“Death by Famine” in Soviet Ukraine: Realities, Myths, and Historical Politics of the Holodomor

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Introduction

In 1932 and 1933, Soviet Ukraine’s countryside was devastated by famine. The famine was a consequence of Stalin and his regime’s collectivization project, in which peasants were forced to surrender their land, grain, livestock, and labor to the collective farm (kolkhoz). As poor weather and the impacts of collectivization blighted the harvest, peasants could not meet the state-imposed requisition targets. The state continued to requisition grain despite this inability to meet the grain quotas, and the peasants starved as their food was forcibly removed from their possession. This man-made tragedy resulted in the loss of 3.3 to 3.9 million Ukrainian lives and has been memorialized in Ukraine as the Holodomor. Meaning “to kill by starvation,” the Holodomor was the Ukrainian experience of famine, one that many claim had been a genocide.

Almost 90 years later, amid a bloody war with Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hosted an international summit in Kyiv to discuss food security and agricultural exports. At this summit on November 26, 2022, President Zelenskyy announced his “Grain from Ukraine” humanitarian initiative, meant to ease the “humanitarian and economic consequences of the global food crisis caused by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.”

It was not coincidental that the summit took place on the last Saturday of November, which is recognized as Holodomor Memorial Day. President Zelenskyy’s opening remarks reflected this choice, with him discussing Ukraine’s long history of famine:

Every year, on the last Saturday in November, we honor the memory of millions of people. Millions of tortured and murdered Ukrainians. Women, men, elderly people. Millions of children. Millions of victims of famine. In 1921, 1922, 1923, 1946, 1947, and the darkest years – 1932-1933. Today is the 90th anniversary of the genocide committed against us by the totalitarian Stalinist regime. Different historians call different numbers of victims, but either way, all of them are shocking. From four to eight million perished Ukrainians.

We remember how it is when they want to destroy your people.

…Such terrible memories. We know about it. We remember that. We have to! And we see what is happening today in the world, what is happening in Ukraine. They want to destroy us again with bombs, bullets, cold, and again with hunger.²

In this statement, President Zelenskyy drew parallels between the famines of the past and the current war. Highlighting the Holodomor as a genocide of Ukrainians, he focused on how the Stalinist regime targeted Ukrainians for destruction through, what he claimed to be, murder by starvation. Zelenskyy also noted the goal of destruction in today’s war, part of which may be accomplished by withholding essential resources from the Ukrainian population. Despite the ninety-year difference between the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian War, the pronoun “they” is used to refer to the actions of the Stalinist regime and Putin’s war; Soviets and Russians are the same “they,” despite being different countries, different regimes, and different people, 90 years apart.

Zelenskyy’s parallel between the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian War represents how the Holodomor has been leveraged as a political tool in the war in Ukraine. The Holodomor, as a tool of tragedy, has been employed to highlight a historical pattern of violence, which in turn, emphasized the repeat victimhood of Ukrainians in a genocide. By highlighting the Holodomor as a past genocide, Zelenskyy categorically re-emphasizes Ukraine’s repeated suffering and repeated victimhood at the hands of a “Russian” oppressor.

This is not the first time the historical politics of the Holodomor have been leveraged. Beginning after the fall of the Soviet Union, the memory of the Holodomor has been used as a political tool by nationalist figures in Ukraine. In conjunction with memories of prolific

Ukrainian writers and freedom fighters, the Holodomor has served as a foundation of the Ukrainian national narrative, used to emphasize a unique Ukrainian past through the promotion of a communal trauma.

This thesis seeks to understand the historical politics of the Holodomor through an examination of the realities of the famine, the myths associated with it, and the uses of the famine’s memory in the political sphere. Building on three decades of rich scholarship on the famine within the fields of Russian, Soviet, and Ukrainian history, this thesis contributes to the study of the Holodomor as an event and as a historical memory. This thesis also builds on scholarship within the fields of Genocide Studies by examining how the terminology of “genocide” has catalyzed both the scholarship of the Holodomor and the politics of its memory. As such, various questions will be raised in this thesis: What caused the famine? What happened during the famine? How did Ukrainians experience the famine? What is genocide? Was the Holodomor a genocide? Why is the Holodomor remembered as a genocide by some and not by others? What are the politics of the Holodomor’s memory?

This thesis primarily explores the Ukrainian experience and memory of famine, hence the use of the term “Holodomor” instead of the “Great Famine,” which refers to the pan-Soviet Union experience of famine. Within this thesis, the Great Famine is factually discussed, and the Russian memory of the famine is compared with the Ukrainian memory of the famine. The primary sources utilized within this thesis reflect this Ukrainian focus; because the focus is on the Ukrainian experience of the famine, the included eyewitness testimonies and oral histories of the famine are almost strictly from Ukrainian sources.

There are complexities to relying on oral history and testimony in constructing a history of the famine. Oral histories and eyewitness testimony are powerful sources of information for
historians to understand the events of the past. Placing the witnesses in the historical context of the period can enrich the historical moment in ways not achievable by other types of sources. It is also important because the memory of the famine was suppressed for decades, leaving few official accounts of the famine for historians to utilize. However, there are limitations to using these types of sources. First, many of the testimonies were collected long after the famine occurred. In this thesis, testimonies were collected in two groupings: first, from Soviet refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War, and second, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Because of this length of time between the famine and the collection of testimony, there is a chance that some things have been forgotten, or that only the most extreme experiences have been remembered. Secondly, testimony is subjective. Each person has their own experience that is unique from another person, but along with this, each person is subject to errors and bias. For example, a Ukrainian refugee in the 1950s was able to speak about their experience, while those within the Soviet Union were silenced. This refugee may have also been more biased regarding the maliciousness of the Soviet regime than the Soviet resident. To balance this subjectivity, other primary sources are used to supplement and provide a more general basis for collectivization and famine, including letters between leading government officials and speeches made by officials before, during, and after the famine.

It is also important to note that I have relied mostly on translated sources for this thesis, which carries its own complexities. Almost every primary source I have used in this thesis was translated by an alternative source. Because I only have beginner proficiency in the Russian language and no skills in the Ukrainian language, I have had to heavily rely on translated primary sources. I have also had to rely more on secondary sources than the average historian to make up for my lack of interactions with primary sources. When relying on translated sources, it
is important to remember that there are politics and nuances associated with translation. These translations reflect an individual’s understanding of what the source says, and translations may reflect certain biases of the translator. Furthermore, not every primary source – whether it be government, newspaper, or eyewitness testimony – has been translated. As such, my research was limited to what other scholars either had access to, or deemed important enough, to translate.

Much of the scholarship on the famine comes from before 2010, and much of the scholarship on the Holodomor’s memory has come about within the 2010s. Unlike the works of other prominent historians, I am evaluating the Holodomor and its historical politics at a new stage in Ukrainian history. The Russo-Ukrainian war has renewed public interest in the Holodomor, and the war has ignited a new application of the Holodomor’s memory, with the Holodomor used to create a historical pattern of Russian aggression. The war has had an indelible impact on the writing of this thesis, and this thesis will reflect this impact.

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter details the political and economic situation of the Soviet Union that brought about collectivization, the process of collectivization, and the famine that resulted from collectivization. This chapter also utilizes eyewitness testimony and oral history to narrate how the Ukrainian peasant experienced the famine.

The second chapter examines the historical politics of the Holodomor by evaluating how the Holodomor has been politicized by the Ukrainian nation. It analyzes the suppression and reemergence of famine memory, the role of the Holodomor in national narratives, how the Ukrainian government has attempted to achieve international recognition for the Holodomor as a genocide, the Holodomor’s role in the “memory wars” of Russia and Ukraine, and finally, the rhetorical and political applications of the Holodomor to the Russo-Ukrainian War.
The third chapter discusses the debate on whether the Holodomor should be recognized as a genocide. It accomplishes this by first addressing the intricacies and politics of the genocide definition, and then using the opinions of leading scholars in Russian, Soviet, and Ukrainian studies to apply the terms of the genocide definition to the historical context of the Holodomor. I further comment on how scholars can move beyond the limitations of the Convention by considering how the politics of the Convention affected the genocide definition, which can be achieved by broaching the Holodomor within an expanded definition of the “protected group.”
Chapter I.
The “Red Broom:” Collectivization and Famine in Soviet Ukraine

In 1929, one family could foresee famine. Dmytro Ivanovych Slobianiuk’s mother was preparing for her son’s journey to join the army when suddenly, a brigade of activists forced their way into her home. When an activist noticed the little pot of wheat in her hands, the mother begged the man to allow her to grind it and bake her son bread for his trip. The activist responded, “And who’s going to give you permission to grind it; we will be looking for those hand mills. We can fix it so that your son won’t even go into the army.” The mother, afraid to jeopardize her son’s future, thought that perhaps he would be saved from starvation, because with the confiscation of handmills, “it was already obvious that there would be a disaster.”

Many families in the village had long since been preparing for famine. Food shortages were the norm, but there had been relative stability in the ten years prior to 1932. Families maintained small garden plots as well as the land they tilled. In the fall they meticulously pickled vegetables, stockpiled grain, and jerked meat for the long, cold winter. Many families had some livestock to survive on, and if they didn’t, they could often rely on a neighbor for a little milk. This was the life of the peasant. But this was to change with collectivization.

Ivan Brynza grew up in Sakhnovshchyna, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine, in the shadow of two milling factories. Though he was only 8 years old in 1932, he remembered the “white factory” that only milled wheat, with its seven floors and surrounding storage areas that held thousands of tons of wheat. Nearby was a rye mill and a butter factory. The sounds and smells of the factories

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filled his childhood and provided the backdrop to which his young life unfolded. However, his village life soon began to change. New pupils joined his class as neighboring villages were collectivized. The grain towers that he played by were suddenly guarded by the NKVD (the Soviet secret police). Stories of activists (communist party officials) barging into homes, searching for food products that families did not have, reached his young ears. And in 1932, food became scarce. His classmates started to swell from hunger, and then slowly stopped attending school. The children that mustered the strength to leave their beds loitered by the grain towers, risking their lives to obtain a morsel of grain. Ivan became one of those children.5

This phenomenon was not limited to Ivan’s village; in 1932, famine struck the Soviet Union’s countryside. This famine was not the result of blighted fields or a random poor harvest. Instead, the famine was the consequence of the Stalinist regime’s rapid collectivization and industrialization initiative. In this chapter, I will provide the relevant background necessary to understand the Great Famine of 1932-3 – also known as the Holodomor – in Ukraine. I aim to show how the ruthless policy of collectivization radically altered life in the countryside, resulting in the undue suffering and unnecessary deaths of millions of peasants. I begin this chapter by explaining the economic conditions of the early 1920s and the circumstances that led to collectivization. Next, I explain the “from above” political process of collectivization and provide commentary on the international economic and geopolitical context that may have impacted Stalin’s plans for collectivization. Then, I highlight the impact collectivization had on Ukraine, underscoring the ways collectivization may have been unique in the republic. Throughout this chapter, I also emphasize the Ukrainian experience of famine through a presentation of survivor testimony and memory, and through this presentation, analyze how the

conditions wrought by collectivization uprooted the norms of the Ukrainian community and family units.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) and the Switch to Collectivization

At the 10th Party Congress in 1921, Lenin introduced the “New Economic Policy” (NEP). The NEP promised a marked recovery to the Soviet economy, particularly through the loosening of War Communism’s “emergency measures” that nationalized industry, disallowed private business, and forcibly requisitioned large quantities of grain from the peasantry. War Communism had been the first dive into a Marxian-economic policy, and its effects had wrought two “horrifying years” of “immense, monstrous poverty” in the countryside. Harsh requisitions and little rations, combined with a severe drought that drastically affected crop production, led to an intense famine in 1921 that killed an estimated five million in the Volga and Ural Regions of the Soviet Union. Lenin attributed the harsh policies of War Communism to “a wave of enthusiasm” within the party but admitted “life demonstrated our mistake.” Too much pressure had been placed on the countryside, and as a result, a tenuous relationship remained between the Vanguard and the peasantry. Lenin – knowing that the peasants, as the largest population, were the “judges” of the Bolsheviks, and that the capitalist hold on the workers of the Western world would prevent a large-scale proletarian revolution – envisioned an alliance of workers and

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10. This sentence is based on the quote “[The Peasantry] does not want this form of relations and will not live like this any longer” in In V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed., vol 43 (Moscow 1958-1965,): 58-61, quoted in Bertrand M. Patenaude, “Peasants into Russians: The Utopian Essence of War Communism,” *The Russian Review* 54, no. 4 (October 1995): 570
peasants (*smychka*) to preserve socialism in the Soviet Union. The NEP was an attempt to solidify this alliance by alleviating requisition strains on the impoverished countryside and strengthening peasant support of the regime, which was weakened after years of civil war and the harsh policy of war communism.

The NEP introduced policies that heralded stability and recovery after years of war and government mismanagement. It lowered grain collection taxes across the Soviet Union and allowed the peasantry to cultivate their own land while paying taxes to the state. The plan also maintained centralized state control over the “commanding heights” of industry, including heavy industry, transport, banking, and foreign trade, but effectively legalized private trade in small-scale industry, such as agriculture (after taxes were paid to the state) and retail trade. With this freedom to trade privately, the plan incentivized peasants to grow as much grain as possible and purchase manufactured goods. The recovery from the NEP was slow, but after a robust harvest in 1922 – due to good weather, foreign donations of grain seed, and the Soviet importation of foreign seed – the real recovery promised by the NEP was in motion by 1923.

In accounts of the wider public, the NEP widely benefited peasants and other classes of workers. A man from the Russian SFSR recalled that in “1921 when the NEP started, the country was in ruins. In five years Russia arose and you never would have recognized it.” Ukrainian Petro Avksentiiovych Shchadko remembered peasant life of the NEP as the “days of genuine efforts,” when “no appeals, no slogans, no measures were necessary” to encourage peasant productivity. Petro recalled people learning together – as a communal effort – how to wisely

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14 Petro Avksentiiovych Shchadko, “Eyewitness Testimony of Petro Avksentiiovych Shchadko (b. 1929 in the village of Kostiantynivka in Maryinsky raion, Donetsk oblast; now living in the village of Heorhiivka, Maryinsky
farm their revolution-given land.15 A Belorussian recalled how his family prospered under the NEP’s incentivization to grow:

During the NEP time, besides [father’s] regular agricultural work, [father] fattened pigs and oxen in order to get awards at state exhibitions. I must say that during the NEP period the government inspired the peasants to work and praised such people who succeeded in producing good results in their work. My father, for example, several times received awards for his spectacular potatoes (1 pound each). He was very proud of that, and he was respected by everybody. But my grand-father did not like that. He did not like government interference in his affairs. Very often he used to say that he does not need to be advised where to show the wheat and where the potatoes.”16

The revolution gave peasants land, and the NEP provided an opportunity for peasants to cultivate their craft and be rewarded for their success. While some peasants were wary of the government’s interference, many thought that the government’s incentives were the key to peasant success under the NEP.

Though many peasants thrived under the NEP, the plan was received with mixed feelings by Lenin’s inner circle. Some, such as Nikolai Bukharin, believed that the NEP was the next step, after War Communism, in achieving the “final victory of socialism.”17 He claimed that during War Communism, “the class struggle had primarily a military-political, ‘shock’ character; now [during the NEP] it has taken on a peaceful economic-organic look.”18 For others, the legalization of private trade ignited outrage in the party, with some claiming it was a “wager on the kulak” and reminiscent of a bourgeois-capitalist past.19 Kulaks were defined as well-off peasants who profited from the capitalist labor system and private land ownership, but the term was expanded to include anyone who was not the poorest rural resident.20

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15 Shchadko, “Testimony,” 1
18 Bukharin, Izbyanny proizvedenia, 256 quoted in Lih, “Bukharin’s Illusion,” 433
For all its benefits, the NEP had its shortfalls. Firstly, the NEP presupposed a peasant willingness to sell surplus grain to private traders and state agencies at state-set prices. In theory, the peasantry could use the revenue from their surplus grain sales to buy needed manufactured goods. However, there was a gap between the state-set price of surplus grain and the price of the goods that the peasantry hoped to buy with the earnings from the sale of their grain. Because the state-set prices of grain were extremely low, the peasantry did not earn enough from their private sales to buy the highly-priced manufactured goods. Since selling their grain surplus at the required market prices would not enable them to afford the goods they wanted, peasants either sold on the black market or withheld their grain until prices changed. Other peasants did not want to sell their grain at all, instead choosing to stockpile their surplus grain out of fear of famine and distrust of the state.

