be understood against this background.

The three leaders left Moscow after a meeting in which Stalin armed them with his reading of the crisis. A week later Molotov forced the Ukrainian Politburo to approve a resolution calling for the "tightening of procurements," which became the party's highest priority, and contemplating harsh punishment for the kolkhoz which did not fulfill their obligations. An even harsher treatment was inflicted by Kaganovich upon local officials in Northern Caucasus, and especially in the Ukrainian-settled Kuban, whom he told

> Let me remind you that in 1921 we deported the Cossacks who fought Soviet power... You do not like to work here, then we deport you. Someone may object: you cannot do this, it is illegal. Well, that's not true. It is legal. You take side against Soviet power, you do not sow, therefore—in the name of state interests—Soviet power has the right to fight against your attitudes... We shall achieve our aims, if not with you—dear comrades—then bypassing you. [26]

Molotov and Kaganovich briefly returned to Moscow to report on the situation. It was probably in those days, the very days in which Stalin's wife committed suicide, that the decision to use the famine, at once enormously and artificially strengthening it, was taken. The idea was to impart a lesson to peasants who refused the "new serfdom," thus forcing them to swallow it. The lesson was tragically simple: he, who does not work in the collective fields, will not eat, and Stalin hinted at it in his 1933 correspondence with the writer Mikhail Sholokhov. [27] The Don "esteemed grain-growers," on whose behalf the writer pleaded, had waged a "'secret' war against Soviet power, a war in which," Stalin added turning reality upside-down "they used hunger as a weapon," and of which they were now bearing the consequences, that is, implicitly, famine.

In Northern Caucasus Kaganovich resorted to fines in nature to deprive peasants of meat and potatoes too, and "blacklisted" entire areas, whose goods and reserves were systematically removed, while new imports were forbidden. Local artificial famine were thus initiated. Other villages were deported, thus making previous threats true. Eventually, about 60,000 Kuban Cossacks were deported, while many more simply starved to death. Since Kuban Cossacks were as a rule of Ukrainian descent, deportations acquired an unmistakable ethnic "hue," and the villages whose inhabitants were deported were re-populated with former soldiers.

Local communist cadres suspected of abetting peasants were hunted down, because—as Stalin said—nobody believed their complaints about the lack of grain, and the state—not the village—had to guarantee its survival. At the end of November, the despot maintained that after all the "sabotage" of collectivization and procurements was playing a positive role, since it was allowing the party-state to vet its local cadres, replacing untrustworthy ones. Kaganovich, for instance, divided rural communists into three categories: 1. Those unable to work, who because of their ignorance, or stupidity, fell an easy prey to the bourgeois specialists' machinations; 2. The hypocrites who, in the name of compassion and great-heartedness, treated the peasants liberally; and 3. Those who were in the service of the enemy. Eventually, 15,000 local cadres were arrested in the entire Northern Caucasus, 5,000 of whom in the Kuban, where the cadres of Ukrainian descent—charged with being agents of Petlyura and Piłsudski—suffered the most. Approximately half of the kolkhoz party secretary were punished, and many were executed, at times for "populism" (meaning that they had fed the peasants).

In Ukraine an informal government and party center directly controlled by Moscow de facto replaced regularly elected bodies, and the Republic thus came to be governed on an emergency basis. On November 18 Molotov forced the local Central committee to pass a resolution on the "strengthening of procurements" which ordered peasants to return the meager advances in kind over the new crop they had received in exchange for their work. In the following weeks he was thus able to squeeze another 90 million *pud* of grain, while—as in Northern Caucasus—local cadres who

[26] Loris Marcucci, *Il primato dell'organizzazione. Biografia politica di L. Kaganovich*, PhD Dissertation (Università di San Marino, Scuola Superiore di Studi Storici, 1991): 282-83 (Torino, 1997); Shapoval and Vasylyev, *Komandyry velykoho holodu*.

[27] Yuri G. Murin, ed., *Pisatel' i vozhd': Perepiska M.A. Sholokhova s I.V. Stalinym* (Moscow, 1997).

dared to defend peasants were fiercely repressed, thus operating a negative selection: while the most brutal among them got promoted, the more humane ones were persecuted or committed suicide, like the district president who in his last letter to Skrypnyk wrote "I no longer have the strength to so shamefully bully my own people." [28]

Meanwhile Balitskii, dispatched back to Ukraine with Molotov to head the local political police, used Stalin's "national interpretation" of the famine to launch a massive terror campaign: the political police's primary aim, he said, was to be the prompt uncovering, and defeat, of rebel counter-revolutionary activity, and the harsh punishment of all the kulak, counter-revolutionary and Petlyurite elements sabotaging party's and Soviet power's policies in the countryside. More than 1,200 counter-revolutionary groups were thus "uncovered" in the Republic's kolkhoz: in just one month (November 15 – December 15), the Ukrainian GPU (whose leading troika enjoyed for a time the right to autonomously mete out the death penalty in quelling revolts) arrested almost 16,000 people, destroying underground organizations of its own making, accused of profiting of food difficulties to start an insurrection in connection with Poland and émigré Ukrainian nationalists. As a pleased Balitskii was to declare in the following February, the GPU had thus defeated an accurately prepared, centralized plan to launch in the spring an armed revolt, aiming at overthrowing Soviet power and establishing an independent Ukrainian republic (the reference to 1919 is obvious). [29]

Postyshev resorted to similar, yet not as harsh, measures in the Volga regions he toured in December, [30] while the crisis gave new impetus to repression all over the country. The political police arrested 410,000 people in 1932, and more than 500,000 in 1933, 283,000 of whom for counter-revolutionary crimes (the figure is possibly underestimated, given the arbitrariness obtaining in the countryside).