Secondly, the NEP did not sufficiently improve the conditions of urban industrial workers. For many workers, their life resembled how it had been under the tsarist regime. After the civil war, industry had been reorganized into giant trusts, and the most important enterprises were placed under the close supervision of the state. Even with these industrial trusts, many factories were closed or leased, sometimes to their former capitalist owners. Excess workers were laid off, and those not fired had their wages linked to their output quotas in a manner similar to how it had been during tsarist times. Engineers and specialists enjoyed special privileges, just like they had under the old regime. Worker frustration boiled over in the spring of 1923, when strikes began. Bolsheviks claimed that these pseudo-tsarist conditions were due to

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22 Mark Harrison, “Peasantry and Industrialization,” 113-4
23 Mark Harrison, “Peasantry and Industrialization,” 113-4
24 Lewin, “Society,” 146, 149
the “dilution” of the proletariat by recent rural arrivals to cities, women entering the industrial workforce, and intellectuals.\footnote{William J. Chase, \textit{Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 231-2}

Thirdly, the incentives to grow more grain did not spur the socialist revolution in agriculture that was needed, nor could the state meet its desired requisition rates. The grain output and exports during the NEP fell far behind the output and exports from pre-World War I Russia. In 1913, Tsarist Russia exported 9 million tons of grain, whereas the Soviet Union exported 2.2 million tons of grain in 1927. Not enough grain was reaching the foreign market, so the Soviet Union was not receiving enough foreign currency to fund its industrial and technological plans. Not only this but as time went on, the harvests under the NEP steadily declined. The peak harvest under NEP was during 1925-1926, when the state recorded a harvest of 77 million tons. In subsequent years, the harvest reached only 73 million tons (1926-1927) and 70 million tons (1927-1928). Then, there was the peasantry’s failure to meet the state’s requisition targets. From July to December 1927, the state had only secured 5.4 million tons of grains when the target was 7.7 million tons.\footnote{Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Paradoxes of Power}, 662} The harvest was not bad, nor were the procurement rates low, but the declining numbers made it seem that the NEP was becoming less and less effective as time went on. This was particularly concerning when the Soviet harvests lagged behind the harvests reaped by a more technologically advanced West.\footnote{Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Paradoxes of Power}, 662-3} After 7 years of the NEP, neither vast technological improvements nor full socialism were in sight.

For Stalin, who had consolidated his power by 1927, the “grain crisis” of 1927-8 provided an opportunity to move on from the NEP. In this grain crisis, Stalin claimed there was a deficit of 100 million poods (or about 1,805,661 tons), prompting him to implement
“emergency measures” that would improve grain procurements. However, were not greeted with enthusiasm by local officials. Emergency measures effectively set aside the policies of the NEP and threatened the newly won peace with the peasants. In response to the local officials’ hesitancy to enforce the emergency measures, Stalin accused them of being “afraid to disturb the tranquility of the kulak gentry.” But Stalin’s goal, of course, was not peace; it was to change the economic planning and grain procurement of the Soviet Union, even if it meant discarding Lenin’s smychka. To Stalin, it was the class-conciliatory, worker-and-peasant alliance that had allowed the “industry to be dependent on the caprice of the kulaks,” and it was the fault of the kulak that the grain deficits happened in the first place. To achieve his socialist goals, both the kulak that impeded Stalin’s goals and the alliance that allowed the kulaks to prosper needed to be discarded.

In January 1928, Stalin traveled to the area of the Soviet Union with the most successful procurement rates – Siberia – to introduce his plans to increase industrial development and transform the Soviet economy: the First Five-Year Plan. The First Five-Year Plan was a policy of forced industrialization, collectivization, and dekulakization that radically changed the Soviet market, agricultural system, and village life through the implementation of collective and state farms. In various speeches, Stalin indicated that it was time for the Soviet Union to “pass from the socialization of industry to the socialization of the whole of agriculture.” Collectivization would come in six parts. First, collectivization would shift the agricultural land from individual,

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29 Stalin, “Grain Procurements,” [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm)
30 Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (New York; Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005), 76
32 Stalin, “Grain Procurements,” [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm)
peasant-owned farms to collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhоз*)\(^{33}\). Second, across the country, collective farms were to be designated as the main suppliers of grain, and as such, would be the main targets of requisitioning. Third, the country would put “an end to the possibility of the restoration of capitalism” by ridding itself of all capitalist ventures, including any forms of private trade. Fourth, the state would create a nationalized reserve of grain and foodstuffs. Fifth, collectivization would organize “a single and firm socialist basis for the Soviet system, for Soviet power.” Lastly, upon completion, the plan would ensure “the victory of socialist construction” in the Soviet Union\(^{34}\). All of these goals were to be achieved within five years, from 1928 to 1933, and the regime projected a 236% increase in industrial output from the 1926-1927 harvest, a 100% increase in productivity, a 35% drop in industrial costs, and at least a 70% increase in the wages of industrial workers\(^{35}\).

In preparation for his plan, Stalin took political steps to ensure the success of collectivization. Though he denied that he was negating the NEP, Stalin abandoned Lenin’s *smychka* and replaced it with the early phases of a “class war” approach\(^{36}\). This began through the persecution of any remaining ‘commanders of agriculture,’ such as the kulaks or old regime bourgeoisie who managed industry. He implemented a special attack on the technicians and engineers who received special privileges during the NEP, culminating in the 1928 Shakhty Affair. In this show trial, twenty Donbas factory technicians and engineers were accused of colluding with foreign powers to sabotage the factory\(^{37}\). Though these attacks made little

33 The differences between the collective farm and the state farm are as follows: The kolkhoz was legally organized as a collective cooperative. Peasants “voluntarily” joined, and their land, along with the other farmers, became a part of a joint-owned collective. The decisions for the collective were made by a committee. A sovkhoz, however, was a farm on state-owned land, and its workers were all employees. It was run more like a factory than a collectively owned-and-operated farm.

34 Stalin, “Grain Procurements” [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm);

35 Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 88

36 Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 78

37 Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 78
economic sense – it was the “kulaks,” engineers, technicians, and other agricultural and industrial leaders who operated, developed, and ensured the success of their professional field – Stalin used them to take advantage of anti-NEP sentiments in the party and the population, allowing him to defeat those whom he considered the “right-deviationists” who challenged his authority.\footnote{Kuromiya \textit{Stalin}, 79, 84}

In his original plan for collectivization, Stalin intended for only 10\% of rural land to be collectivized by 1933. However, local party leaders aimed to surpass these goals. Ukrainian Communist Party leadership promised to fully collectivize within one year, but raion officials promised 9-12 weeks, setting in motion a rapid plan of collectivization.\footnote{Timothy Snyder, \textit{Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin} (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 28} To accomplish this, twenty-five thousand officers – known as the “twenty-five thousanders” – were sent out to the countryside from the urban centers. They were told by local officials that the peasantry was responsible for the food shortages in the town, and as a result, the twenty-five thousanders relentlessly and insensibly collectivized the land, at times through coercion and brute force. In the process, peasants were threatened with deportation and coerced into signing away their property rights. By March of 1930, over 70\% of the arable land in the Soviet Union was attached to a collective or state farm. But most of the land was collectivized \textit{after} the seed had been planted by individual farmers.\footnote{Snyder, \textit{Bloodlands}, 28}

As collectivization was underway, Stalin began his dekulakization initiative, which targeted those he believed to bear responsibility for the grain shortages: the kulaks. In December 1929, Stalin declared that the only wait to restrict “the exploiting proclivities of the kulaks,” and thus ensure the success of the Five-Year Plan, was to pursue a policy of “liquidating the kulaks
as a class.”

The next month, the Politburo authorized a screening of the entire Soviet Union’s peasant population to determine who was a kulak. On February 2, 1930, Stalin delineated the measures necessary for liquidation. Each locality was to form a special commission called the *troika* – composed of a member of the state police, a local party leader, and a state procurator – to judge the kulaks and other suspect peasants. By May of 1930, over 113,637 Soviet “kulaks” had been forcibly transported to “special settlements” on the Solovki islands, effectively removing the kulak from Soviet life.

To successfully liquidate the kulaks as a class, officials pursued a fierce propaganda campaign. Vasyl Stepanovych Zavoritny remembered the first time an anti-kulak poster appeared in his village. In the poster, a Komsomol member turned a winnowing machine while kulaks, Orthodox priests, Roman Catholic priests, and other “profiteers” fell into the basket. It was captioned, “We will destroy the kulak class.” In other posters, kulaks were depicted as animals and insects infiltrating the kolkhoz, and in others, kulaks pulled at a young Soviet woman’s skirts in an attempt to prevent her from turning onto the road to the collective farm. In these posters and by order of the regime, the kulak was the largest threat to collectivized life.

For one family in the Poltava Oblast of Ukraine, collectivization and dekulakization came in early 1930. They were a poor peasant family, though the husband’s father had been relatively

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42 Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 25-28


44 Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 1-2

Example of Anti-Kulak Propaganda. In this poster, a kulak is being forced away from the collective farm. In the background is a collective farm, surrounded by fertile fields and tractors. The quote to the right of the fist was spoken by Lenin: “The kulaks are most bestial, brutal and savage exploiters, who in the history of other countries have time and again restored the power of the landowners, tsars, priests, and capitalists.” The poster is captioned “Eject the Kulak from the Kolkhoz.”

prosperous under the tsarist regime. The wife worked on her husband’s farm near the town of Hadiach, Poltava Oblast, Ukraine, from 1927 to 1930. She recalled that high taxes were introduced in 1929, which compelled many peasant families to surrender their land to the collective farm. In 1930, her husband was falsely accused of organizing an uprising, leading the NKVD to arrest him for counterrevolutionary activities. The wife remembered returning to her home after visiting her husband in prison, only to find it robbed with an order that she, her

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https://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmViewCatalog&id=COLL%20MISC%200660%2F2%2F1; Translation checked by Professor Thomas Hodge, Chair of the Russian Department at Wellesley College.
children, and her in-laws were expelled from their homestead. She applied to work on the collective farm but was denied because of her “kulak” familial connections. Facing persecution for being the wife of a counter-revolutionary and from the family of a kulak, she entrusted her sons to a caring neighbor and left the village to seek work elsewhere.\(^\text{48}\)

Many other families faced similar situations to the woman from Hadiach. After Kostiatyn Mochulsky’s extended family was dispossessed for their kulak status, his parents knew that the activists would target their land next. Kostiatyn remembered the resulting fight that broke out between his parents. His mother was in favor of joining the collective farm, whereas his father was against it. His father only agreed to join after coercion from party officials, who told him to “watch out, or we’ll remind people that you served in the army of the Ukrainian National Republic [during the Civil War] and wore binoculars.”\(^\text{49}\) Kostiatyn remembered how his father “cr[ied] bitterly” as “he wrapped his arms around his bay horse and led him off to the collective farm.”\(^\text{50}\)

Coercion was common in the early days of collectivization. Petro Danylovych Humeniuk remembered how his village of Mitlyntsi (in Vinnytsia oblast) was collectivized. As a child, he and his friends would peer through the windows of the local village soviet. Time and time again, they watched as villagers stood in the middle of the room with raion officials and party activists at the table. In each instance, the raion official “would yell, jump from his seat, grab his revolver, and wave it in front of the [villager]. And the [villager] would stand there stock-still, only occasionally raising his head and timidly uttering a few words.” The children, having overheard the whispers of their parents, knew that what was happening in that room could only be one of


\(^{49}\) Kostiantyn Mochulsky, “I Was Eight Years Old.” Krymska svitytsia, no. 12 (21 March 2003), translated by Marta D. Olynyk: 2

\(^{50}\) Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 2
two things: the villager was either being forced to join the collective farm, or he was being “interrogated” for his failure to supply enough grain.51

In the face of intense repression from activists, peasants attempted to preserve not only their independence but their livelihoods. They illegally cultivated small gardening plots to feed their families, and many sold or slaughtered their livestock to prevent the collective farms from taking ownership – an act that took the Soviet Union decades to recover from. Other peasants openly voiced their discontent, with some participating in resistance movements. In the village of Chukiv (in Vinnytsia oblast), Vasyl Stepanovych Zavoritny remembered the widespread confusion over whether to join the collective farm and recalled that the peasants who did not want to join organized a “mutiny” in the village. The bells rang, and officials brought in a tractor to dispel the masses. But the old women of the village prevented the tractor from approaching the crowd by laying down in front of its wheels.52 Mutinies in response to collectivization happened across the Soviet Union. In 1930, over 1,700 peasant revolts and uprisings in Soviet Ukraine were registered by authorities, and rebels killed dozens of Soviet administrators and activists.53 Other acts of rebellion included leaving the countryside, with whole villages abandoning Ukraine for Poland. As peasants grew angrier, Ukraine seemed more destabilized by collectivization, rather than secured by Soviet policy and order.54 This destabilization extended beyond Ukraine, with unrest occurring throughout the Soviet Union.

On March 2, 1930, Stalin temporarily suspended collectivization with his “Dizzy with Success” speech. In this speech, he acknowledged that the Soviet Union had already surpassed

52 Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 1-2
53 Plokhii, Gates of Europe, 249
54 Snyder, Bloodlands, 28-31
its one-year goal within mere months. However, Stalin warned that the countryside must
“consolidate” its successes, rather than conclude that “the radical turn of the countryside towards
socialism may be considered already achieved.” He attributed the hardships of collectivization to
overzealous local officials and cautioned against coercing the peasants to join the collective
farms. Stalin also stressed the diverse farming conditions across the Union, which called for a
diverse approach to collective farming. Stalin knew that the current public resistance to
collective farming placed the political stability of the country at risk, but by attributing the
troubles with collectivization to a “lost clearness of mind and sobriety of vision” by local
officials, he hoped to quell public frustrations while maintaining an appearance of control.55 As a
result of this speech, activists stopped collectivizing, and within months, over half of the land
was reverted to the peasantry as they left the collective farm.56

Timothy Snyder theorized that this speech was a tactical withdrawal to temporarily regain
peasant favor. By highlighting the faults in the previous collectivization campaigns and
dispelling the blame on localities, Stalin was able to protect his image while re-strategizing the
collectivization process. In 1931, he introduced a solution to the peasantry’s unwillingness to
collectivize: now, the peasants would be given no choice. Rather than outright coercion (though
this still happened), indirect coercion would be employed through the introduction of a high tax
on the independent farmer. This tax would be too outrageous to pay, leaving the farmer no choice
but to avoid the tax by surrendering to the collective.57

Because of Stalin’s pullback, the peasants planted the crop of 1930 as uncoerced, mostly
independent farmers. A combination of this independent labor along with favorable weather

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1930/03/02.htm
56 Plokhii, Gates of Europe, 250
57 Snyder, Bloodlands, 31-2
conditions led to the “bumper crop” – or an unusually productive harvest – of 1930, which set
the baseline grain requisition target for the next year’s harvest. In 1928, Ukraine was slated to
produce 28.7% of the Soviet Union’s total crop yield, but in 1931, the requisitions were
increased to 35.1%. However, this requisition target was too high for Ukrainians to feasibly
achieve.

By 1931, Stalin’s plan of slow collectivization had come to fruition. Collectivization
came farm by farm, each unable to pay the high taxes. This was unlike before when whole
villages were collectivized at a time. By mid-1932, 70% of the households in Ukraine were
collectivized, along with 60% of the households across the total Soviet Union.

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The fluctuating economic and political influences of the international sphere greatly
impacted Stalin’s approach to collectivization and requisitions. The economic collapse of 1929
seemed promising for the Soviet Union, for the weakening of capitalist superpowers and
“international imperialism as a whole” suggested that the revolutionary moment for global
communism could be approaching. Nonetheless, for all the prospects of global communism, the
economic impact of the Great Depression hit Eastern Europe, and then the Soviet Union.
Peasants were greatly affected by the commodity price crash while the governments faced a
sudden cut to foreign financing. As a result, Stalin was unable to purchase the industrial
materials he desperately needed to modernize the country. In an attempt to finance the
industrial leap of 1931, the Soviets entered a bilateral trade agreement with Germany in 1929 on

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58 R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933 (Longson, 2004), 448-9; This “requisition target” meant that Ukraine was responsible for 35.1% of the state’s total grain delivery. The other 64.9% was the responsibility of other republics within the Union.
59 Snyder, Bloodlands, 33
60 Plokhi, Gates of Europe, 250
62 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 86
the promise that they would use the funds to buy German goods at set, favorable prices. This, along with balance-of-payment problems from their other short-term credits, caused Soviet foreign debt to more than double between 1929-1931. Rumors of default spread in the West, but as the USSR failed to meet the 1931 grain output targets, they still managed to pay their debts, though they had to curtail imports to do so. This “state-imposed deprivation” of imports, along with the deprivation of food for Soviet citizens, “allowed the USSR to avoid external default.”

Simultaneous to the global economic crises of the early 1930s, the Soviet Union faced what it perceived as physical threats along its eastern and Western borders. On the morning of September 18, 1931, reports of an explosion on the South Manchurian railway reached Stalin’s desk. Though the track, trains, and cargo were relatively unscathed by the blast, Japan’s Kwantung army had begun massacring Chinese soldiers in the nearby barracks. Within 10 days, Japan had taken control of Mukden and other nearby cities. Japan’s actions in Manchuria violated the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth, which stipulated the Russian sphere of influence around the Chinese Eastern railway. With this influx of manpower, Japanese troops and artillery outnumbered the Soviet forces in the area. On October 1st, the Soviet Council of People’s Commissars quietly allocated funds for guns and soldiers, and a committee was created to increase the meager 190,000 tons of grain stored in the far east in anticipation of war.

This new threat indicated that soldiers would also need to be fed, complicating an already precarious food situation. Between 1931 and 1932, the number of people on rations had doubled from the previous year. There was not enough food to go around, and it was becoming increasingly evident that many would not receive adequate food provisions. It is possible that Stalin prioritized storing grain in preparation for invasion at the expense of the civilian

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63 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 86-7
64 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 83
65 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 84-5
population of the Soviet Union. The likelihood that this happened is unknown, but a May 1932 telegram about transferring more grain to Siberia suggests that Stalin was worried about military action on the Eastern front of the country, indicating that this international problem may have been an aggravating factor to the famine.

Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, Poland was the main threat along the Western border. In 1930, the Poles secretly funded and trained a Ukrainian army on its own soil for special missions inside the Soviet Union, though this plan ultimately failed. In the fall of 1931, an intelligence report suggested that the Japanese and Poles signed an agreement to jointly attack the Soviet Union. Though this report proved to be false, attack and surveillance remained a constant perceived threat to Stalin. As collectivization incited chaos among the peasantry and Ukrainian refugees fled to Poland, the security of the Western borderlands became a priority.

To secure the borderlands, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Poland in 1932. With this pact, Poland “was inclined to believe that [they] now ha[d] the most desirable type of Bolshevik government that [they] could have.” Regardless of the treaty, Poland would not have been a threat. Facing an economic depression, massive budget cuts to the armed forces, and the Soviet capturing of a large number of trained Polish spies, Poland did not have the resources to incite a revolt among an unhappy, starving population, even if they were aware of the severity of

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66 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 84-5  
67 Stenogrammy zasedanii Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) 1923–1938 gg. [Stenograms of the Meetings of the Politburo of the CC RCP(b)–AUCP, 1923–1938]. 3 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), quoted in Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 87  
68 Snyder, Bloodlands, 37-8  
70 Snyder, Bloodlands, 31  
the famine. Nevertheless, the past perceived threats of Poland may have impacted how the Soviet Union treated the population most susceptible to Polish influence – the Ukrainians.

The Famine Begins

Due to a large variety of factors – the season’s bad weather, an abundance of pests, lack of animal labor, a fewer number of tractors reaching the countryside than expected, the deportation of the best farmers (the “kulaks”), the disruption of the sowing and reaping by collectivization, and peasants who were so defeated by the loss of their land that they saw no reason to work hard – the first collective harvest of 1931 was a pronounced failure that triggered a series of events that laid the groundwork for famine conditions.

Ukrainian officials reported this poor harvest in August of 1931. Stanislav Kosior – the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party – stipulated that the requisition targets were unrealistic considering these conditions, but Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin’s top lieutenant, responded that the issue was not with the harvest, but with theft and concealment of grain by kulaks and class traitors. Though the many purported kulaks had already been deported and dispossessed, they were still facing the blame for something that was a mix of natural occurrences and collectivization-induced conditions. Not only this, but the Stalinist regime deflected blame for the failures of collectivization once again.

That year, despite the poor crop, more than half of the non-spoiled harvest was removed from Soviet Ukraine. On December 5, 1931, Stalin ordered that all collective farms that had not met the requisition quota must surrender their seed grain. Ultimately, the requisition targets for 1931 were fulfilled, but only by handing over the seed grain meant for the next year’s planting.

72 Snyder, Bloodlands, 38
73 Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 672
74 Snyder, Bloodlands, 32-34
75 Davies, Years, 71, 82, 89, 95
76 Robert Kuśnierz, Ukraina w latach kolektywizacji i wielkiego głodu, (Torun: Grado, 2005): 102-103, quoted in Snyder, Bloodlands, 34
By early 1932, there was little seed grain left to plant the crop.\textsuperscript{77} Ukrainian leadership asked for seed in March of 1932, but by then, the planting was already delayed, precipitating the conditions for another poor fall harvest.\textsuperscript{78}

In the village of Chukiv, peasants slowly surrendered their grain to the officials. Their grain was transported by a “long column of vehicles” to a station with a flag that read “Surrender surplus grain to the state.” When the peasants had no more to give, the village leadership created a “towline brigade” headed by a “brutal man” named Plaksiienko.\textsuperscript{79} The members of this brigade went around to the homes of people who had not met the quota and searched their land and houses with ramrods, poking holes through floors, walls, and soil that would reveal hidden “booty” underneath.\textsuperscript{80} Vasyl Stepanovych Zavoritny remembered how the activists “proclaimed the farmers ‘kulaks’ and seized everything they owned: grain, cattle, and rags. Everything was sold on the spot by public auction, to whomever could pay more. People cried and shouted, but the brigade members paid no attention.”\textsuperscript{81} The experience of Vasyl Stepanovych was not unique. Across Ukraine, the peasants were forced to surrender all they had. When that was not enough, their homes were forcefully invaded and torn to the studs to find hidden grain. Despite the Ukrainian officials’ and the Moscow Politburo’s knowledge of the grain shortage, party activists were ordered to continue their quest.

Reports of mass starvation began in mid-1932.\textsuperscript{82} A member of the Young Communists reported that “collective farm members go into the fields and disappear. After a few days their

\textsuperscript{77} Snyder, Bloodlands, 34
\textsuperscript{78} Snyder, Bloodlands, 34
\textsuperscript{79} Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 1-2
\textsuperscript{81} Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 1-2
\textsuperscript{82} Snyder, Bloodlands, 34
corpses are found... the next day one can already find the body of someone who had just been
digging graves for others." In Kharkiv oblast, starvation had been reported in every district of
the region. In June 1932, Vlas Chubar, a member of the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership,
acknowledged that the excessive requisitions had caused the famine:

Given the overall impossibility of fulfilling the grain-requisition plan, the basic reason for
which was the lesser harvest in Ukraine as a whole and the colossal losses incurred
during the harvest (a result of the weak economic organization of the collective farms and
their utterly inadequate management from the districts and from the center), a system was
put in place of confiscating all grain produced by individual farmers, including seed
stocks, and almost complete confiscation of all produce from the collective farms.

Chubar directly attributed the poor harvest and subsequent impoverishment of the peasantry to
the kolkhoz’s substandard organization and Moscow’s insufficient management. Chubar’s report
was not received well in Moscow. In contrast to Chubar’s report, Stalin claimed that Ukrainians,
“despite a fairly good harvest, have found themselves in a state of impoverishment and
famine.” To Stalin, it was not the impossibly high requisition numbers that caused the famine,
but the Ukrainians themselves. In response to these reports, Stalin directly ordered Kaganovich
and his other top lieutenant Vyacheslav Molotov to defeat the “Ukrainian Destabilizers” who
prevented the requisitioning of grain. He did not see the structural issues with collectivization
or the suffering of the people but instead saw a problem with the popular image of
collectivization. The image needed to be fixed, not starvation. Kaganovich and Molotov went to
Kharkiv later in July and told Ukrainian party members that rumors of starvation conditions were
an excuse for the lazy peasants and the complicit activists who did not want to discipline them.

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83 Kusnierz, *Ukraina*, 104-5, quoted in Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 34
84 Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 34
85 “Letter from Vlas Chubar to Molotov and Stalin on agricultural affairs in the Ukrainian SSR,” 10 June 1932, in
86 R.W. Davies et al. (eds), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-1936* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), 138
87 Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 35
88 Jurij Sapoval, "Lügen und Schweigen: Die unterdrückte Erinnerung an den Holodomor" *Osteuropa*, 54, no. 12,
As conditions grew worse in Ukraine, Stalin’s greatest concern was the survival of the regime in the face of nationalists and class traitors. In August 1932, he wrote to Kaganovitch:

The main issue is now Ukraine. Matters in Ukraine are currently extremely bad. Bad from the standpoint of the Party line. They say that in two oblasts of Ukraine (Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk, I believe), nearly 50 raion Party committees have spoken out against the grain procurement plan as unrealistic. They say the matter is no better in other raion committees. What does this look like?... If we do not correct the situation in Ukraine immediately, we will lose Ukraine….Also keep in mind that within the Ukrainian Communist Party (500,000 members, ha, ha) there is no lack (yes, no lack!) of rotten elements, active and latent petlurites and direct agents of Pilsudski. As soon as things get worse, these elements won’t hesitate to open a front within (and outside) the Party, against the Party. Worst of all, the Ukrainian leadership does not see these dangers. Things should not continue this way any longer.89

In this letter, Stalin highlighted how the famine in Ukraine had exacerbated party differences between Moscow and Ukrainian officials, which was further complicated by the unrest of the peasantry. Stalin suggested that if the situation was not corrected, nationalists – agitated by agents of the Polish Chief of State Josef Pidluski and sympathizers of Symon Petliura, the civil war-era President of the Ukrainian People’s Republic – might overtake Soviet Ukraine. As the letter continued, Stalin proposed four corrections: replacing Kosior with Kaganovich as the Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, implementing Balytskyi to Ukraine as chairman of the Ukrainian secret police, replacing other members of the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership, and “turning Ukraine into a fortress of the USSR, a real model republic, within the shortest possible time.”90 Seemingly, Ukraine could only be corrected by replacing its national leadership, purging those who allowed improper requisitioning.

Stalin continued his affronts to Ukrainian nationalism through his reversal of the korenizatsiya policy. Since his days as Commissar of Nationality Affairs, the party position he held before becoming the Central Committee’s General Secretary, Stalin was critical of the

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89 Letter from Stalin to Kaganovitch on changing Ukrainian SSR leadership (excerpt), August 11, 1932, in Pyrih, Holodomor, 47-9.

90 “Letter from Stalin to Kaganovitch on changing Ukrainian SSR leadership (excerpt),” August 11, 1932
korenizatsiya policy instituted by Lenin – which allowed for the promotion of Ukrainian culture and language in everyday life, education, and governmental administration. In contrast to Lenin, Stalin saw the Ukrainian nationality as a problematic threat to socialism. As party membership in Ukraine approached 500,000, with 60% of those consisting of ethnic Ukrainians (a result of indigenization), he had serious concerns for the security of Soviet Communism in Ukraine in the midst of collectivization.91 Beginning in late 1932, korenizatsiya was discarded in Ukraine, reversing a nationality policy that had placated the borderlands for a decade.92 Affronts to Ukrainian nationalism were not limited to those he believed to be complicit in grain requisitioning; he viewed the entire institution of nationalism as politically suspect.

As Stalin bore down on the Ukrainian Soviet leadership’s failure to achieve the requisition targets, he strengthened his collectivization policy by legislating the protection of kolkhoz property from the theft of starving peasants. On August 7, 1932, Stalin introduced laws to protect the property of the collective farm, declaring that all agricultural production was “sacred and inviolable” state property and the unauthorized collection of that property was theft punishable by immediate execution.93 This led to the building of watchtowers around the perimeter of the collective farms, increased security, and dire consequences for the peasantry.94 Those who risked theft to feed themselves and their families reportedly faced public humiliation, rape, torture, and death.95 Henrikh Ksaverovych Pidvysotsky remembered a starving child who

91 Plokhii, Gates of Europe, 252
93 I.V. Stalin, Works, 13 (Moscow 1953-5), 213-14, 402, quoted in Conquest, Harvest, 225
94 Conquest, Harvest, 225-6
95 Snyder, Bloodlands, 39-40
crawled onto a farm and grabbed a single beet seedling. He recalled that the “guard shot him without any questions—just like that.”

By November of 1932, only ⅓ of the grain target had been collected in Soviet Ukraine. Ukrainian officials were told that requisition must be “fulfilled unconditionally, completely, not lowering it by an ounce.” This resulted in the issuing of two directives, uniquely implemented in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership. In the first directive, any grain that was previously allowed to be kept by individual or collective farmers – say, for consistently meeting requisition targets – had to be handed over to the state. In the second directive, peasants unable to meet the grain quotas were ordered to pay a special tax that required a “fifteen-month quota of meat from collectivized and privately owned livestock” and a “one-year potato quota.” This forced peasants who still had livestock and any potatoes stored away to surrender them to the state. Even after the penalties were paid, they still had to meet the grain quota. Peasants were not given receipts for any food that they handed over, so they were subject to repeat search and seizure.

Yelyzaveta Mytrofanivna Spaska remembered that “fateful day” in the winter of 1933, when the activists took her horses and cow. She cried, begged, yelled, and pleaded with officials to leave the animals, but they slapped her across the face to stop her screaming. She tore her hair from her head as her husband watched the activists confiscate everything from the yard, the attic,

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97 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) [Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History] 82/2/141/6, quoted in Anne Applebaum, Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 191
99 TsDAHOU [Central State Archive of Civic Organizations of Ukraine] 1/6/237/201-16, quoted in Applebaum, Red Famine, 192
100 Snyder, Bloodlands, 43
101 Snyder, Bloodlands, 42-3
the vestibule, and the horse stable, taking “all the grain, down to the last grain, including grain for food and grain that had been set aside for sowing.” They found the food she had carefully pressed and hidden under her thatched roof. They demolished the stove bed in the search for grain, where they found no grain – only ashes. By destroying the stove bed, the activists condemned Yelyzaveta and her family to freeze during the winter.\footnote{Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 1}

A story from one boy suggests that access to meat may have been what families needed to survive that winter. A child during the famine, Dmytro Ivanovich remembered how he heard from a peer at school that the activists would confiscate his family’s cows that day. He left school and returned home, but instead of heading inside to warn his family, he tied a rope around the cow and led her into a ravine in the nearby woods. From his hiding spot, he counted 18 activists entering his property. They took a neighbor’s cow away, but the activists did not find Dmytro Ivanovich and his cow. Later, his father told him that by saving the cow, he ensured that his family had milk. That milk was the only thing that saved the entire family from starving to death during the winter.\footnote{Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 1}

Not only were individual peasants targeted by these new directives, but whole villages and regions were targeted as well. On November 28, 1932, the “blacklist” was created as a tool to enforce requisition policies and punish those who did not meet their quotas. Blacklisted farms that failed to meet the targets were required to immediately surrender 15x the normal amount of grain due in a month. Communities on the blacklist had no right to trade or receive deliveries, and they were cut off from food and outside support. They were unable to purchase any manufactured or industrial goods – including salt, kerosene, or matches – and were unable to

\footnote{Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 1}
receive loans or credit. Anyone caught trading in a blacklisted village was subject to immediate arrest.\textsuperscript{104} Blacklisted farms could not receive the services of tractors, so all work had to be done by hand or the (very limited, practically non-existent) livestock.\textsuperscript{105} Effectively, by being blacklisted, the peasant was officially left without the aid of the state, all while being subject to the state’s requisition policies. Across the republic, the names of blacklisted villages appeared in newspapers along with the percentage of the grain quota they had achieved.\textsuperscript{106} On December 15th, 1932, a list of whole districts “to which supplies of commercial products [had] been halted until they achieve[d] a decisive improvement in fulfillment of grain collective plans” was released, including at least 79 out of 358 Ukrainian districts as fully blacklisted, while 174 were partially blacklisted.\textsuperscript{107} Most of the blacklisted districts were in the northern areas of Ukraine, which Serhii Plokhii attributes as the areas hit hardest by the famine.\textsuperscript{108}

On December 21, 1932, Kaganovich traveled to Ukraine to ensure that the new directives were properly enforced. After an all-night meeting in which Ukrainian officials begged for the release of some grain reserves to the peasantry, Kaganovich assured Stalin that “this ‘preoccupation’ with reserves” would cease and that Ukrainian officials would fall in line with the orders from Moscow.\textsuperscript{109} After that meeting, Ukrainian officials stopped resisting Moscow’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104] Applebaum, Red Famine, 194
\item[105] Applebaum, Red Famine, 196
\item[106] Applebaum, Red Famine, 194
\item[107] Medvedev, Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism (New York: 1971): 93, quoted in Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow, 239; Applebaum, Red Famine, 194
\item[108] Conquest, Harvest, 239; In “Mapping the Great Famine,” Serhii Plokhii found that because Central and Northern Ukraine produced foodstuffs other than grain, they were more harshly affected by the famine. Most of their production was beets and other goods. Because of this, they were offered less assistance from the government. Requisitions hurt this population more because they were less likely to be able to fulfill the grain quota, so they had to surrender other foodstuffs earlier to meet the quotas than other parts of the Republic. The South, on the other hand, was normally the most severely affected by natural famines, but this was not the case in 1932. Famine conditions in the South began much later than the North, and the famine conditions were not as severe in the South as they were in the North. Furthermore, the South was the recipient of greater aid from Moscow, whereas only local Ukrainian communist leaders wanted to assist the boreal-steppe region. In Serhii Plokhii, “Mapping the Great Famine,” Harvard Ukrainian Studies 34, no. 1-4 (2015-16): 385-428.
\item[109] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) 81/3/215/1-24; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) 81/3/232/62, quoted in Applebaum, Red Famine, 191
\end{footnotes}
orders and gave all underperforming collective farms “five days to ship, without exception, all collective farm reserves, including sowing seeds.” Ukraine was to produce over \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the Soviet Union’s total yield.

Between December 15, 1932, and February 2, 1933, nearly 95,000 peasants had fled their homes in Ukraine. Peasants crowded the cities, begging for food. Others fled by foot, by train, and by ship to neighboring republics, where there was seemingly no famine. But with this influx of peasants came increased strain on the city rations and the potential for news of the famine to spread, which elevated the regime’s concerns for the political perception of collectivization. The OGPU was:

convinced that this exodus, like that of the previous year, has been organized by enemies of Soviet power, Socialist Revolutionaries and Polish agents, in order to agitate by using peasants' against kolkhozes and, more generally, against Soviet power in the USSR's northern territories. Last year party, government, and police organs failed to uncover this counterrevolutionary plot... A repetition of such a mistake this year would be intolerable.