In 1932-1933 Stalin's terror thus followed two principal lines, one linked to requisitions, and therefore stronger in grain-producing areas, and the other of a more directly political nature, which reached its heights in regions that the regime considered particularly dangerous, because of past rebellions, the strength of their national movements, or their strategic location, such as border areas. Where just one of these "worries" prevailed, terror, albeit severe, was not as bad as where two, or event three of them were present. Belarus, for instance, though lying on the sensitive Western border, did not give massive grain crops, and its national movement was weaker than the Ukrainian one. Repression thus hit the Republic, but not nearly as badly as in Ukraine, where all the above-mentioned factors were present in a heightened form.

In the next section I will discuss how Stalin—who explicitly linked the national question to the peasant one, and remembered what had happened in Ukraine in 1919-1920, and then again in 1930—doubled his anti-peasant policies with quite effective anti-national ones, inaugurated with the already-mentioned resolution on procurements in Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus and the Western region of December 14, 1932. Six days later, Kaganovich pushed the Ukrainian Politburo to accept yet higher targets of grain procurements. Soon afterwards, he declared that the necessary pre-condition to reach them was the discovery, and confiscation, of family reserves, thus opening the door to mass death. Finally, on January 22, 1933, Stalin and Molotov ordered the OGPU to stop the exodus from Ukraine and the Kuban of peasants hunting for food. The Central committee and the government, they wrote,

> Do not doubt that this flight of villagers, like the exodus from Ukraine last year, have been organized by enemies of Soviet power, socialist-revolutionaries and Polish agents who use the [fleeing] peasants to agitate against the kolkhoz, and more generally against Soviet power in Northern territories. Last year the Party, Soviet, and Cheka (political police) agencies of Ukraine missed this counter-revolutionary undertaking... Last

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[28] "Introduction," *After the Holodomor*.
[29] Yu. Shapoval, "The Holodomor and Its Connection to the Repressions in Soviet Ukraine, 1932-1934," in *After the Holodomor*.
[30] Krawchenko, *I Chose Freedom*; Kondrashin and D'Ann Penner, *Golod: 1932–1933 gody v sovetskoi derevne*.

year's mistakes cannot be repeated this year.[31]

The political police and the Party were thus given orders "to prevent the mass flight of peasants" from Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus, and to arrest those who attempted to flee. Ukrainian cities too, which were far better, albeit still miserably, supplied, were surrounded by anti-peasant roadblocks, and over the following months approximately 220,000 people, as a rule starving peasants, were arrested, and sent back to their villages to die. Most stricken areas were not extended any help until the spring of 1933, and while the Commissar of Foreign Affairs publicly denied the famine's existence, the state "ferociously fought" (in Kaganovich's words) to fulfill its procurement plans.

Famine—that, according to Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi in 1932 killed in Ukraine approximately 100,000 people—thus took on forms and dimensions much more extreme than it would have taken if nature had followed its course. It was less intense, in terms of both drought and the area it affected, than the 1921–1922 famine (and the 1932 crop, though quite low, was higher than the 1945 one, which did not cause 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 assuring the victory of the "great offensive" launched four years previously.

Always as a consequence of political choices, the famine took on profoundly, and at times radically different features in different Republics and regions. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the general conditions of suffering and hardships which then obtained throughout the whole country (the pan-Soviet famine), and the "local," and much more terrible mass starvation famines which came to dominate specific areas. And it is as necessary to distinguish between what happened in the cities and in the countryside, both at a pan-Soviet level and in the most-stricken areas.

In major cities Stalin's choices took on features that, as extreme as they may seem, cannot be compared with those prevailing in the grain-producing, non Russian areas. At the end of 1932, for example, in order to strengthen control over urban and industrial centers, and to prevent the repetition of the spring's agitations, the Politburo launched a mass "cleansing" of the country's most important cities. This was done by reintroducing, only for urban residents, the Tsarist internal passport system, whose abolition had been vaunted as one of 1917 great victories.

Moscow, Leningrad and Kharkov, the Ukrainian capital, were the first cities to be "passportized" in January 1933. Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, the urban centers situated within one hundred kilometers from the Western border, and major industrial boom towns such as Magnitogorsk underwent passportization in the spring. Everywhere, thousands, and often scores of thousands of vagrants, "unreliable elements," people with a suspicious past, etc. living and working in these centers were deported from them: lucky ones were just dropped in the countryside 100 kilometers away from their previous residence, others were deported to far away locations where they at times met a fate even more terrible than that of dekulakized peasants.[32]

Since the regime supplied cleansed cities far better than other ones, the passport, which was a necessary (but not sufficient) pre-condition to get a residence permit, became a major privilege. Moscow and Leningrad were thus only slightly touched by the famine: in 1933 first quarter, for example, the capital received 165,000 tons of grain, plus 86,000 for its surrounding. By contrast, the whole Ukrainian Republic, with a far larger population, got only 280,000 tons: Italian and Polish diplomats thus got used to the daily removal of hundred of bodies—generally starving peasants without a ration card, who had been able to bypass the roadblocks only to die in the city streets—even from Kharkov and Kiev.