Officials solved the mass migration problem by blaming the influx on “anti-soviet” agents, and then the officials worked to prevent those “anti-soviet” agents from reaching the cities. In the first weeks of 1933, as peasants grew weaker and more desperate, the borders to Ukraine were closed. The walls of Ukrainian and Soviet border cities were locked so peasants could not enter to beg. On January 14, Soviet citizens who lived in a city were required to carry internal passports that served as documents of residence. This document was required to legally reside in and to travel between cities. Any peasant found in a city without a passport was returned to

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110 TsDAGO Ukrainy [Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine] 1/20/5384/23, quoted in Applebaum, Red Famine, 192
111 Applebaum, Red Famine, 197
112 “Direktiva Tsk VKP(b) i SNK SSSR o predotvrashchenii massovogo vyezda golodaushchikh krest'ian,” quoted in Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 105
113 Snyder, Bloodlands, 45
where they came from. On January 22, the sale of long-distance rail tickets to peasants was banned, signifying that there was no escape out of the starving village. By the end of February 1933, 190,000 Ukrainian peasants had been caught in their attempt to flee and were forcibly returned to their homes.

Ivan Brynza and his friend Volodka attempted to escape by train in early 1933. They rode a cargo train from their village Sakhnovshchyna, to Lozova, and then to Kharkiv. With only 14 kilometers left to the Russian border, they dreamt of food and survival. But when they reached the border, they found it closed. NKVD soldiers with dogs guarded the border. The train was stopped, and those without passports were kicked off the train without “any questions.” The boys ran along the border, hoping to find an unguarded spot where they could slip into the Russian SFSR. Instead, they only saw “a Ukrainian village from which an unpleasant odor was wafting” and right across the border, a Russian village “with children running and laughing.” Ivan swore, “there was no famine there.”

**The Ukrainian Famine Experience**

I remember another horrifying image of the famine year. Some boys were fishing in the pond with a khvatka, a long-handled sieve, and fished out a human head. People came running and froze with fear. It was a child’s head, unrecognizably swollen from being in the water. Someone said: “That’s Pavlo Havryliuk’s head.” Everyone in Zarichchia knew that this boy had gone missing. He was the same age as I, and a friend of mine. No one had looked for him—there was no one to look for him. The village authorities and the militia were occupied with other matters. Eventually his entire family perished: first his father, then his brother, sister, and mother. The people remembered Pavliusha only at that moment.

For a long time his head lay on the dam near the bridge. Then someone reported it to the village soviet, and some men came and took it away.

For a long time I couldn’t get the image of that head out of my mind. I stopped thinking about it only after I had seen my fill of corpses at the front. – Petro Danylovych Humeniuk

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115 Snyder, Bloodlands, 45
116 Graziosi, “New Interpretations,” 105
117 Brynza, “I Was Dying,” 6-7
118 Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 7
More so than memories of hunger, memories of the dead permeate accounts of famine life. Peasants were surrounded by death: of their loved ones, of their neighbors, of their prized livestock. In the selection above, Petro Danylovych recalled his first vivid imagery of death. In a search for life-sustaining nutrients, the boys accidentally fished their classmate’s mutilated body out of a pond. A bitter irony, the boys could not escape death in their search for life. It also revealed a fate that one of these fishing boys could face: Pavlo was dead and missed by no one. His family had died, but the officials did not care – there was no one to mourn for the boy. Even as his head remained on the dam, exposed for the world to see, people had become sensitized to the presence of bodies, to the omnipresence of death. In the end, Pavlo’s head was swept up and buried, along with the other nameless dead.119

For some, it was the attempts to satiate the starvation that killed them. Kostianyn Mochulsky remembered how his Grandpa Yarema died after eating pigweed that jammed in his esophagus.120 Others would find food, only to die right after eating it.121 Some theorized it was because their bodies could not digest the food, leaving the food as an obstructive presence in the body; others thought it was because their bodies were too far gone, with no nutrients capable of saving their body at that stage of starvation.122

The end stages of starvation came slowly. Once one began dying of starvation, they swelled up.123 One child remembered how in his family, his father’s legs swelled first. Next, his sister’s legs, then her face. Finally, their skin began to crack, and the water within the skin leaked out.124 All around, people were swollen from starvation-induced edema.

119 Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 7
120 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 5
122 Taranets, “Communists,” 3
123 Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 2-3
124 Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 2
remembered that the starvings’ skin was so translucent that it seemed like you could see right through their skin to their bodily fluids.\textsuperscript{125} Others remembered how the skin was shiny. Once they reached this state, they were too weak to walk. Soon after the skin had become shiny, their swollen legs would burst.\textsuperscript{126} In the freezing temperatures of early 1933, the starving would crawl out of their houses to sit in the sun and warm themselves, but as soon as they sat, they would be unable to stand up again. Petro Danylovych recalled that some people died in that position.\textsuperscript{127} Dmytro Ivanovych Slobodianiuk remembered a family searching for refuge after traveling from far away to beg for food. They settled near a church for the night with their small children. By morning the mother and father were dead, and their tiny children were attempting to wake them, thinking they were asleep.\textsuperscript{128}

Though many looked towards warmer weather with the hope that it was the “second coming,” spring continued to bring death.\textsuperscript{129} Marfa Pavlina Honcharuk remembers how one by one, her entire family perished. She remembered her mother telling their neighbor: “Three of my children have died.” The neighbor contacted the village council, who sent two people on a cart with red armbands on their sleeves. They wrapped her brothers and little sister in shrouds and took them away. Two days later, on a Saturday evening, her father died. Marfa slept next to her dead father that night. When she awoke Sunday morning, her mother said: “Child, bring me some clean clothing from the chest.” She brought her clean clothing and her mother dressed herself, lay down, and died. A death with clean clothes was the only death with dignity she could provide herself with. She and her husband’s bodies lay in the house until the next day.\textsuperscript{130} After her parents’ death, Marfa sought refuge with her uncle’s family. When she arrived at his home,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[125] Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 5-6
\item[126] Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 2-3
\item[127] Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 5
\item[128] Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 2-3
\item[129] Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 5-6
\item[130] Honcharuk, “Testimony,” 1-2
\end{footnotes}
she found three of his six children dead: one was lying on the floor, another on the bench, and a third on the table. When the children were taken away by the death collectors, her uncle disappeared into the woods, never to be seen again. His wife went mad; Marfa remembers that she “would walk around like a *rusalka*, with her hair loose, repeating the same phrase over and over: the ‘red broom’ has taken away my children, husband, and the grain.”

It was May 1933. Bodies were everywhere – in homes, on the streets, in railroad stations. In some areas, authorities created funeral brigades. The members of this brigade covered themselves in mint leaves before beginning their duties. They traversed the villages, picked the corpses up with rakes, loaded them onto a bullock cart, and transported them to the cemetery. Some peasants were too paranoid to interact with these collectors of death, whether it be out of superstitious fear of summoning the collector to their homes or fear that the collectors were agents of the activists. Kateryna Krychevska-Rosandich believed it “was dangerous even to look at these dead people. My father said that special trucks were taking the dead away.”

During the famine, the relationships of the community were tested. Life before the famine had been abandoned, and the once-strong community units had shriveled during the starvation years. What was needed to survive, to protect oneself and one’s family, was prioritized.

Theft was rampant during the famine, causing neighbors to distrust one another. In one community, Petro Danylovych Humeniuk’s neighbor was the father of a successful party activist, who allowed him to plant onions in a private garden. When the onions ripened, someone began

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131 Honcharuk, “Testimony,” 2  
132 Honcharuk, “Testimony,” 1-2  
133 Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 2  
to pick them. The neighbor suspected Petro and told the boy's mother that if Petro was caught, his mother would be carrying him “wrapped in a length of cloth.” The child swore that he had not picked the onions, but the old neighbor did not believe him.\textsuperscript{135} One evening a woman came to the neighbor’s garden plot and began to pick the onions. The neighbor, when discovering her, pushed her to the ground and began kicking her. Then he shoved a door key into the woman’s mouth, trying to smash her teeth so that she would be unable to eat. The woman cried and begged him to stop. Hearing her cries, the child and his mother rushed outside. The old neighbor stopped the torture, and the woman barely managed to drag herself home. A few days later she died.\textsuperscript{136}

Not all neighbors turned against one another. When Kostiantyn Mochulsky’s home was raided by activists, the activists found the family’s sacks of seed in a hole beneath the snow. When the activists were not looking, neighbors reburied the seed in a different spot. The actions of these neighbors saved a family from starving to death.\textsuperscript{137} Other neighbors took in children orphaned during the famine or dekulakization.\textsuperscript{138} Some neighbors, whom I suspect served in advanced village Soviet positions, provided aid to the beggars that came to their doors.\textsuperscript{139}

Certain members of the community became activists, or activists were imported into the village. Activists were remembered for a brutality that transcended grain requisition – it seemed to bypass the moral norms of the community. In some stories, the activists brutally hurt the children of the community. Plaksiienko, the Chukiv activist discussed earlier in this chapter, took the sheepskin jacket off a two-month-old infant in the middle of winter, only to sell it

\textsuperscript{135} Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 5-6
\textsuperscript{136} Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 5-6
\textsuperscript{137} Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4
\textsuperscript{138} Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Vol. 37, Case 622/(NY)1719, 5
immediately after the raid. Another child recalled an instance when his mother went to collect straw. After collecting it, she tied it up with string, wrapped the string around her chest and back, and left to return home when suddenly, a guard snuck up behind her and set fire to the straw. She survived by the acts of a good samaritan, who untied the string that bound the flaming straw to her body. Despite the urges of the good samaritan, the mother distrusted the court and refused to pursue legal proceedings.

To many, it seemed as though the activists wanted the peasantry to starve. Kostiatyn Mochulsky remembered entire families dying after being poisoned by copper sulfate, which he claimed the authorities had sprinkled into the bags of seed grain to prevent people from eating it. Dmytro Ivanovych Slobodianiuk remembered when a horse died, the activists poured gas over the corpse so the peasants could not eat it. Hryhorii Partychenko recalled a story from his aunt, who claimed to see trainloads of grain being dumped into the sea simply because the grain agents were in a hurry to send the empty cars back for more grain.

Some activists garnered a mythical presence from their searches. In one village, a man named Babiazh appeared, with no one knowing where he came from. Petro Danylovich recalled “legends” of there being no “hiding place that he could not unearth.” He was compared to a bloodhound, able to “sniff out not just food but also gold, silver, and money,” no matter where it was hidden. In another village, a man by the name of Buznoi was referred to as the “Black Broom,” because he left an entire large village without grain by the time he finished his

140 Zavoritny, “Testimony,” 2
141 Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 8
142 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 5
143 Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 2
144 Hryhorii Partychenko, “God Forbid that this should ever happen again,” Krymska Svitlytsia, September 5, 2003, trans. by Alexandra Hawryluk, 2-3
145 Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 3
requisitioning rounds. In many villages, characterizations of activists took on sacrilegious themes, with references to them as “antichrists” and “red devils.”

The hatred of the activists boiled over in one village, when in 1933, an activist perished from starvation. When brought to the cemetery, a woman came up to the edge of the grave and started assaulting the activist’s corpse, yelling: “Here are some groats for you, here’s some fatback for you!” When reflecting on the event, Volodmyr Dmytrovyich Kravchuk recalled that “this was the evil that had been sown among the people; they hardly resemble people anymore.”

Amid starvation, rumors of murder circulated in the villages. One boy recalled how he needed to go into the woods to scavenge for food, but, after the murder of a local woman days before, he was too scared to go. As time went on, and he saw his family’s increasing starvation, he worried that his mother would kill him for food to eat. In another village, a boy named Ivan Lukianovych Marchenko met an insane woman, who was dashing from one house to the other, shoving people and yelling a name over and over: “Vania! Vania! Vania!” He later found out that she had chopped up her two-year-old son, Vania, with an ax and cooked him to feed her other children, causing her to fall mad.

Though few in number, there were confirmed reports of cannibalism in Ukrainian villages. 2,505 were sentenced for cannibalism during the famine in Ukraine. Despite

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146 Shchadko, “Testimony,” 5
149 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4
151 Davies, Years, 173.
cannibalism not being widespread, stories of cannibalism dominate the tales of famine life, highlighting the constant haunt of the horrific fate of either being eaten or becoming a cannibal – either fate worse than dying from starvation.

A city-dwelling child recalled the horrifying story she heard from her schoolteacher about the cannibals in the countryside. The schoolteacher had gone to her native village to find her parents and brother. She entered her parents’ home, and though she found no one there, she discovered barrels of salted meat. Confused about where they had managed to obtain meat, she saw some skin with a mole attached to it on one of the meat pieces. Horror overcame her as she realized the mole was from the skin of her father’s arm, and that the salted meat came from the bodies of her parents. She ran out of the pantry only to find her brother, standing with a “strange expression on [his] face… looking at her askance and avoiding her gaze.” After a few moments, without even a greeting, he said that he was going to bring in wood for the fire. Through the window, the schoolteacher saw her brother sharpening an ax, but unsure if it was for the wood or to attack her, she crawled out of the window and ran to the neighbor’s house. There, the neighbor told her that everyone in the village knew that her brother had killed his parents. That day the schoolteacher returned to Kyiv and told the child this story. Upon hearing this story, the child’s parents brought her grandmother into the city from the countryside, scared for her safety.152

Vitalii H. Taranets recalled the presence of what he called “cannibals” on the marsh fields outside his village. One day, his mother went to the marsh field to pick sorrel and noticed some men staring at her from behind some hazelnut bushes. She ran away and reached a public place, and the men did not catch up with her. When she returned home, she cried and hugged her children, and she told them that some cannibals had wanted to kill her. Later, Vitalii heard rumors that some children who had gone to pick sorrel on the marsh field were never seen again.

152 Krycheyska-Rosandich, “A Horrible Memory,” 1-2
Suspicions were only solidified when at the bazaar, a neighbor bought some jellied meat in which she later discovered boiled human fingers.\textsuperscript{153}

In some of these stories, families turned on one another out of desperation, but in other stories, hopelessness overcomes the nuclear unit. Some tales involve mothers telling their children to eat them once they die, so the child could live.\textsuperscript{154} Some parents, in an attempt to save their children from a more miserable death, took their fate upon themselves. One survivor recalled a wagon carrying a “mountain” of corpses to the cemetery somewhere near Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast. He later found out that the corpses were a whole family, and that husband and wife had suffocated themselves and all their children with smoke by closing the stove vent.\textsuperscript{155}

Less mythical were stories of families abandoning their children in public places, hoping that someone else could ensure their survival. Kostiantyn Mochulsky had heard of parents leaving their children at train stations and asked his mother to bring him there, but she said her legs were too swollen to move.\textsuperscript{156} One child remembered how his Aunt Olena, sensing that she would die soon, left her baby boy at the Children’s Home in Pryluka, where he disappeared without a trace.\textsuperscript{157}

Children’s homes managed to be a refuge for some, but children still died in droves upon reaching them. Often, they arrived too emaciated to be saved. Ivan Brynza, along with other school children, were collected from their village and driven to the edge of a city, where they were put in a large building with orchards on the grounds. Ivan recalled that forty-five children, between the ages of seven and twelve, were brought there in early September 1933. Upon arrival, the children were each given a piece of clay-like bread and some sort of thin soup. Unable to eat

\textsuperscript{153} Taranets, “The Communists,” 2-3
\textsuperscript{154} Leonid Plyushch, \textit{History’s Carnival} (New York, 1977), 40, quoted in Conquest, \textit{Harvest of Sorrow}, 258
\textsuperscript{155} Marchenko, “Testimony,” 1-2
\textsuperscript{156} Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4
\textsuperscript{157} Partychenko, “God Forbid,” 2
the bread, he went outside and ate cherries from the orchard. From that time on, every morning Ivan would go into the garden and pick cherries off the trees. Eventually, the gatekeeper provided him with a small knife so that he could eat the other fruit. During the next two weeks, twelve children died, but he was still “grazing” in the garden instead of eating the sour food provided by the nurses. When the doctor came a month later and noticed Ivan’s improvement, he asked, “What have you been eating?” Ivan responded, “I’m grazing in the garden.” “Good,” the doctor said, “Continue grazing.” Another month went by and ten more children died, but Ivan continued to heal.158

Situations like Ivan’s were not present everywhere – no context is provided for why he was sent to a home when his family was still alive. In many areas of Soviet Ukraine, schools had to take initiative to preserve the lives of their pupils. Ivan recalled that in 1932, more and more children stopped going to school after swelling with hunger. So, in March of that year, students were issued certificates attesting to the fact that they had completed the third grade. Autumn arrived, and the children stopped attending school. Once again, they were given grade-completion certificates ahead of time – in January 1933 – by which time two-thirds of the pupils had disappeared.159 Another survivor claimed that the “Stalinist killers realized that the children would not survive to the spring,” so “at school they began cooking a thin porridge made of barley flour.” The children dragged their swollen bodies to school for the thin gruel.160

Children often became responsible for their families’ survival. While their adult family members worked or were too weak to move, the children scavenged for foodstuffs in the woods, water, and villages. Children also took on roles as beggars, as they were more likely to receive the kindness of strangers than their adult family members. Facing less dire consequences for

158 Brynza, “I Was Dying,” 9-10
159 Brynza, “I Was Dying,” 3-4
160 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 5
crimes, children would steal from shops and illegally collect food scraps from collective farms.\textsuperscript{161} The crime for stealing from “socialist property” was death for an adult, but it was normally only a beating for a child.\textsuperscript{162} Because of this, children would steal from the farms, taking their chances with the guards.

Ivan Brynza and his friend Volodka mastered the art of child crime. One day they were passing by a vegetable depot when Volodka attempted to steal five potatoes and two sugar beets. He was chased by guards, but his pursuers didn’t catch him. However, during the chase, he lost one of the beets.\textsuperscript{163} Another time, the huge grain-storage facility near Ivan’s house was temporarily unguarded. Late one evening, Volodka crawled into the storage area and filled his pockets with about 300-400 grams of wheat. The next day, however, he was caught and beaten, but he later achieved retribution by attacking a soldier with a rock. Guards searched for the perpetrator of this rock attack, but no one suspected a twelve-year-old boy. Officials arrested four men for the attack, none of whom were ever seen in the village again.\textsuperscript{164} With this story, we see that children were able to use their youth to their advantage to get away with crimes that preserved the livelihood of themselves and their families.

Theft was one of the many ways families survived during the famine. Every day, families found new ways of sustaining themselves, even as new directives that confiscated meat and barred travel were introduced.

Life on the collective farm was foodless and difficult. During the harvest season, farmers worked the fields from 6am to 8pm, with a two-hour break for a lunch with no food.\textsuperscript{165} In 1933, a

\textsuperscript{161} Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 3
\textsuperscript{162} Recorded in Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 8; Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 3; Taranets, “The Communists,” 3
\textsuperscript{163} Brynza, “I Was Dying,” 5
\textsuperscript{164} Brynza, “I Was Dying,” 5-6
woman recalled that men died at faster rates than women on the farm, so women were left to do the harsh labor normally reserved for the men.\textsuperscript{166} Even with this work, farmers received little, if anything, as payment. Officially, the rule was if a farmer worked until evening, they received a 600-gram ration. If it rained, they got a half-ration. The rations, however, were not real bread; it was “some sort of‘ black, doughy mess made out of vetch (a viny annual legume used as cattle feed).”\textsuperscript{167} Still, women waited in hours-long lines for rations of this “bread” before work, hoping to receive a few grams for their families\textsuperscript{168} Even when collective farm policy was properly enforced, there was little food to give the workers.

For many, survival involved a dependency on odd jobs. One woman worked as a dressmaker for the heads of the village soviet, the only people left who could afford new clothing.\textsuperscript{169} Another woman worked as an artist of Soviet propaganda and recalled spending more time painting than necessary because she was paid in extra bread for every day she worked.\textsuperscript{170} One man built himself a wheelbarrow and was able to hire himself out to transport rocks, mix horse fodder, and collect bodies.\textsuperscript{171} These employment opportunities were few and far between, and many of the jobs required mobility that was inaccessible to a person bound to the collective farm. Furthermore, many were only able to work these jobs because they escaped the village before the borders were closed, or because they made connections prior to the famine.

Escape, if one could manage it, was likely the best way for a peasant to sustain themselves and their families. Hryhorii Partychenko heard stories of how his uncle escaped to Belarus through an unguarded swampy area near his village. In Belarus, he received bread as a

\textsuperscript{167} Pidvysotsky, “Testimony,” 1
\textsuperscript{168} Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 109, 19-20
\textsuperscript{169} Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 37, Case 622/(NY)1719, 5-6
\textsuperscript{170} Krycheyska-Rosandich, “A Horrible Memory,” 3
\textsuperscript{171} Kravchuk, “Testimony,” 1
wage, which he then dried into crackers and snuck back to his family in the dead of night.172 Other peasants found ways to leave their villages for short periods of time. Petro Danilovich remembered how his grandparents lived in a neighboring village, where requisitions were not enforced as harshly as they were in his own village. Every week, he and his siblings would sneak to their grandparents’ house and receive a little grain or a few potatoes.173

When escape was not possible, families had to improvise new food options. Dmytro Ivanovych remembered eating anything he could forage: bagasse (dry residue of sugar cane and beets), stripped corn cobs, sunflower heads, beet leaves, nettles, magpie eggs, spring onions, spurge, and geraniums.174 Vitalii Taranets remembered how the leaves of a hawthorn bush tasted much better than grass, and he found a way to turn the hawthorn bush leaves into a meal. He picked the leaves, dried them, and ground them to make pancakes.175 Kostiatyn Mochulsky remembered digging food scraps out of a rat’s nest to make soup.176 Beyond scavenging, many families survived only because an animal died on the collective farm. Kostiatyn and his mother “hacked off a piece of carrion” and “boiled it all day to prevent poisoning” from the gas poured on the animal, creating a pungent “yellow foam” from the soured meat.177

Torgsin shops were opened by the government, providing a space where silver and gold could be traded for goods. There, one family traded a child’s gold cross, the mother’s thin bracelet, the gold crowns from the mother’s teeth, the silver from old coins, and the silver frame of an antique icon. The child remembered how her “Granny Marusia and [Aunt] Prisia wiped their tears” as her father smashed the frame to pieces.178 After trading things at the Torgsin, one

172 Partychenko, “God Forbid,” 3
173 Humeniuk, “Testimony,” 4
174 Slobodianiuk, “Testimony,” 2; Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4-5
175 Taranets, “The Communists,” 3
176 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4-5
177 Mochulsky, “I Was Eight,” 4; similar story in Olynyk, “Testimony of Vasyl Ulianovych Savchuk,” 1-2
178 Krycheyska-Rosandich, “A Horrible Memory,” 4
woman was able to purchase a “loaf of beautiful rye bread” at “very inflated, commercial prices.”

At the expense of family heirlooms, families were able to purchase a chance to survive.

All in all, the famine devastated village life. The peasant was dually affected by the death of their loved ones while being a part of a community in turmoil. Thieves and activists roamed the countryside, searching for morsels of food to take. Not only were neighbors suspicious of one another, but the nuclear family unit was ravaged by fears of cannibalism and violence. However, through it all, peasants found ways to survive. Children took on adult roles in the search for food while peasants found unusual forms of sustenance. For some, survival was dependent on the surrendering of family heirlooms or the abandoning of children at orphanages. The famine inflicted unconscionable conditions on the Ukrainian village that went deeper than starvation and death; the village and family lost trust in one another and faith in a common future.

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In the spring of 1933, there were reports that over ten thousand Ukrainian peasants died every day. As summer approached, cadres of soldiers, students, and other young activists were transported from across the Soviet Union to Soviet Ukraine to harvest the crop of the collective farms. The peasants who were still alive were too weak to till the land on their own.

Ultimately, the harvests from 1930 to 1932 drastically declined. In 1930, the harvest was 73 million tons. This dropped to 57 million tons in 1931 and 55 million tons in 1932. Like the harvest, the total procurements from requisitions fell, but they never fell to zero. Similarly, exports declined, but they never stopped. Hiroaki Kuromiya noted that between 1931-1933, a

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179 Krycheyska-Rosandich, “A Horrible Memory,” 4
180 Snyder, Bloodlands, 47
181 Olga Ryabchenko, “Young People Mobilizing for Participation in Communistic Transformations in Rural Areas during the years of Collectivization and Holodomor,” Ukrain’s’kyi Istoriychnyi Zhurnal, no. 3 (July 2019: 74-9; Applebaum, Red Famine, 283, 288
182 Kuromiya, Stalin, 102
record-breaking 7 million tons of grain and flour were exported to secure foreign currency and technology.\textsuperscript{183} Anne Applebaum highlighted how in 1932, the USSR exported more than 3500 tons of butter and 586 tons of bacon from Ukraine alone. Those numbers rose to 5433 tons of butter and 1037 tons of bacon in 1933, along with other foodstuffs including apples, poultry, eggs, and vegetables.\textsuperscript{184}

There is no conclusive figure of deaths in Soviet Ukraine, but the ultimate consensus rests somewhere around 3.6 million hunger-related deaths in the Ukrainian countryside and 300,000 in the Ukrainian cities.\textsuperscript{185} Despite the obvious signs of starvation, many of the deaths were not accurately attributed to the real cause. Panteleimon Kazymyrovych Vasylevsky’s father was a \textit{feldsher} (or physician's assistant), and from the summer of 1932 until May 1933 he oversaw the collective farm first-aid station in the village of Masivtsi, Khmelnytskyi Oblast. As the mortality rate increased, village soviet officials forced him to report alternative causes of death for those who died of starvation.\textsuperscript{186} Because of situations like this, it can be difficult to properly estimate the true amount of starvation-related deaths. In the Russian SFSR, around 3.3 million people perished from starvation or hunger-related disease. Of those who died there, it is estimated that two hundred thousand of them were ethnically Ukrainian. In Kazakhstan, it was estimated that 1.3 million people died from starvation, hunger-related disease, or the result of forced denomadization. Of these, roughly one-hundred thousand were ethnically Ukrainian.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{183} Kuromiya, \textit{Stalin}, 102
\textsuperscript{184} Applebaum, \textit{Red Famine}, 193
\textsuperscript{185} “Demographic Impact,” The Great Famine Project, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, accessed March 15, 2023, \url{https://gis.huri.harvard.edu/demographic-research}
\textsuperscript{187} Snyder, \textit{Bloodlands}, 53
the whole Soviet Union, approximately seven to eight million starved to death during the famine.\textsuperscript{188}

There is no doubt that the famine was the result of the Stalin regime’s brutal collectivization and requisition policies, and there is no doubt that the peasantry was brutalized by activists during the process of collective reform. However, it is important to note two things: First, not everyone suffered during collectivization. Often, those who worked in government posts, such as teachers, received adequate rations.\textsuperscript{189} Those who lived in the city were hungry, but there was less starvation there. In some areas of the countryside, requisitions were less harshly enforced, providing the peasantry with more opportunities to hide foodstuffs from requisitioning. Secondly, aid was provided to the peasantry during the famine. The aid was too little and arrived much too late, and the fact that aid was provided does not negate the callous disregard for human life shown by activists and government officials. But, the famine did come to an end, even as collectivization continued, and even as officials worked to quietly erase the famine from Soviet memory.

While requisitions and exports never ceased, there were reductions in exports and requisitions as well as some forms of grain assistance. As early as 1931, Stalin approved, and as Historian Stephen Kotkin claims, “sometimes even initiated” reductions in grain exports. From April 1932 onwards, grain assistance for sowing and sustenance was given in the form of loans, but it came too late and was too limited. In 1932 and 1933, reductions in grain collection quotas for Ukraine, the North Caucasus, Crimea, the Volga, the Kazakhs, and Eastern Siberia were approved on nine occasions, with the ultimate grain collection requirement for the Soviet Union falling from 24.3 to 19.6 million tons. Of that lessened quota, only 18.5 million tons were

\textsuperscript{188} Kuromiya, \textit{Stalin}, 103

actually collected.\textsuperscript{190} In early 1933, Stalin’s order “On Aid in Seeding to the Collective Farms of the Ukraine and North Caucasus” issued 325,000 tons of seed for Ukraine and 230,000 for North Caucasus.\textsuperscript{191} Moscow quietly returned 5.7 million tons of grain back to agriculture, including 2 million tons from the reserve stock and 3.5 million tons from the procurement stock. Around the same time, small allotments of food were reallocated from the cities to the countryside of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the North Caucasus. As this occurred, Stalin used hard currency to quietly purchase grain and livestock from abroad.\textsuperscript{192}

There is evidence that Stalin may have been receptive to providing aid to Ukraine early on. On July 24, 1932, while declaring that requisitions must be unconditionally fulfilled, he thought “an exception must be made for the districts in Ukraine that have suffered especially.”\textsuperscript{193} However, he may have had an ulterior motive. Though he claimed that while the exception was “necessary from a point of view of justness,” it was also necessary “in the view of the special condition of Ukraine and its common frontier of Poland.”\textsuperscript{194} This suggests that Stalin may have only wanted to aid the areas of Ukraine in the vicinity of Poland, either to prevent the migration of the Ukrainian population into Poland or to prevent Polish intervention in the region. It will remain unclear whether Stalin prioritized the livelihood of his citizens or the stability of his borders against his perceived enemies.

In the Spring of 1933, concessions were finally made that brought the famine to an end. To bolster the labor force of remaining peasants in addition to the imported workers, the Ukrainian government halted all peasant deportations and reduced the number of arrests during

\textsuperscript{190} Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Waiting For Hitler}, 128
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Pravda}, 26 February 1933, quoted in Conquest, \textit{Harvest}, 241
\textsuperscript{192} Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Waiting For Hitler}, 128
\textsuperscript{193} Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 17, op. 162, d. 13, l. 75, 76, signed by Kaganovich, quoted in Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Waiting For Hitler}, 100
\textsuperscript{194} RGASPI 17/162/13/5, 76, signed by Kaganovich, quoted in Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Waiting For Hitler}, 100
the spring of 1933. In late 1933, Ukraine’s grain contributions for the next calendar year were reduced by 915,000 tons. Students and activists continued to be bussed into the region to help with the harvest. In the spring of 1934, the requisition of vegetables was suspended, and peasants were now allowed to keep the food they grew on their remaining private land allotments.

Collectivization continued into 1934, but labor shortages plagued the region. Importing students and workers to the countryside was not a permanent solution, so a resettlement program was launched. Migrants from other areas of the Soviet Union were incentivized to move to the rural areas of Ukraine, settling into the homes where Ukrainian families had once lived.

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Ivan Brynza, like all the other witnesses included in this chapter, survived the famine. He returned to his village from the children’s home, reuniting with his family who, remarkably, all survived. But the long-lasting emotional scars remained, and for those, he blamed “Bolshevik Moscow,” whom he claimed did not feed Ukrainians in their time of need. Many agree with Ivan – in the testimonies discussed here, most witnesses labeled the famine as “intentional” and “artificial.” These characterizations have been passed down through generations, exploding into academic debate and shaping the memory of Ukrainians today. These ideas of “intention” and memory will be evaluated in the following chapters of this thesis.

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195 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 283
196 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 284
197 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 286
198 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 288-90: In 1933, 117,000 Russian peasants arrived from Russia and Belarus, and in 1934, 20,000 more arrived. Many settlers left in spring of 1935.
Chapter II.
The Politics of the Holodomor’s Memory

Each year since 1998, on the last Saturday of November, Ukrainians commemorate the millions of lives lost during the Holodomor. For the past decade, the sculpture “Bitter Memory of Childhood” – located on the right bank of the Dnieper River in Kyiv – has been the centerpiece of *panakhyda* memorial services, where participants have placed sheaves of grain, bread, apples, and children’s toys around the statue of a weeping young girl. 199 Every year, at 4pm, both domestic and international leaders, along with civilian observers, have gathered at the Kyiv monument, lighting lamps and laying flowers in front of the statue before holding a moment of silence. 200 Many around Ukraine have left lit candles in their windows, symbolically partaking in the service from afar. 201

These memorial services have extended to the Ukrainian Diaspora. This past year, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, thousands gathered for a memorial service, one of over thirty official memorial events that took place in Ukrainian diasporic communities across the United States. 202 At a memorial event in Lithuania – held at the monument to the victims of the Soviet occupation in Vilnius – officials opened an exhibition called “The Uncondemned Genocide of Ukrainians Repeats.” 203 One publication reported that in several European cities, “restaurants

203 “Mournful events dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor took place in Lithuania,” Holodomor Museum, November 29 2022,
[were] set up on the streets, where they [offered] food that Ukrainians used to save themselves 90 years ago – bread made from grated grass, potato peels, weed soup.\footnote{56}

The Holodomor Memorial Day of 2022 carried greater importance than the normal memorial service because of the current war in Ukraine. On this day, President Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to “honour the memory of Ukrainian men and women, children and adults, whose lives were taken by the Holodomor-genocide.”\footnote{205} Zelenskyy believed that Ukrainians must mourn the lives “taken by the Holodomor genocide,” but they also must do “everything possible and impossible to stop Russia’s new genocidal policy. A new one, but so like the one that killed millions of people in the 20th century.”\footnote{206} November 26, 2022, was not only a day of remembrance; it was a day to harken tragic past into current tragic events, tying them together through the term “genocide.”

The Holodomor and the claims that it was a “genocide” have become a fixture in the Ukrainian nation, but not without controversy. This chapter investigates the politics of the Holodomor’s memory, focusing on the complex ways in which the memory of the Holodomor and its controversial status as a potential genocide have been used to shape the Ukrainian nation. This chapter first discusses how the memory of the famine was suppressed during Stalin’s rule and how it eventually emerged into public consciousness. Next, I explore the ways in which the Holodomor has been used as a tool in Ukrainian nation-building. Then, I evaluate the politics of the international recognition of the Holodomor, and how this “internationalization” of memory

has factored into Russo-Ukrainian relations. Finally, I underscore how Ukrainian officials and world leaders have fused the violence of the past with the violence of the present to create a historical pattern of Russian aggression, accomplished by connecting the events of the Holodomor to the Russo-Ukrainian war.

The Taboo: The Censored Memory of the Holodomor from the Late 1930s until the Eve of Soviet Collapse

Four years after the famine, the Soviet Union undertook its first census since the implementation of the Five-Year Plan. As the census was underway, newspapers advanced stories of population growth and increased standards of living after “ten years of our heroic fight for socialism.”207 In 1934, census officials estimated the population of the USSR to be 168 million and optimistically predicted that by 1937, the population would stand at 170-172 million. A preliminary report of the 1937 census, however, cautiously suggested lower population levels in the Ukraine, North Caucasus, and Volga regions, where “the resistance of kulaks to collectivization was particularly determined and bitter.”208 The official results of the census listed the total population of the Soviet Union as 162 million people, over 8 million less than the original estimate. This loss reflected the famine victims, their unborn children, and the results of mass migration and deportation during the famine years.209

This census did not fit the Stalinist narrative of success, so it was crushed. The census was officially declared by the regime to be “conducted with violations of government

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208 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE) [Russian State Archive of the Economy] 1562/329/143, 6-10, quoted in Merridale, “1937 Census,” 235
209 Anne Applebaum, Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 300
instructions, with the grossest violations of elementary principles of statistical science.” In this narrative, the lower statistical figures were falsified by “enemies of the people” in order to hinder the success of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, the regime halted the census publication and hid the results. Within months, new officials had replaced the former census workers, many of whom were arrested and executed. Stalin declared a socialist victory in the quantity and quality of life across the Soviet Union. Two years later, at the Eighteenth Party Conference, he announced that the Soviet population had reached 170 million.