The strategy elaborated in the fall was systematized and sanctioned at the Central committee plenum of January 1933, where Stalin declared that it was no more necessary to spur the country

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[31] Now in Klid and Motyl, *Holodomor Reader*: 254.
[32] Nicolas Werth, *Cannibal Island: Death in a Siberian Gulag* (Princeton, 2007).

forward. Industrial investments were thus reduced, and factories were told to raise productivity by reducing the labor force. In the countryside special "political sections," charged with controlling kolkhoz and *kolkhozniki*, were instituted at the Machine-and-Tractor Stations (MTS). It was also decided to launch a general purge of the party, whose rural apparatus had been already vetted in previous months. Its direction was entrusted to Nikolai Ezhov, an uncultivated former worker who, under Stalin's guidance, was to transform the purge into one of the seed of the Great Terror of 1936-1938. Postyshev, accompanied by hundreds of central cadres, was dispatched to "normalize" the Ukrainian party, which was deemed to represent a special case.

Soon after the plenum, at the first *kolkhozniki* congress held in February, Stalin stated that the main difficulties of the past had been overcome, and that existing ones were not as bad. Possibly, from his perspective, this was true: he was indeed winning his war against the village. In the countryside, however, and especially in Ukraine, the tragedy was reaching its acme. As Kosior reported to Moscow on March 15, thereby confirming that hunger was being indeed used to impart a lesson to peasants, "the unsatisfactory course of sowing in many areas" showed "that famine [hadn]'t still taught reason to many *kolkhozniki*."[33] New repressive measures were thus adopted, such as prohibiting the sale of meat and grain on the kolkhoz market even to kolkhoz which had fulfilled their quotas, if they were situated in districts or regions which had not complied with them. In March a new law on seasonal labor restricted the possibility for peasants to leave by making it necessary to obtain a permit from kolkhoz authorities, and a resolution was passed which defined as a "kulak" any peasant unable or unwilling to fulfill his labor and procurement obligations towards the state.

The measure opened the door to yet new mass deportations, similar to the 1930-1931 ones, which were indeed prepared, but not executed on the planned scale. Always in March, fearing new, mass peasant revolts, Moscow decided to deport from dangerous areas such as Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, and the central Black Earth region all those who had been sentenced to more than two years. Eventually, in 1933 270,000 peasants were deported. Even the Gulag administration complained about the deportees' conditions (up to 3% of them died during their journey), and in the special villages receiving them the situation was not much better: in 1932 90,000 out of the 1,3 million people living in the special settlements died. In 1933 deaths, generally caused by starvation, passed the 150,000 mark, but it is reasonable to assume that many of the 200,000 whose flight was denounced also died of hunger, a fact local administrations were unwilling to admit.

In the first months of 1933 people thus starved to death almost everywhere in the country, in minor, peripheral centers more than in large ones, and especially in prisons, camps and special settlements. Above all, people died in the countryside, were approximately 25-30 million peasants suffered because of hunger. In Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus and in the Volga regions the extraordinary requisitions launched in November deprived villages and families of their reserves for the winter and the spring. People first consumed the small hidden holdings they had been able to defend, then fed on everything they could lay their hands on, dogs, cats, fish, rats, small animals, roots. Mass death starvation possibly started in mid-late January and peaked in May, when entire villages were wiped out, and cannibalism became widespread. Possibly 80% of the three to four million Ukrainian deaths were thus concentrated over a few weeks in March-May, 1933, and the *Holodomor* was an extremely time-compressed tragedy, much more so than the other, comparable politically motivated mass extermination actions of the European 20th century.

April and May were the most terrible months all over the country: the victims were approximately five millions (one or more million deaths, that used to be imputed to late 1932-early 1933, had in fact died over the two-three previous years). Besides Ukraine, 1.3 to 1.5 million died in Kazakhstan (where mass deaths started earlier and reached their peak in relation to the population size, exterminating 33 to 38 per cent of the Kazakhs and 8 to 9 per cent of the Europeans); and several hundred thousand in Northern Caucasus (where Gorbachev's father lost three of his

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[33] Ruslan Pyrih (ed.), *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 2007): 771.

brothers), and, on a lesser scale, in the Volga, where the most harshly hit area coincided with the German autonomous republic.

Other Russian regions, large cities, and major industrial centers suffered too. Deaths, however, numbered there in the scores of thousand, not in millions, and victims were generally concentrated outside the "special regime," that is the passportized, areas. In Transcaucasia the crisis hit even less harshly, and local leaders—traditionally hostile to the Slavic penetration in their Republics—worried about stopping the inflow of refugees.

If we consider annual mortality rates per thousand inhabitants in the countryside, and make 1926 equal to 100, we see them jump in 1933 to 188.1 in the entire country, to 138.2 in the Russian republic (which then included both Kazakhstan and the Kuban, so that the figure for Russia proper is lower), and 367.7, that is, almost triple, in Ukraine. Here life expectancy at birth dropped from the 42.9 years for men and 46.3 for women registered in 1926 to, respectively, 7.3 and 10.9 in 1933 (it was to be 13.6 and 36.3 in 1941). Also, in Ukraine there were 782,000 births in 1932 and 470,000 in 1933, compared with an average of 1.153 million per year in 1926–1929.

As we know, the differences in the severity of the death tolls over the entire USSR are explained by the famine's different course, for which different Moscow policies were largely responsible. The same applies to the variation in the intensity of the famine in Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, and the Volga regions. Here too large cities and industrial centers suffered less than villages, and so did borders areas, which received better and larger supplies because of strategic and political reasons. Death rates were thus unevenly distributed within Ukraine too, with regions such as Kiev, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkov suffering a decline in population of 25% of more, as was the case in the Kuban. Northern regions, bordering with Russia, fared better, and so did the Donetsk mining and heavy industry region. [34] As Voroshilov remarked, the most terribly affected areas were those in which the Bolsheviks had traditionally encountered "special difficulties in the class war." Here the famine took on unmistakable planned features.

Mortality thus depended on residency, urban or rural, and not on nationality, meaning that people living in the countryside suffered independently of their ethnic background. Yet one cannot forget that, as everybody knew, in spite of previous urbanization-cum-Ukrainization, villages remained overwhelmingly Ukrainian, while cities had largely preserved their "alien" (Russian, Jewish, Polish) character. The countryside was thus targeted to break the peasants, but with the full awareness that the village represented the nation's spine.

What did Stalin know of his decisions' consequences, and how did he elaborate the information he possessed? We know that important local leaders—such as Turar Ryskulov or Kosior—sent him detailed information, as did writers such as Sholokhov, who on April 4, 1933 wrote him a 16-pages long letter on how procurements were carried out in the Don region where he lived:

> I will never be able to forget what I saw. By night, under a cruel wind, in the frost, when cold made even dogs hide, the families evicted from their houses lit fires in the street and gathered around them. Children wrapped in rags lay on the earth the fire had thawed… A woman with an infant went from house to house asking for shelter. To let her in was forbidden, and in the morning the infant was dead in his mother's arms. [35]

Sholokhov painstakingly described the methods used to squeeze peasants: mass beatings, letting naked people freeze in barns, the feigning of executions, the torture with red-hot iron, suffocation etc. And he told Stalin that these were policies carried out following regional instructions, not local cadres' excesses. Stalin also received OGPU reports that did not present negative phenomena as the results of "enemy" machinations, and accurately described the famine,

[34] See the rate of population decline in various Ukrainian regions in the map "Political Geography of the Holodomor," now in Klid and Motyl, *Holodomor reader*. The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute is working to produce a more ambitious, digital map.

[35] Danilov *et al*., eds, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 3:717–18

mass mortality, cannibalism, and the growth of anti-Soviet feelings. Towards the end of 1932 he also received rather precise data about the famine's demographic effect.

However, as Oleg Khlevniuk has noted, Stalin did not passively accept this information and defended himself from it. While in public the very existence of the famine was denied, among his followers he circulated a reconstruction of what was happening built upon a mixture of lies and clever re-interpretations of reality. Any link between his policies and mass starvation was denied: the responsibility for the famines lay with enemy sabotage and with the opposition, the thievery and the ignorance of peasants, who did not understand the need to put the state's interest before their own, petit-bourgeois one. Enemies and peasants also purposely exaggerated the famine's real dimension: the rumors and the complaints about the famine were but arms in the fight against Soviet power. By claiming that the real culprits for the famine were the very peasants who were dying because of it, and that local rumors deliberately inflated the famine's real scale, Stalin also freed himself from the obligation to help starving villages. [36]

Notwithstanding the fact that even at the beginning of the 1933 summer, that is at their lowest point, Moscow held grain reserves (1.4 million tons) sufficient to feed approximately four million people for one year, aid thus did not come, if not in very selected ways. In 1933 220,000 tons of grain were exported, and contrary to what had happened in 1932, no grain was bought abroad.

In the early spring, despite their catastrophic situation, peasants were still resisting. As the Italian vice-consul in Novorossiisk reported to Rome in April:

> The terms of the struggle remain the same: the rural masses passively but effectively resist; the party and the government are determined to suppress their resistance... The peasant revolt (it cannot be called otherwise) is too vast to be effectively controlled and suffocated, and has disrupted the kolkhoz. Yet, force is but on one side: peasants are just an amorphous, clearly powerless mass. Starving peasants are completely destitute, and no organization, certainly not the persecuted church, keeps their spirit and resistance alive, yet their resistance is not sapped. To a well-equipped and resolute army, villages do not oppose an army of their own, not even the bands and the brigandage that have always accompanied rural revolts. Perhaps here lies the peasants' strength, or, rather, the reason of their enemies' failure. The well-armed and very powerful Soviet apparatus cannot look for victory in the open field; the enemy does not regroup, is everywhere, and the battle—that cannot be joined—is rather reduced to a never-ending series of very small, minimal operations: an un-weeded field here, a few quintals of grain hidden there, tractors that do not work properly, go around in circle, or are maliciously broken everywhere. [37]