Even with this public denial, Stalin was aware of the plight of the population. Years later, at a September 1940 Politburo meeting, Stalin admitted that during the famine years, in the whole Soviet Union, “25-30 million people starved, there wasn’t enough grain.”

Just like the true population impacts of the famine were suppressed, so was discussion of the famine. In the fifty years after the famine, there was near silence on the subject in the Soviet Union. The famine was rarely mentioned in the state-sanctioned media from the 1930s onwards. Successive regimes after Stalin forged official narratives of what happened during the collectivization years – narratives that did not involve famine. With this suppression, Stalin’s totalitarian regime implemented what Georgiy Kasianov called a “taboo” about the famine. Nevertheless, throughout those fifty years, there were brief instances when the taboo was partially lifted until finally, the Ukrainian diaspora opened the floodgates, forcing the Soviet Union to address the famine on the eve of its collapse.

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211 Sautin, “The National Census”
212 Applebaum, Red Famine, 300-1
213 Surrovaia drama naroda (Moscow: 1989), 503, quoted in Hiroaki Kuromiya, Stalin (New York; Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005), 103
The taboo was partially lifted at different moments between 1934 and 1984. The first time was between 1941 to 1944, during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Many Ukrainian Nationalists viewed the Nazis as potential liberators, and the average peasant believed that their conditions could not be worse under Nazi occupation than they had been under Soviet rule. Perhaps capitalizing on these sentiments, the Nazi regime allowed various newspapers to publish a small number of articles that mentioned the famine, along with a few eyewitness accounts from the famine years. The first known work of fiction about the famine was published by a Polish citizen during Nazi occupation, with the work devoted “to the mothers who starved to death in the famine in Ukraine in the years 1932-3.” These publications suggest that Ukrainians were allowed to remember their experience during the famine and openly discuss these memories. Though these publications were few and far between, Nazi occupation marked the first domestic discussion of famine in Ukraine. Years later, after the Soviets regained control of Ukraine, any talk of the famine was labeled as “Hitlerite propaganda” and quickly suppressed, which suggests that famine discourse was widespread enough to warrant renewed suppression.

The “taboo” was slightly lifted again during the era of Stalin’s successor, Nikita Khrushchev, who critiqued the Stalinist regime and initiated a relaxation of censorship policies. At the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev, in front of hundreds of activists, condemned Stalin for having “sanctioned…the most brutal violation of socialist legality, torture and

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215 Certain members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists were Nazi collaborators. Viewing the Nazis as liberators of Ukrainians from communist rule, certain leaders, such as Stephen Bandera, proclaimed Ukraine an independent state and pledged to work under with Nazi Germany. The Nazi regime, however, disfavored the proclamation, and when OUN officials refused to rescind it, arrested Bandera. Because of this complicated history, the OUN is often criticized for its connections to fascism by some, while others view the OUN as heroes of the Ukrainian nation; Karel C. Berkhoff, “The Great Famine in Light of the German Invasion and Occupation,” Harvard Ukrainian Studies 30, no. 1/4 (2008): 174
216 Berkhoff, “Famine in Light of German Invasion,” 165-6
217 Ulas Samchuk, Na koni voronoma: Spomyny i vrazhennia, 2nd ed. (Winnipeg, 1990): 109, quoted in Berkhoff, “Famine in Light of German Invasion,” 166
oppression,” but his speech was concealed from the Soviet public. Though the former head of the Ukrainian Communist Party did not explicitly comment on the famine, Khrushchev referenced the “difficult situation in agriculture,” one that “Stalin never even noted” despite the concerns of his lieutenants. However, even with this critique, Khrushchev praised Stalin’s economic plan, for without it, the country “would not now have a powerful heavy industry…would not have the kolkhozes… [and] would find [them]selves disarmed and weak in a capitalist encirclement.”219

In addition to his critiques of Stalin's “cult of the individual,” Khrushchev allowed studies on the agricultural impact of collectivization to reach the public sphere.220 Khrushchev-era historians V.P. Danilov and N.A. Ivnitskii used the thaw conditions to modify the history of collectivization and approach the issue of starvation during collectivization for the first time in Soviet history, though they were limited by the accessibility of the regime’s official archives.221 Despite these revisions, the current regime continued to distance itself from catastrophes of collectivization by claiming that the Stalinist regime had addressed the original issues with collectivization as they happened, such as when Stalin blamed the activists for the negative peasant response to collectivization with his 1930 “Dizzy with Success” speech.222 In a 1969 speech, Khrushchev’s successor Leonid Brezhnev, claimed that in “the process of collective-farm construction, we were not free from known errors, but these were errors of feeling our way, errors caused by the lack of experience. The Party itself uncovered these errors,

222 Wemheuer, “Regime Changes,” 36-39
[and] spoke openly about them to the people.”223 The “thaw” only went so far; while there was an awareness of the poor conditions that plagued the Soviet Union during 1932-3, the regime managed to dodge criticism and responsibility through blame and continued censorship.

After World War II, 250,000 Ukrainians – including political refugees, war veterans, and displaced peoples – immigrated from the Soviet Union to the wider world, bringing with them their experience of the Great Famine.224 Of these immigrants, 34,000 went to Canada, which already had a flourishing population of Ukrainians.225 Beginning in the 1950s, Ukrainian-Canadians introduced a powerful political agenda based on survivor accounts of the famine, which they claimed was perpetrated against the Ukrainian people.226 The diaspora published numerous accounts of survivor testimony and circulated them within local Canadian communities.227 This included the 1953 Black Deeds of the Kremlin (a white book), which was secretly shipped outside of the Soviet Union and published in North America.228 This book of testimony aimed to show the “Russian Communist enslavement of Ukraine” and documented the Ukrainian peasantry’s resistance to the regime.229 The writers of the book believed that it was “Russian Communist Imperialism,” not Soviet imperialism, that had initiated the deadly “struggle” against “the independent Ukrainian farmer.”230 By the end of the 1960s, the growth in

225 The first wave of Ukrainian immigrants came to Canada between 1891 and 1914, escaping Austro-Hungarian rule. They were mostly poor farmers who went to Canada because of its Homestead program that aimed to cultivate the rural lands of the vast province. The next wave of 70,000 Ukrainians occurred between 1915 and 1930, consisting mostly of laborers and political refugees fleeing the new Soviet Union. Most of these migrants settled in Canadian cities. More info in Nikolko, “Diaspora Mobilization,” 1875-6 and “Timeline: Ukrainian Canadian History and Settlement,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed March 29, 2023, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/ukrainian-canadian-history
226 Nikolko, “Diaspora Mobilization,” 1878
227 Nikolko, “Diaspora Mobilization,” 1878
228 Applebaum, Red Famine, 332
230 Black Deeds of the Kremlin, pg VII
widespread Holocaust awareness and the investigation into Ukrainians’ roles in the persecution of the Jews during World War II led to hesitation in considering the Great Famine as an equally catastrophic event, and many who tried to bring the Great Famine to public attention were treated as “Nazi collaborators” and “anti-Soviet puppets.” However, this changed in the 1980s.

Influenced by the efforts of the Ukrainian diaspora, the United States began to investigate what really happened during the Great Famine of 1932-3. Robert Conquest’s 1986 Harvest of Sorrow marked the first investigation into the Great Famine, made possible through the resources of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and the Ukrainian National Association. The Research Assistant for his book, James Mace, led the 1986 United States’ Joint Congressional initiative to investigate the famine and “provide the American public with a better understanding of the Soviet system.” Holding hearings throughout the nation, the committee interviewed over 57 eyewitnesses to the famine, which were later transcribed into an oral history project. When the report to Congress was released in 1988, the committee issued 19 conclusions, one of which declared that “Josef Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-1933.” The committee argued that Stalin knew about the famine conditions, and even with this forewarning, introduced policies that exacerbated the conditions with notable “vigor” in

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234 United States Congress, Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933: Report to Congress, viii https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d00831044s
ethnically Ukrainian areas of the Soviet Union. Despite these conclusions, the US did not pursue further action, such as raising the issue of genocide before the United Nations or successfully voting to label the famine as a genocide in Congress.

As these investigations occurred in the United States, the Soviet Union faced several political and economic challenges that necessitated widespread reform. After Brezhnev’s improper management resulted in the Era of Stagnation, Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to reform the lagging Soviet economic and political system through his perestroika and glasnost reforms. Perestroika aimed to reform and restructure the Soviet economy so the country could become competitive with the West, while glasnost called for “openness” and “transparency” within the government. Gorbachev believed that public awareness of previous political faults would help to overcome the old regime’s political and bureaucratic shortcomings. As part of glasnost, the state loosened its reins on the media, allowing them to discuss sensitive topics. Soon, the media scrutinized several “black holes” in Soviet history that had long been hidden, and they exposed numerous social and economic problems in the Soviet Union that the government had long denied and covered up. Eventually, information about Stalin's atrocities, long suppressed, came to light, sparking an interest in the crimes of the Soviet regime. These revelations, along with a deteriorating economic situation, sent the Soviet Union into chaos, and calls for “true history” became a part of the political agenda of the emerging opposition to delegitimize the regime.

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235 United States Congress, Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933: Report to Congress, xxiii-xxv
https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d00831044s
238 Dovilė Budryté, “Memory Politics and the Study of Crises in International Relations: Insights from Ukraine and Lithuania,” Journal of International Relations and Development 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2021): 985
239 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 195; Zhurzhenko, “Capital of Despair,” 601
Conquest’s book, the United States’ investigation, and Gorbachev’s political reforms were critical to how discourses of the Great Famine finally reached the Soviet public. Simultaneous with Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost reforms, a special task force was created by the Soviet Union’s Central Commission of CPSU to respond to the report of the US Commission. Intended to disprove the US Commission’s findings, the Soviet special commission was provided evidence that was used by the United States Congress, as well as previously classified or unpermitted Soviet archival sources, government documents, survivor testimonies, and images of Soviet Ukraine from the famine era. These newly declassified documents indisputably proved that a large-scale famine had occurred between 1932-3. Now, the commission members knew what happened – the famine was not a result of drought or poor weather conditions, but a result of political malfeasance. Yet after viewing these sources, the special commission decided not to make these findings public.240

In 1988, the World Congress of Free Ukrainians created an International Committee of Inquiry to perform a “Nuremberg-Style” tribunal into the famine. The Commission asked jurists and legal scholars from across the world to participate. The purpose of the Commission was to inquire and report on the existence, causes, and extent of the famine, and to assess the culpability of its perpetrators.241 The majority of Commission members argued that the evidence was sufficient to prove that the famine was a genocide against Ukrainians, while a minority of the commission disagreed. Its final report was not widely publicized, but according to Milana Nikolko, the report provided a “strategic goal” for the World Congress of Free Ukrainians to mobilize the trauma from the famine into a larger political movement.242

240 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 198-9
242 Nikolko, “Diaspora Mobilization,” 1880
As parts of the diaspora continued to launch investigative tribunals, the Soviet commission’s task evolved from the denial of the famine to providing a “correct” explanation of the event. Because the Soviet government now had to publicly correct the narrative, the taboo on famine discourse was lifted. The Soviet Union commissioned Canadian journalist Douglas Tottle to write *Fraud, Famine, and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard* as a response to evolving Western scholarship on the famine, arguing that not only was the Ukrainian famine a hoax, it was Nazi propaganda. The book argued that while there was a food shortage in Ukraine and Russia during the time, it was due to activist mistakes in collectivization enforcement, poor harvests, bad weather, foreign sanctions, Kulak grain hoarding, and sabotage on behalf of Polish spies.

The findings from Tottle’s book poured into the public Soviet media. By 1988, the word “famine” appeared in official mass media, along with the continued usage of the term “food shortages.” Though famine was officially interpreted by the Soviet Union as a result of the deviation from “Leninist agrarian policy,” Ukrainian nationalist movements changed the tone of the famine discourse from one of unfortunate circumstances to one of national tragedy.

Ukrainian magazines published extracts from Conquest’s *The Harvest of Sorrow*, revealing newly uncovered government documentation and Ukrainian eyewitness testimony. Magazines dedicated special columns to the famine, such as *Ukrayina’s “By the Paths of Pain and Sorrow*” weekly column. Others published extracts from the *White Book*, an account of eyewitness testimony that Western readers had had access to for thirty years.

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243 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 338
244 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 339; Tottle was said to have written this book without input from the Soviet government, but many have speculated that he was given special access to Soviet archives.
245 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 198-9
246 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 198-9
247 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 198-9
248 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 198-9
In February 1988, in a speech to the Kyiv chapter of the Union of Writers of Ukraine, group secretary Oleksa Musiyenko became the first recorded person to publicly use the term “Holodomor.” The speech was published in the Literaturnaya Ukraina, the newspaper that after independence, would become the mouthpiece of the national democratic movement – the movement that later promoted the institutionalization of the Holodomor in Ukrainian national narratives.249

While Gorbachev hoped that openness would bring in a new era of government, he did not intend to reconstruct the Soviet political system. An unintended consequence of glasnost was the public revelation that the country’s most pressing political, legal, and national issues could no longer be ignored, which culminated in a massive rift between the ruling bodies of the Soviet Union and between the government and society. Within a few years, the Soviet Union disintegrated, republic by republic. Ukraine declared independence on December 1, 1991, with 92% of the population voting to break away from the Soviet Union. On December 8, 1991, the Belavezha Accords were signed by the leaders of the now-independent Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, recognizing each other's sovereignty, and marking the Dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Dissolution was made official when on December 25th, 1991, the Soviet Flag was lowered and replaced by the Russian flag, and General Secretary Gorbachev transferred his sovereign powers to Russian President Yeltsin. Now independent, Ukraine would build its own narrative of the past, relying heavily on the crimes of the Stalinist regime to do so.

Institutionalizing the Holodomor in Ukrainian National Narratives, 1992-2014

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics had to find their own way of governing. To define themselves as a new nation, separate from the Soviet past, they

249 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 198-9
began to develop a national culture. In Ukraine, this cultural transformation was pursued in several ways, which included the reclaiming of the Ukrainian language, re-identifying Ukrainian triumphs and heroic personalities, and preserving and remembering national tragedies. These processes were meant to deconstruct Soviet legacy and Russian influence. One of the important ways in which this was accomplished was through the institutionalization of the Holodomor in Ukrainian nationalist narratives.

In the creation of a new nation-state, memory is delicately but deeply intertwined with history. Scholars have observed that, in the development of a new national identity, it is common practice that the collective memory and the common experience of a group are constructed into a historical memory, defined as a relatively stable idea of what a group’s (in this case, Ukrainians’) past has been and what its future will be. This historical memory is then fashioned into a national narrative, which involves shaping aspects of a rediscovered past into a cohesive narrative for the present and future. This is inevitably a highly politicized process. According to Victor Roudometof, nationalist narratives often consist of four parts: first, the narrative provides an origin for the people as a nation; second, it establishes the “continuity” of a nation through time through the cultural norms and traditions held by the group; third, the narrative distinguishes periods of glory and decline throughout this groups’ common history, while identifying “others” who have challenged the nation; and fourth, it ascribes purpose for the nation. In addition, Milana Nikolko suggests that national narratives are rooted in emotion. She points out that nationalist narratives are simplified and reduced to a chain of events that

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251 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 17
stand in for a larger story and often reduce history to an emotional narrative of triumph and victimhood, of an “us” vs. “them.”

Such national narratives, it is argued, are created by political actors and intellectuals at the “top” of society, and then disseminated to the people that make up the group.

In Ukraine, beginning with independence, the memory of the Holodomor was slowly molded into a cohesive project of nation-building. In the Ukrainian national narrative forged primarily during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010), the Holodomor became the “chosen trauma,” or the foundational event that rooted the Ukrainian nation in victimhood and “homogenous national suffering” at the hands of an outside oppressor. In official acts and rituals of commemoration, the Holodomor became the collective trauma that produced Ukrainians as the cohesive, victimized “us,” who were the ultimate victims of a narratively imposed “them.”

The first Ukrainian President, Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994), initiated the state’s recognition of the Holodomor, marking the beginning of the institutionalization of the Holodomor’s memory. At the state commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the famine, Kravchuk framed the Holodomor as a “deliberate attempt by Moscow to obliterate the Ukrainian nation.” The first open discussion of the tragedy occurred at a 1993 conference entitled “Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932–1933: Causes and Consequences,” dedicated to the 60th

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254 Nikolko, Diaspora Mobilization, 1872; Pakhomenko, “Politics of Memory,” 529-30
anniversary of the famine. Kravchuk’s presence was of great symbolic importance, showing that the highest governmental authorities were interested in “restoring the historical truth” about the famine.  