In those very weeks, however, hunger was winning the war. As a top official wrote after a tour in the Don area, "in most villages the 'conspiracy of silence' [peasants had stopped talking to local authorities] has been broken. People speak again at meeting, and they do so to ask for bread, promising that once food will come, work will be properly done." He added that a small increase in the number of those reporting for work could be noted, even though one could not say the "generalized sabotage" to be over. The handing out of approximately 1.3 million tons of seed grain, and of more than 300,000 tons in food aid—a proportion reflecting the regime's priorities—sealed Moscow's victory. In the summer a German diplomat returning from a trip to Ukraine and Northern Caucasus told the Italian ambassador that "the secret of the Ukrainian agriculture's revival" lay precisely in the fact that "peasants were not left with any other choice than working for the government in exchange for a minimum of food, or literally starve to death." In those very weeks, Piłsudski too was forced to admit that the Ukrainian peasants' mass starvation represented a victory for Stalin. By the time these conclusions were reached, that victory was complete. In July, the Italian ambassador could not but approvingly report to Mussolini what the German diplomat had told him, noting that "stuck in their villages, and deprived of the possibility to beg for food in the cities," Ukrainian peasants had finally understood that the only way to survive was to work for the

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[36] O. Chlevnjuk (Khlevniuk), "Stalin e la carestia dei primi anni Trenta," *Storica*, 11: 32 (2005): 27-40.
[37] *Lettere da Kharkov*: 157-64.

state.[38]

Of course, resistance and small conflicts did not disappear, and peasant work was not good work (in fact, the compromise that emerged in 1935 lay at the basis of Soviet agriculture's intrinsic weakness),[39] yet the Bolsheviks had realized their long-held dream of taking out of the countryside what they deemed necessary to take, without compensating peasants for their work. After the 1933 summer, while Stalinist leaders gloated, the state was able to seize without difficulties more than 30% of a rather poor crop.

4. *National Repression and Terror*

The awareness that in Ukraine and in the Kuban the peasant question also was a national question determined Stalin's resolution 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, suspected, as we know, of abetting peasants. On 14 and 15 December 1932, the Politburo thus passed two secret decrees that reversed, *only in Ukraine*, the official nationality policies decided upon in 1923. According to these decrees *korenizatsiia*, as it had been implemented in Ukraine and in the Kuban, far from having disarmed nationalistic feelings had helped them grow, producing "enemies with a party card in their pocket." Peasants were not the sole culprits of the crisis, but shared responsibility with the Ukrainian political and cultural classes. A few days later, on December 19, similar though less harsh measures hit Belarus too, where—as in Ukraine—the peasant and the national questions largely coincided, a fact that caused problems during the civil war, albeit not on the Ukrainian scale. Here, too, in early March the party was accused of abetting nationalism, and party cadres and the national *intelligentsiia* were repressed for such crimes, but there was no reversal of "Belarusization."[40]

On these premises, Ukrainization programs in the Russian republic were discontinued. Several million Ukrainians who, following the pro-Russian border choices of the mid-1920s, were living in the RSFSR thus lost those education, press, and self-government rights which other nationalities continued to enjoy. The 1937 census would reveal that only three million RSFSR citizens defined themselves as Ukrainians versus the 7.8 million of 1926 (at least part of this decline was caused by the promotion of Kazakhstan, previously a RSFSR autonomous republic, into a Soviet one).

Soon afterwards, an attack on the Ukrainian language was launched in Ukraine too, where Stalin was not content of the indirect consequences of his policies, causing a re-Russification of the Ukrainian cities which was to have important long-term consequences. The aim was not only to transform Ukrainian in a second rate, subordinated language, which upwardly mobile people had to abandon. Direct policies were adopted to bring Ukrainian closer to Russian, and to repress the thousands of cadres that had promoted it in previous years.[41]

While in Kharkov, according to Italian diplomats, top GPU officials boasted of changing the "ethnographic material" in the countryside,[42] at the Central committee plenum of February Skrypnyk was attacked because "not only he did not wage a struggle against… the bourgeois-nationalist line on the questions of creating Ukrainian scholarly terminology, he also facilitated this distortion of the line on the linguistic front." Such distortion was equated with "separating the

[38] *Ibid.*: 192-194.
[39] A. Graziosi, "Stalin, krest'ianstvo i gosudarstvennyi sotsializm, 1927-1951 gg.," in *Istoriia stalinizma: krest'ianstvo i vlast'* (Moscow, 2011): 12-32.
[40] Elsewhere, in Central Asia as in the Far North or the Far East, there also was a turn in national policies, but on a much lesser scale. The percentage of "indigenous" leading cadres went down at the top, but not at the medium and low level, where it continued to grow; most languages were switched back from a Latin to a Cyrillic alphabet; the unifying role of Russian was extolled, etc. See Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*: 344-93.
[41] See the already mentioned Naimark forum in *Journal of Cold War Studies*: 165.
[42] *Lettere da Kharkov*: 168.

Ukrainian language from the Russian language." Skrypnyk was also criticized for his "theory of a mixed dialect," according to which children of ethnic Ukrainians who spoke *surzhyk* (an Ukrainian-Russian mix) were supposed to begin their schooling in the Ukrainian language, thus preparing the transformation of Ukraine into a completely Ukrainian-speaking republic. And he was accused of having introduced a scholarly-based, nationwide orthography of the Ukrainian language, which included the linguistic features of both Soviet-ruled Ukraine and Western Ukraine. This orthography confirmed the separateness of the Ukrainian language and impeded the process of bringing it forcibly in line with Russian. [43]

Meanwhile hundreds of middle and local cadres, and intellectuals continued to be repressed, or sentenced to death for sabotage or for having "undermined agriculture and caused a famine in the country" (accusations that reflected reality much better than official propaganda, which denied the famine's very existence). Among them was Skrypnyk's secretary, born in Galicia and accused to be a member of a hypothetical Ukrainian Military Organization. Skrypnyk energetically defended himself, but his secretary confessed that he had encouraged the counter-revolutionary activities of his organization. Other "Galician" intellectuals—often refugees from Poland, who up until recently had been called "Western Ukrainians"—were soon arrested, while in both the party and the state started a wave of de-Ukrainization signaled among other things by the switch from Ukrainian to Russian in newspapers, journals, university classes etc. More than 2,000 officials of the Commissariat of Education—Ukrainization's very hearth—were removed, almost all the directors of the Commissariat's *oblast* directorates were dismissed for political motives, the publication of dictionaries was suspended, new ones were prepared, favoring Russian terms, and the 1928 orthography was abolished. [44]

Scores of Ukrainian writers were also arrested, while a deep depression spread among national-communist leaders and intellectuals, savagely attacked in the press. In May the most important pro-Bolshevik Ukrainian writer, Khvyl'ovyi, committed suicide. Skrypnyk, who tried to answer the criticism directed at his work in an essay on nationality policies disapproved by the Ukrainian Politburo, was again violently criticized on the eve of the Ukrainian Central committee plenum of June, 1933, where Postyshev once more attacked the 1920s orthographic reform, and called the attempts at ukrainizing the working class a cultural counter-revolution. Skrypnyk, on the verge of despair, thought of saying "everything", and to personally confront Stalin, but his wife convinced him to recede, threatening otherwise to commit suicide. On July 7 he thus went to a Politburo meeting with a document acknowledging his guilt, but left the room before the meeting was over, and retired to his office, where he killed himself. Thus ended, with the repression of thousand of its cadres, and the death of its leaders, the Ukrainian national-communist "experiment" born out of the civil war.

Suicide stopped the assaults upon Skrypnyk (Stalin almost respectfully spoke of his "biblical fall"), but not the anti-Ukrainian purge. In November the Central committee repeated that the most dangerous enemy in Ukraine was Ukrainian nationalism, supporting, and supported by, foreign intervention, thus confirming the reversal of the 1923 verdict, according to which the main enemy had been Russian great-power chauvinism. Postyshev boasted of the purge of nationalistic-minded personnel in the educational system, which included the firing of 4,000 "hostile" teachers. Soon afterwards, at the 17th Party congress, in January, 1934 he declared that repression had been the real method by which many Ukrainian party organization had been led, and a few weeks later he asked the GPU, still engaged in "uncovering" counter-revolutionary organizations, to evict from their apartments and to deport to the North the families of the arrested, and at times executed, nationalists, whose relatives were to lose their jobs, and whose sons had to be kicked out of schools.

The 1933-1934 anti-Ukrainian terror thus presented some of the traits that were later to

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[43] Hennadii Efimenko's and Shapoval's essays in *After the Holodomor*.

[44] The short-term consequences of the *Holodomor*, that is of the way Stalin chose to deal with the Ukrainian question on both the social and the national front, thus acquired crucial long-term implications, whose effects are still with us today, as shown by the importance and the peculiarities of the language question in contemporary Ukraine.

characterize the Great Terror of 1936-1938, when some of the "cases" the GPU had constructed in the Republic were re-opened and used against major Moscow leaders, such as Georgy Piatakov. Lev Kopelev was thus right in maintaining that 1937 started in Ukraine, and it is possible to say that Ukrainians—including those starving in the Kuban, or losing their national rights in the Russian Republic—were the first people Stalin "punished." As Kul'chyts'kyi replied to Viktor P. Danilov, who noted that in 1937-1938 Ukrainians suffered less than Russians, Ukraine had been already visited by Terror in 1932-34, when State security organs arrested approximately 200,000 people, almost as many as in 1937-1938. [45]

Conclusions

It would be wrong to maintain that we now perfectly know what happened in 1931-1934: much is to be expected from new research on the Soviet famines' causes, mechanics, geographical variations, chronology, and impact, as well as on human suffering, mentalities, and behaviors, cruelty, and cannibalism included. Yet much has been learned and, with but a few exceptions, past controversies have grown into scientific discussions, which help the advancement of knowledge.