258 It was at this conference that President Kravchuk confirmed his belief that the Holodomor was a genocide: “I agree completely that this was a planned action and that this was a genocide committed against the people…That is how this horrendous page of our history should be treated.”  

259 Under Kravchuk, the official political memory of the famine began to take hold. Kravchuk initiated the Holodomor’s status as the “chosen trauma” of Ukraine, framing Ukrainians as not only victims but as genocidal victims of Stalinist – or depending on the framing, Russian – aggression and domination. Kravchuk believed that “if we lose our independence…we will always face the possibility of repeating those horrible pages in our history, including the famine, which were planned by a foreign power.”  

260 According to Georgiy Kasianov, the discussion of the famine within this wider geopolitical context often evolved into blaming Russia, or “Moscow,” for their perpetration of the famine. Russian historians who tried to defend the idea that the famine took place in all the grain-producing regions of the USSR found themselves in the role of “defenders” of the Stalinist regime.  

261 By insisting on this interpretation of the famine, Kravchuk framed Ukraine as a post-colonial state that began to set itself apart from the Soviet Union by denouncing any external actors who set out to harm or deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian nation.  

262 Thus Kravchuk’s discourse lay “the foundations of

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258 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 89-90
261 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 351-2
statehood” by justifying and legitimizing the Ukrainian people’s right to “have a state of their own, their own native state.” Using the Holodomor, Kravchuk began to mold the trauma of the Soviet past into a new history, with the Holodomor as the foundational narrative that explained and legitimized the Ukrainian nation-state.

Following in Kravchuk’s footsteps, the second Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005) “grasped the growing political influence of Ukraine’s historical and cultural differences” and instituted the basic set of rituals for the commemoration of the Holodomor. In 1998, Kuchma established an annual, national memorial day dedicated to the victims of the Holodomor on the fourth Saturday of November. In 2003, in a speech to the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament), Kuchma advocated for the state-level recognition of the famine of 1932–33 as an act of genocide against Ukrainians. Kuchma, however, was mostly interested in the Holodomor when he had a political struggle. His 1998 decree and 2003 defense of the genocide act coincided with parliamentary elections and his preparations for presidential elections. Though this is revealing of his personal ambition, it also suggests that the nationalist construction of the Holodomor had become accepted among the Ukrainian population. Kuchma, who was embroiled in corruption scandals that involved him ordering the murder of a journalist, seemingly employed the national tragedy to reassert his national commitment and regain popularity among his support bases.

264 Pakhomenko, “Politics of Memory,” 533
Broaching the topic of the Holodomor as a genocide and establishing days of remembrance were just the beginnings of the political institutionalization of the Holodomor. Kravchuk had used the memory of the Holodomor to help establish the Ukrainian nation as justifiably independent and separate from its Soviet past through the image of its trauma, a tradition that was selectively continued by Kuchma. But beginning under Kuchma’s successor, Viktor Yushchenko, the Holodomor would evolve from a commemorable tragedy to a political tool that shaped Ukraine’s domestic and international politics.

When Yushchenko assumed the presidency after the Orange Revolution of 2004, he used the “chosen trauma” of the Holodomor to overcome regional nationalisms and romanticized views of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, the Western region was more pro-European and the Eastern region was more pro-Russian, with stark language and other cultural divides. Many older Ukrainians romanticized the Soviet Union, believing that the Soviet Union had provided better livelihood conditions or provided glory and prestige that Ukraine as a nation could not achieve on its own. In Yushchenko’s nationalist ideas, if these conflicting allegiances, whether it be regional or to a glorified past, could be overcome, then perhaps a common faith and identity in Ukraine could be fostered. To accomplish this common identity, Yushchenko embarked on a campaign to actively reshape cultural memory through informational and cultural politics, done in part through the promotion of the common trauma and historical memory of the Holodomor.

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268 The Orange Revolution was a series of protests against corruption and electoral fraud in the run-off elections of November 2004. The protests were prompted by reports that the results of the run-off vote of 21 November 2004 between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych were rigged by the Kuchma government in favor of Yanukovych. The revolution succeeded when the nation’s Supreme court annulled the election results and ordered a re-vote, which was heavily monitored by international powers. In the re-vote, Yushchenko won.

269 Budryte, “Memory Politics,” 986; Zhurzhenko, “Capital of Despair,” 603

270 Zhurzhenko, “Capital of Despair,” 603

271 In addition to the Holodomor, Yushchenko promoted other nationalist narratives during his presidency. For example, he recognized former Ukrainian nationalists, including Stephen Bandera, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, and Symon Petliura, idolizing them for their “heroism” in fighting for Ukrainian independence. However, these nationalists’ histories are complicated by their collaboration with Nazis and anti-semitic crimes during World War 2. Though this is another important aspect of the Ukrainian national narrative, the Holodomor was largely the trauma that the Ukrainian past was rooted in.
The memory of the Holodomor would no longer be just a commemorable national tragedy; instead, this historical memory was refashioned into a political narrative, ultimately becoming a full-fledged nationalist tool.

Yushchenko continued his predecessor’s constructions of Soviet inhumanity as collective national pain, but he took the political institutionalization of the Holodomor’s memory further than his predecessors. This institutionalization involved creating state institutions and practices that engaged, fortified, and preserved the collective Ukrainian experience of the Holodomor. This process began in 2006, when Yushchenko established the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, with the goal of “restor[ing] historical truth and accuracy in the study of Ukrainian history.” Its first tasks were dedicated to the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the creation of the National Book of Memory of the Holodomor Victims in Ukraine, and the pedagogical improvement in the way Ukrainian history was taught in schools.272

Another aspect of Yushchenko’s memory policy was legislating the Holodomor’s status as a genocide in law. In what colloquially became known as the “Holodomor Law,” the 2006 Ukrainian Parliament voted to recognize the Holodomor as a deliberate act of genocide against the Ukrainian people. When the bill was signed into law by President Yushchenko, it included provisions for commemorative and research activities and the construction of memorials to honor the victims and preserve the memory of the Holodomor tragedy for future generations. In a similar fashion to Europe’s famous Holocaust Denial laws,273 the Holodomor law established that “the public denial of the 1932-33 Holodomor in Ukraine is an insult to the millions of Holodomor victims, a humiliation of the dignity of the Ukrainian people, and is unlawful.”274 It

272 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 124
introduced a penalty for the denial of the famine as a genocide, but because the required amendments to the criminal code were never made, the penalties were unenforceable.  

Nevertheless, with this law, memory was transformed into national policy.

By making it illegal to deny the man-made nature of the famine, this law outlined the right of the state to regulate and direct publicly-expressed opinions on the past. Historian Lina Klymenko believed that using the law to reinforce a political claim in this way “provides legitimacy and an aura of objectivity to the claims posed,” anchoring the claims in society as fixed, fundamental truths “since, by definition, moral claims established by law cannot be contested.” Thus, the law became a powerful tool of Yushchenko’s government for imposing narratives of collective national memory. Furthermore, the law also forged a new legal understanding of the distinct Ukrainian experience during the famine. At the “highest legal procedure, the law centered on the understanding that as a national group, Ukrainians were treated differently from other nations during the Soviet period.” This legislatively centered Ukrainians as victims in a long history of repression. It moreover also officially separated Ukrainians from having a common history with the rest of the Soviet Union.

Because the Holodomor law allocated funds for the commemoration of the victims, the Holodomor was visibly established in public space during Yushchenko’s presidency. 2008 marked a year in which hundreds of monuments and gravestones in honor of Holodomor victims were erected across Ukraine, including the Bitter Memory of Childhood monument on the

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275 Nikolay Koposov, “Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 36, no. 1 (February 2022): 287

276 Pakhomenko writes that “the policy of historical memory became an instrument of national security” in the aftermath of Russia’s Crimean invasion in 2014 (in Pakhomenko, “Politics of Memory” 544)

277 Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 93-4

278 Klymenko, “The Holodomor Law” 347-8

279 Klymenko, “The Holodomor Law” 342-3
Dnieper River. As the centerpiece of the monument, there is a statue of a young, crying girl who holds a handful of wheat. Behind her, a 30-meter-high candle called the “Candle of Memory” looms large, and angels with their hands over their hearts stand guard at the entryway. According to Anna Wylegala, the Holodomor memorials in Ukraine are clearly characterized by the “aesthetics of martyrdom and mourning,” with religious symbols of domes, bells, crosses, and the number 33 (both the age of Christ at the crucifixion and the year of the famine in Ukraine), as well as a location near a church or holy sites, such as cemeteries. Many of the memorials depict people struggling to survive or mourning the dead, representing either the tragedy of the nation or Ukraine’s continued struggle for survival. These memorials cultivated a cultural landscape of memory, increasing the public visibility of the Holodomor. The “Bitter Memory of Childhood” was later incorporated into a museum in 2010, recently renamed the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide. Under Yushchenko, all state visits by diplomatic officials required a stop at the memorial and museum.

Yushchenko’s successor, Viktor Yanukovych (2010-2014), reversed course from his predecessors, refraining from invoking the historical politics of the Holodomor so he could instead promote the reunification of Ukraine’s history with the Soviet past. Historian Alexander Motyl claimed that the first act of the Yanukovych presidency was deleting the link to

282 Kudela-Świątek, “Lieux de Mémoire,” 63-7
283 Kudela-Świątek, “Lieux de Mémoire,” 59
284 Kudela-Świątek, “Lieux de Mémoire,” 61
286 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 97-8
information on the Holodomor on the President’s official website. A politician from the Donetsk region with many Russian ties, Yanukovych publicly refused to endorse the Holodomor as a genocide of Ukrainians, instead focusing on the famine’s “general tragedy” of the Soviet Union. On April 27, 2010, Yanukovych expressed that “it would be wrong and unfair to recognize the famine of the 1930s as genocide against this or that ethnic group” to the Parliament Assembly of the Council of Europe. Yanukovych, in addition to refusing to acknowledge the Holodomor as a genocide, generally stepped away from the politics of memory. On December 9, 2010, Yanukovych discontinued Yushchenko’s Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, instead creating the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance as a research institution rather than a site of educational and national development.

While Viktor Yanukovych refused to consider the Holodomor as genocide and continued to undermine the institutional memory-making established by his predecessor, he otherwise left the canonical version of the Holodomor within the Ukrainian nationalist narrative untouched. To him, the politics and institutionalization of memory were not a priority of the state. As such, while Yanukovych’s presidency marked a step back in the national centering of Holodomor memory, it did not mark a complete reversal. He did, however, welcome back forgotten Soviet historical myths, reinstate commemorative practices such as holding military parades on May 9 (Victory Day), and return the term “Great Patriotic War” to textbooks to reaffirm Ukrainian

287 Motyl, “Deleting the Holodomor,” 25
288 Dmytro Tabachnyk, Yanukovych’s Minister of Education and Science, said “the Holodomor of 1933 was a general tragedy of the peoples of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan,” quoted in Motyl, “Deleting the Holodomor,” 29
291 Pakhomenko, “Politics of Memory,” 535
cultural ties to its Eastern neighbor, Russia. Yanukovych prioritized restoring Ukraine’s shared heritages with the former Soviet Union, stepping back from the discourse developed by his national democratic predecessors who had used the Holodomor to turn Ukraine into a unique nation.

The institutionalization of the Holodomor in Ukrainian memory politics represented the leveraging of a past narrative of tragedy to create a new history of the Ukrainian nation. The memory of the Holodomor – in its various representations, commemorations, laws, and public images – simultaneously tied the Ukrainian population together through a common past while separating them from the Soviet past. Although the process took place gradually, with an acceleration under Yushchenko and a step back under Yanukovych, the Holodomor nonetheless became an integral part of the Ukrainian national narrative, institutionalized in Ukrainian politics to refashion memory into an identity.

**Internationalizing the Holodomor: The Memory War between Ukraine and Russia, 2007-10**

The memory politics of the Holodomor was not limited to Ukrainian soil. Rather, the Holodomor was transported to the international stage as Ukrainian officials sought for it to be recognized as a genocide (a process that I will refer to as “internationalization”). This quest for recognition, however, was strongly opposed by Russia, so as Ukrainian efforts for recognition increased, so too did tensions with Russia. Soon, a battle of who had the “true” history commenced, with each state fumbling for international recognition of its truth: For Ukraine, that was the label of “genocide” to the Holodomor, and for Russia, it was the denial of the “genocide” label. As the international community grappled with this politics of recognition, the “memory

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292 Pakhomenko, “Politics of Memory,” 535
The quest for international recognition of the Holodomor began on September 24, 2003, at the 58th session of the UN General Assembly. At this assembly, a discussion was held on the actions of the Stalinist regime and the best ways to commemorate the victims.295 On November

294 Kappeler, “Legacies,” 110-1
7, 2003, the General Assembly adopted the “Joint Statement on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Holodomor – the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine,” which stated that the “cruel actions and policies of the totalitarian regime” had led to the death of 7 to 10 million “innocent lives and became a national tragedy for the Ukrainian people.” The document served to “note activities in observance of the seventieth anniversary of this Famine.” But the document did not focus solely on the Ukrainian aspect of the famine. It also recognized the “memory of millions of Russians, Kazakhs and representatives of other nationalities who died of starvation in the Volga River region, Northern Caucasus, Kazakhstan and in other parts of the former Soviet Union, as a result of civil war and forced collectivization.” 296

Though international recognition of the tragedy had been achieved, it had not been recognized as a genocide. Under the Yushchenko presidency, multiple efforts were undertaken to achieve such international recognition. In March 2007, Yushchenko created the Coordination Council on Preparations for Commemoration on the Occasion of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine, which he presided over himself. At the first session of the Coordination Council, Yushchenko defined the council’s “goal as the worldwide recognition of the Holodomor as genocide.” 297 This initiative coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the famine of 1932–33.

In August 2007, Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Volodymyr Ohryzko sent a letter to the heads of the foreign diplomatic missions of Ukraine, proposing that they work with the International Holodomor Coordinating Committee (IHCC) to carry out an international publicity

and lobbying campaign to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Holodomor with help from the Ukrainian diaspora. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also created a special working group that specialized in activities aimed at the international recognition of the Holodomor.298

In November 2007, the 34th session of the General Assembly of UNESCO unanimously adopted the resolution “Remembrance of Victims of the Holodomor in Ukraine.” Ukrainian efforts to include the term “genocide” into the resolution were unsuccessful; the first version only mentioned the “Great Famine (Holodomor)” in Ukraine.299 Discussions on amendments, in which the Russian delegation participated, still resulted in the exclusion of the term “genocide.” While the resolution was titled “Remembrance of Victims of the Great Famine (Holodomor) in Ukraine” and addressed specifically to one country, it also expressed sympathy with the victims of famine in Russia, Kazakhstan, and other regions of the former USSR. Although representatives of the Russian Federation were part of the working group that prepared the final text of the resolution, Russia was not among the forty-five states that supported the document.300

Ukraine had not succeeded in receiving recognition for genocide from a worldwide organization, and they had mixed success with other interstate councils. On November 24, 2007, a session of the Baltic Assembly adopted the statement, “In Remembrance of the Victims of Genocide and Political Repression in Ukraine in 1932–33,” providing some success for Ukraine.301 On November 30, 2007, the Council of Ministers of OSCE in Madrid released a statement dedicated to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Holodomor of 1932–33, but it notably

298 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, “To the heads of foreign diplomatic establishments of Ukraine,” Letter no. 200/21/100-1769 of September 4, 2007. Author’s personal archive, quoted in Kasianov, Memory Crash, 360-1
300 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 361
did not include the word “genocide.”\textsuperscript{302} The Russian delegation did not sign this statement, making its own statement instead that declared that millions of citizens of many different nationalities were victims of the famine, and it would be an injustice to those victims to talk of the victimhood of only ethnic Ukrainians.\textsuperscript{303}

In response to Ukraine’s global recognition efforts, Valery Loshchinin, Russia’s permanent representative to the UN office in Geneva, urged the UN not to raise the issue of recognition of the Holodomor as genocide in March 2008. He argued that historical truth showed that millions of people from different ethnic groups had been victims during the famine years. In July of that year, the Ukrainian delegation suggested adding the recognition of the Holodomor to the agenda of the Sixty-third session of the UN General Assembly, but the final decision was postponed due to the opposition of the Russian delegation.\textsuperscript{304}

On September 22, 2008, the Ukrainian delegation withdrew the Holodomor’s recognition from the agenda. They argued that their decision was due to the issue “being addressed in other global forums,” but, according to the Russian delegation, it was due to a total lack of support from other national delegations.\textsuperscript{305} However, two days later at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, Yushchenko concluded his speech with a brief commentary on the Holodomor, remarking that it “had a task-oriented character of genocide.” Though he characterized the

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Holodomor as a genocide, he acknowledged that other peoples suffered during the famine and invited the UN to honor “every national tragedy.”

*Memory Wars: Internal Debates of Soviet Memory*

The competing Russian and Ukrainian narratives of history culminated in what Dovilė Budrytė and Georgiy Kasianov have called a “memory war” between Russia and Ukraine. With two different understandings of history, each country pursued its own policies regarding “historical truths,” with Russia growing increasingly agitated as time went on. The “memory war” of Russia and Ukraine played out on both domestic soil and the international stage, with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ukrainian President Yushchenko becoming the main players.