The effort to reach a consensus on at least the crucial features of the Ukrainian tragedy is, however, hampered by difficulties whose nature is not only of intellectual, or documentary, nature. The definition of the *Holodomor*, its use in the process of Ukrainian nation-building, and Russian-Ukrainian polemics—as groundless as they may be since in the 1930s both nations were victims of Stalin's regime—distort the historians' debates, especially those centering around the question of whether or not the famine in Ukraine took on a genocidal nature.

On the one hand, among those supporting the genocide thesis there are scholars seeing in the famine an event artificially organized in order to break the peasants and/or to alter (destroy) the Ukrainian nation's social fabric, which obstructed the transformation of the USSR into a despotic empire. In the light of what happened up until the fall of 1932, this variant of the genocide thesis does not seem to fit the facts.

On the other, there are historians who, though recognizing the criminal nature of Stalin's policies, deem it necessary to study the famine as a "complex phenomenon." They in particular maintain that 1. The famine was the unplanned result of Stalin's catastrophic anti-peasant policies; 2. The regime used it to force peasants to work for the kolkhoz; 3. The famine had *regional* peculiarities, which determined its scale and consequences. It hit hardest in the areas of full collectivization, where the state faced the active reaction of the peasantry and the threat of an agricultural collapse; 4. The situation in Ukraine was defined by its role as grain provider, by the extent of the peasants' opposition, and by the measures taken to eradicate this opposition and prevent the collapse of the kolkhoz system; 5. The Ukrainian crisis did give the Stalinist regime a pretext to deal also with national problems. However, the tragedy was not caused by the national question, but by the problems of the kolkhoz system, and by the economic and political crisis, which the Stalinists tackled with methods determined by the nature of the regime and the personality of their leader; 6. The famine did not distinguish among people of different nationality. There was no genocide. There was a tragedy of the Soviet countryside, including Ukraine and Russia. [46]

While all of the above is partially true, these scholars are blind to the national question and its interaction with the social, economic and political ones, so evident in the eyes of Stalin, according to whom "the national question" was, as we know, "in essence a peasant question." They are therefore unable to descend from the pan-Soviet to the republican level, and thus to distinguish between the Soviet phenomenon and its national counterparts. Above all, they do not fully appreciate the crucial turning point which took place in the fall of 1932, when in Ukraine, the

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[45] Lev Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer* (New York, 1980); Kul'chyts'kyi in *After the Holodomor*.

[46] V.V. Kondrashin, *Golod 1932-1933 godov: tragediia rossiiskoi derevni* (Moscow, 2008).

Kuban, the Northern Caucasus, and the Volga regions, the 1931–1932 "spontaneous" famines (these too, of course, the direct, if undesired, consequences of the 1928–1929 choices) gave ways to the 1932-1933 politically managed ones (events in Kazakhstan followed a different pattern and would deserve special treatment).

A clear grasp of the ways in which the combination of power considerations with the social, i.e. the peasant, and the national factors worked in Stalin's mind, makes instead it possible to understand what happened in late 1932, when Stalin decided to use the famine his policies had caused as a weapon to save his regime. He thus transformed it in Ukraine into a *Holodomor* intended not to destroy, but to emasculate the Ukrainian nation by breaking its peasantry and crippling its intellectual and political elite, and completed the job with national, intellectual, and language repression, which must therefore be seen as an integral part of the *Holodomor*.

Stalin's strategy did attain at least part of its intended aims, as proven by the famines' consequences, which were partially similar, yet essentially different in different Soviet Republics and regions. Throughout the USSR the use of hunger broke peasant resistance; guaranteed Stalin's victory; opened the door to the 1937–1938 terror; marked a qualitative change in the lie that had accompanied the Soviet regime since its inception; allowed, by means of the subjugation of the most important Republic, the de facto transformation of the Soviet federal state into a despotic empire; and left a dreadful legacy of grief in a multitude of families that were prevented from dealing with it because of the famine taboo and the dogma about life having become "more joyous."

In Ukraine and in Kazakhstan, however, famine dug much deeper. In the latter, the traditional society's very structures were seriously impaired. In the former, both the masses and the elite of society were badly damaged, slowing down and distorting nation building. [47] The peasantry's annihilation deprived the Ukrainian national movement of its traditional, albeit unstable, base of support; that movement also lost a majority of its cadres, and the very mechanism by which these cadres had been produced was broken. The uprooting was not accomplished only through repression. Postyshev wore Ukrainian embroidered shirts, raised monuments honoring Shevchenko, allowed the publication of Ukrainian books and magazines, albeit in much reduced proportions, and moved the capital back to Kiev from the more Russia-oriented Kharkov. Skrypnyk's "Petlyurite" Ukrainization was thus replaced by a "Bolshevik" one, whose main pillar consisted in the promotion of cadres of Ukrainian origins provided they integrated in Russian culture, the Ukrainian-turned-into-Russian Brezhnev possibly being its most notable embodiment. In urban centers, where the proportion of "ethnic" Ukrainians continued to grow, almost reaching in 1939 the 60% mark (but in major cities the figure was much lower), cultural Ukrainization stopped with the crystallization of two linguistic spheres, one Russian, the other Ukrainian, with the former enjoying a clear pre-eminence over the latter, identified with rural backwardness and social inferiority.

Only from this perspective one can explain the incomparably weaker presence in the 1941-1945 crisis of the Ukrainian national movement, which had given repeated proofs of its vitality in the 1914-1922 one (not surprisingly, Galicia and Volhynia, which in 1933 did not belong to the USSR, were the rather extraordinary exception, nourishing a partisan movement at least as strong as previous ones). Then came the famine of 1946-47, once more ravaging a large swath of the Republic. [48] The memory of these two tragedies, together with those of the sufferings caused by collectivization, the war, and the oppression of the late Stalin's years then coalesced into a single bloc, relating to the entire 1929-1953 period, which came to be seen as an uninterrupted *continuum* of extreme hardship, thus affecting for decades the psychology of a large section of the population.

The *Holodomor* left its clearest imprint on the Ukrainian demographic structure. As France Meslé and Jacques Vallin demonstrated, without the *Holodomor*, 2007 Ukraine would have had approximately 52 million inhabitants instead of 46.5; if the impact of WWII and of the 1946-1947

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[47] Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor,": 10.

[48] Vladimir F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov: proiskhodzhenie i posledstviia* (Moscow, 1996); OlexandraVeselova's contribution in *After the Holodomor*.

famine is considered, that figure would jump to 65.7, clearly revealing the tragedy the country went through in less than two decades, and the huge weight of its legacy on today's Ukraine.

Can we thus say that there has been an Ukrainian genocide within Soviet history? The answer is no if we think of a famine purposely "manufactured" since its very beginning by the regime—or, even more groundlessly, by "Russia"—in order to destroy the Ukrainian people. And it stays no if we follow a narrow definition of genocide as a pre-ordained will to kill all the members of an ethnic or religious group, in which case only the *Shoah* would qualify.

Yet the U.N. 1948 definitions terms as genocidal acts "deliberately inflicting on members of the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction *in whole or in part*" (my italics). Not long before, Raphael Lemkin, the inventor of the word, had noted that, "generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction 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. [49]

Based on this definition, if one thinks: 1. Of the substantial difference in mortality rates in different republics; 2. Adds to the millions of Ukrainian victims, including the ones from Kuban, the millions of Ukrainians forcibly Russified after December 1932, as well as the scores of thousands of peasants who met a similar fate after evading the police roadblocks and taking refuge in the Russian republic; 3. Keeps in mind that one is therefore dealing with the loss of approximately 20 to 30 percent of the Ukrainian ethnic population; 4. Remembers that such a loss was caused by the decision, unquestionably a subjective act, to make an anti-Ukrainian use of the famine on the basis of the "national interpretation" Stalin developed in the second half of 1932; reckons that without such a decision the death count would have been at the most in the hundreds of thousands, that is, less than in 1921–1922; and finally, 5. If ones adds to all of the above the destruction of large part of the Republic's political and cultural elite, from village teachers to national leaders, and the conscious, repressive measures adopted to distort the development of the Ukrainian language and culture—then the answer to the question *Was the Holodomor a genocide?* is unquestionably positive. [50] In 1932-34 Ukraine, the Ukrainian peasants and intelligentsia, its language and culture, did suffer because of policies that, if taken together, do fit the "genocide" category adopted by the U.N. 1948 Convention.

This anti-Ukrainian genocide, however, was not an expression of Russian nationalism, nor did it serve Russian nation building even if it led to increased linguistic and cultural Russification of Ukraine. The *Holodomor* was not, if not indirectly, an event in Ukrainian-Russian relations. It was an event in the history of the USSR and of communism, which devastated also Russians and Russian culture. Above all it was a Stalinist event, and we have intriguing hints suggesting that Stalin knew what he was doing when he used famine as a tool of national destruction: as he told an Ukrainian Politburo delegation in 1952, "the history of mankind knows many tragic cases in which entire nations died out because of lack of bread, and were thus cancelled from history." [51] The Ukrainian nation was not cancelled as such, and perhaps Stalin knew that given its size this could not be accomplished. Yet Ukraine bore for decades, and still bears, the marks of the despot which tried to re-mold it according to his theories.

A final note. The *Holodomor* and the Kazakh tragedy share an important feature: the regime bearing responsibility for them succeeded for decades in concealing their very existence. As a consequence, the judgment that "history"—i.e. collective memory as produced by politics, scholars, mass media etc.—passed on the 1930s, and more generally on the 20th century's first half has been produced without taking into account the Soviet famines, and genocides. This at least partially explains the harshness of past debates on these issues, debates which have thus been an integral part of the difficult process which led to the realization of their extraordinary human dimensions, and

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[49] *Yearbook of the United Nations* (New York, 1948–1949), 959; R. Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C., 1944), 82.
[50] I am quoting from my "The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian *Holodomor*,": 11.
[51] V. Vasylyev, ed., *Politicheskoe rukovodstvo Ukrainy, 1938-1989* (Moscow, 2006): 168.

consequences, moral and interpretive ones included. To bring the Soviet famines, and the *Holodomor*, in our representation of the European past means in fact to radically alter the judgment that has been passed upon it, and this requires time, and cannot be painless.