Respected Russian novelist and outspoken critic of communism Alexander Solzhenitsyn argued that Ukrainians were misrepresenting a complex, intertwined common history to receive favors from the West. In an op-ed published in newspapers across the world, he claimed that the “provocative outcry about ‘genocide’” could be directly attributed to “spiteful, anti-Russian, chauvinistic minds,” which has now “spun off into the government circles of modern-day Ukraine.” Solzhenitsyn posited that the Holodomor was a “fairy tale” meant to appease Westerners and those who “have never understood [Russian and Ukrainian] history.” This op-ed reflected the Russian view that the Ukrainian efforts to obtain the Holodomor’s recognition as a genocide were a deliberate attempt to distance themselves from Russia through appeals to the West. It further embodied the belief that Ukrainians wanted to villainize Russians

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307 Budryte, “Memory Politics,” 984; Kasianov, Memory Crash, 351-2
and blame them for crimes that they had not committed. In this view, Ukraine’s tactic was one of morality, in which asserting themselves as victims in a narrative of historical inaccuracy provides a superior moral history.309

Russian officials and politicians sensed that Ukrainian leaders were attempting to place blame on Russia for the famine. Some Ukrainian public figures such as Ivan Drach, a poet and member of Our Ukraine (the center-right political party supported by Yushchenko), declared the need for Russia to apologize and provide Ukraine with material compensation for the Ukrainian losses during Soviet rule.310 Because some of the proponents of these sentiments were associated with Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine party, the Russian government viewed President Yushchenko as complicit.311 Another source of Russia’s frustration was the perceived negative ethnic stereotypes and anti-Russian themes in Ukrainian scholarly research, school textbooks, and manuals, and in visual representations of the Holodomor. Georgiy Kasianov highlighted a passage from a tenth-grade textbook’s account of the Holodomor, which claimed that the “smell of decaying corpses in the emptied Ukrainian houses had not yet dispersed when trains were sent with settlers from other republics of the USSR, mostly from Russia.”312 Accounts like these were perceived to have explicitly anti-Russian connotations.

This resulted in the Russian government and press attempting to combat the “russophobic” famine narratives through the equating of Ukrainian Nationalism with Nazism.313

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309 But with this reflection on villainization, Solzhenitsyn seems to equate the Stalinist communist regime with the Russian people, as Sergei Plokhi points out in a response to the op-ed in “Solzhenitsyn’s curious change of heart,” Boston Globe, April 10, 2008.
310 “And we must know that this is the 349th year of Russia in Ukraine, not the first one—this is the anniversary of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 [applause]. It is a no-brainer that a state, before the start of its year of its culture [in Ukraine], should apologize, should do penance for everything that happened during the centuries because such were the relations between the Ukrainian and Russian people.” See Parliamentary hearings on honoring the memory of the victims of the Holodomor of 1932–1933, February 12, 2003, quoted in Kasianov, Memory Crash, 357
311 Kasianov, Memory Crash, 358
312 Fedir Turchenko, H. Novitnya Istoriya Ukrayiny (10 vols.), Part 1 (Kyiv: Heneza, 2002), 282, quoted in Kasianov, Memory Crash, 357-8
313 Applebaum, Red Famine, 352; Plokhi, Gates of Europe, 349
One Russian newspaper recorded an account of a radical Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA) march in 2008, where marchers were heard calling “for the honor and dignity of the Ukrainian state” and shouting “Glory to Our Heroes!” and “Death to Our Enemies,” while some of them raised their right arms in a Nazi salute.\(^\text{314}\) That same year, the Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the “discrimination against the Russian language in Ukraine, the glorification of war criminals who collaborated with the Nazis, the portrayal of the 1930s famine as genocide against the Ukrainian people, the war on historical monuments and graves of Soviet Army liberators and the rewriting of our common historical past.”\(^\text{315}\) To Russia, these key areas of Ukrainian nationalism were based on historical untruths and disrespected a common past between the two countries. Further statements also accused Ukrainian political agents of attempting to “exacerbate Russian-Ukrainian relations” and called on Ukrainian leaders to condemn and “respond to such nationalist vagaries in kind.”\(^\text{316}\)

Russia played into the memory war with legislation of its own. In 2009, President Dmitry Medvedev created a commission “to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests.” The purpose of this commission was to analyze and strategize against all perceived “false interpretation[s] of history” that “aimed at detracting from the country's international prestige.”\(^\text{317}\) The establishment of this commission coincided with a bill in the Russian Duma that would make it a crime to call Soviet actions during the Second World War

criminal. Sergei Markov, a vice-chairman of the State Duma committee on public associations and religious organizations and also a member of the Presidential Commission, attributed the creation of the commission and the bill as a necessity of national security, one raised by the threat of Ukraine’s weaponizing of history. Markov believed that Russia could not “send [its] poor, impoverished historians to the front to fight for historical truth - they [were] bound to lose, since they have no resources” in comparison to Ukraine’s complete “mobilization of all their resources to fight for historical lies.” As such, Russia had to fight fire with fire: “state-sponsored programs to falsify history need[ed] to be countered with a state-sponsored program to fight for historical truth.”

With these new Russian efforts in the memory war, some members of the Russian press criticized Russia for stooping to Ukraine’s level. In an anonymous op-ed in Nezavisimaya gazeta, the presidential commission was criticized for employing mostly ministry and security officials who had their own political agenda and goals for “historic gain,” rather than historians or war veterans who could ensure historical truth. The author asked, “Why get steamed up about Ukraine’s attempt to introduce a new law criminalizing denial of the Holodomor, when we’re doing the same thing? We’re beginning to juggle facts in exactly the same way.”

Other editorials agreed that Russia needed to take a higher road, but proposed a solution of congeniality and historical accuracy, rather than a continued memory war. Boris Makarenko wrote that Russians “are right to tell the Ukrainians that the Holodomor was a tragedy common

320 Moshkin, “Don’t Rake up the Past,” 1
to many peoples of the Soviet Union.” But to be “heard and understood in Ukraine” without a fight over the genocide definition, “those remarks should go hand in hand with an unconditional condemnation of the architects of the Holodomor.” The author highlighted that simply “paying tribute to those who are near and dear to the Ukrainian people is a natural gesture of respect on Russia’s part for a fraternal people, a gesture that does not in any way belittle the memory of the people of Russia or of the other republics who died in the famine.”

By acknowledging the unique circumstances of the Ukrainian famine experience – because there were unique aspects of the Ukrainian famine experience in comparison to the entire Soviet Union – and condemning the Stalinist regime, Russia could take a higher road. These actions would have effectively ended the memory war, but the Russian government chose to pursue alternative routes.

The Ukrainian-Russian confrontation over the internationalization of the Holodomor peaked when Russian President Dmitry Medvedev refused to attend the official commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the famine in Kyiv in 2008. The Russian president not only refused but sent a statement to President Yushchenko, detailing the Russian objection to the solely Ukrainian perception of the famine and highlighting that the famine had affected all areas of the Soviet Union. He also claimed that Ukrainian officials were attempting to sow discord among fraternal peoples through historic untruths as a way for Ukraine to enter the “preparatory class of NATO.”

With all this criticism from the Russian government, one must note that Yushchenko had repeatedly stated that Russia was not to be blamed for the famine. On November 24, 2006, Yushchenko directly stated that Ukraine did not blame Russia for the famine of 1932–33. During

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his visit to Austria on July 8, 2008, Yushchenko reiterated this point, again emphasizing that Ukraine did not blame Russia for the tragedy of 1932–33. Speaking during the general debate of the sixty-third session of the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2008, he declared that the desire of Ukraine to honor the memory of the victims of the famine of 1932–33 “is not directed against any people or state.” However, he never publicly commented on or condemned any of the aforementioned statements by representatives of his own political force and allies.

Once Yushchenko had left office and was replaced by pro-Russian Yanukovych, the tone of Russo-Ukrainian relations, particularly regarding the Holodomor, changed. The mandatory diplomatic visit to the Holodomor Victims Memorial, instituted personally by Viktor Yushchenko, remained an essential part of the itinerary for foreign leaders’ visits to Ukraine during the Yanukovych tenure, as did the laying of a wreath at the Eternal Flame and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on the Alley of Glory, a memorial site established during the Soviet era. The visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on May 17, 2010, was symbolically significant: he visited the Holodomor Victims Memorial with Yanukovych, although he had refused to come to its opening when invited by Yushchenko in 2008. President Yanukovych’s lean-Russian policies momentarily eased the memory wars of the two countries, but it would not last for long. Soon, Russian territorial encroachments on Ukrainian soil would once again escalate the memory wars.

“Nazism,” “Genocide,” and Russian Invasion, 2014-Present

In March 2014, the geopolitical makeup of Eastern Europe shifted as pro-Russian forces, with the help of the Russian military, occupied the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk,

declaring the two provinces to be independent of Ukraine. Just a few weeks before, on February 18, 2014, police and protesters clashed, resulting in the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovych (on February 22) and the beginning of the Revolution of Dignity. Days later, on February 20, Russia attacked Crimea and began its invasion, occupying Crimea and Sevastopol. These events marked the explicit beginnings of Russian usurping of Ukrainian territory. These events, according to Domagoj Krpan, also drastically shifted the public feelings of Ukrainians towards Russia, with people viewing Russia as “not the bigger brother but rather the bigger bully.”

During these challenges, Ukraine continued to legislate memory and fully committed to the process of decommunization, in which Ukraine symbolically separated itself from its Soviet past. On April 9, 2015, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada approved a bill on “Condemning the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and banning the promotion of their symbols.” The bill declared the 1917-1991 Communist regime in Ukraine a criminal regime and banned denying the criminality of the regime or promoting the regime. These laws also accelerated the demolition of Soviet monuments across the country. Russian officials claimed that this law aimed to eliminate the Communist Party of Ukraine and was one more instance of Ukraine attempting to rewrite history and deny its Soviet past.

From 2014 to 2021, the competing memory narratives of self-victimization, heroism, and “true” history escalated into an accusatory war of “genocide” and “Nazism.” In 2015,

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337 Domagoj Krpan, “Turning Ukrainians into a Separate Nation,” Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics 16, no. 2 (December 2022): 149
329 Koposov, “Populism and Memory,” 288-9
331 Ljiljana Radonic writes that “the rhetoric in both Russia and Ukraine combines elements of self-victimization and heroism, though to differing degrees. Ukraine has responded by intensifying its historical discourse on genocide,
President Putin stated that the Ukrainian decision to cut off the gas supply to the self-declared republics of Donetsk and Lugansk “smell[ed] of genocide” for its worsening of the “humanitarian crisis.”

That same year, Russian Journalist Ivan Davydov recorded that the “words ‘Nazi’ and ‘Banderovite’ [were] part of the everyday lexicon and [were] used as general insults,” so normalized that “people discuss[ed] the atrocities of the ‘Kiev junta’ on public transportation and at the dinner table.” The Ukrainian government was accused of having “Nazi symbols, the rhetoric of ethnic superiority, and Russophobic ideas” as “integral” parts of governmental policy in 2018.

Two years later, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev told Rossiyskaya gazeta that Ukrainian leaders had created a “corporate-syndicalist state” that “inspired by the examples of Nazi Germany,” allowed “smash up shops” to burn “Russian-language books and sometimes even people.” In 2021, Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine was the “polar opposite of Russia,” a long distance away from the once fraternal nation, whose common history he had fought to preserve.

These Russian equations of Ukrainian Nationalism with Nazism took hold in popular media. Concurrently, Ukraine repeatedly claimed that these Russian territorial incursions into Crimea and the Donbas were Putin’s attempt to exterminate the Ukrainian nation. These escalations in the usage of the terms “genocide” and “Nazism” suggested that the memory war was evolving into a memory crisis.

335 Yegorov, “Resurgent Nazism,” 1
337 Serious conflict over memory can be conceptualized as a crisis as well because it “destabilises both state identity and its relations with other states,” quoted in Budrytė, “Memory Politics,” 981, 989-90
During this time, even as memory wars and territorial incursions raged on, debates concerning the Holodomor ebbed and flowed. In 2015, during the conflict over Crimea, the Donetsk’s People’s Republic (pro-Russian separatist forces) dismantled a Ukrainian famine monument in Snizhne in an effort to restore “historical justice,” sparking intense outcry from Ukrainian officials and civilians.\(^{338}\) That same week, the Russian state-own media site *Sputnik News* published an article called “Holodomor Hoax: Joseph Stalin’s Crime that Never Took Place,” criticizing the historical memory of the Ukrainian state and the Western studies that support the label of genocide for the Holodomor.\(^{339}\) In Ukraine, commemorative practices continued, and Yanukovych’s successor Petro Poroshenko publicly declared that “not recognizing Holodomor is as immoral as not recognizing Holocaust.”\(^{340}\) The war in Donbas sparked a renewed international interest in recognizing the Holodomor as a genocide, with the United States Senate, in addition to many individual state legislatures, approving recognition between 2017 and 2018.\(^{341}\) Despite the ongoing memory war between Russia and Ukraine, Applebaum’s 2017 novel *Red Famine* claimed that slowly, the genocide debate was and is becoming less important to Ukrainians. She argued that “the discussion of the famine was a way of insisting on Ukraine's right to a separate national history and to its own national memory. But now – after more than a quarter century of independence, two revolutions against corruption, and

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a Russian invasion that was finally halted by a Ukrainian army – sovereignty is a fact, not a
theory that requires historical justification, or indeed any justification at all.”

Despite sovereignty being a “fact,” Ukraine’s sovereignty was critically challenged yet
again by Russia with President Putin’s 2021 essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and
Ukrainians.” Building on aggressions in the Crimea and Donbas, Putin’s essay asserted that
Russians and Ukrainians are “one people.” In this essay, he refashioned one thousand years of
history to highlight how the glory periods of both Russia and Ukraine occurred when the
countries were united as one. The independent Ukrainian nation was to be blamed on Lenin
and Khrushchev; the former who planted “a dangerous time bomb under the foundation of our
statehood” by recognizing the autonomy of Soviet Ukraine within the Soviet Union, and the
latter who “robbed” Russians of land and people by granting Crimea to Ukraine. Continuing
the “Nazism” and “Genocide” rhetoric of the past ten years, Putin escalated his aggressions on
February 24, 2022, commencing a “special military operation” that aimed for the
“demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine” and to cease the “genocide against the millions
of people living there. By manipulating a complex history of geopolitical relations in the
region to assert unity, and by employing a rhetoric of genocide to delegitimize the Ukrainian
government, Putin asserted that not only should Ukraine have a common history with Russia, but
that Ukraine should be one with Russia.

These claims of Nazism and genocide were both exaggerated and unsubstantiated. Putin
claimed that Neo-Nazis were leading Ukraine because they promoted Ukrainian nationalism,

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342 Applebaum, Red Famine, 356
343 Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Union of Russians and Ukrainians,” Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library, 2021
344 Luke Harding, Invasion: The inside Story of Russia’s Bloody War and Ukraine’s Fight for Survival (Vintage
Books, 2022), 24-5
345 Putin, “Historical Unity,” quoted in Harding, Invasion, 25
346 “Full Text: Putin’s Declaration of War on Ukraine [Translation],” The Spectator, February 24, 2022
https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine/
which in some cases, involved the commemoration of Ukrainian nationalist figures who had collaborated with the Nazis in the 1940s. Ria Novosti, the Russian Information Agency, elaborated on what “denazification” meant. The paper explained that denazification was synonymous with “de-Ukrainianization,” because Ukraine was “impossible as a nation-state,” merely an “artificial anti-Russian construction.” Denazification could only be accomplished when there was a “military victory over the Kyiv regime.” Only this complete military victory would put an end to the hypothetical genocide of ethnic Russians in Ukrainian territory.

Putin’s assertions of a Ukrainian genocide against Russian-speaking peoples were based on a claim that Russian forces had found four mass graves in Donetsk and Luhansk, which they believed to contain about 300 people who were “killed only because they considered Russian as their native language.” The reality of the language situation in Ukraine is that Russian is either the primary or secondary language for the residents of Eastern Ukraine – including President Zelenskyy, who grew up primarily speaking Russian. While officials have undertaken campaigns to promote the Ukrainian language in educational and administrative capacities, there was no concerted effort to wipe out the Russian language. It is simply untrue that ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples were persecuted or experienced discrimination in Eastern Ukraine. As such, there is no substantiated reason to “denazify” or stop a “genocide” in

347 Harding, Invasion, 30
349 Sergeytsev, “What should Russia do with Ukraine?” https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraine-1781469605.html?fbclid=IwAR1ZIUhDAiRSE-dJc5ueqfVoaR1ub3CcuJzJINlpzK_VDeg6_lilAQflLVI
352 Hiroaki Kuromiya, “The War in the Donbas in Historical Perspective,” Soviet & Post-Soviet Review 46, no. 3 (September 2019): 246; Kuromiya also provides the example of Pavel Gubarev, one of the separatist leaders in the Donbas, who openly claimed that “Here [in the Donbas] there was no ethnic enmity.”
Ukraine. To demilitarize Ukraine is to take away Ukraine’s sovereignty, subjugating the state to Russian occupation and rule.

What these formulated claims reveal is Putin's utmost desire to restore Russia as a great empire. Carl Mirra argued that Putin regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as a humiliation. The fall of the USSR brought with it a loss of geopolitical prestige and its “standing” in the global order. Within this collapse was the loss of historical lands; lands that now require recovery. By invoking claims of Nazism and genocide, Putin ascribes himself a moral duty to reconquer what he considers stolen land.

Genocide was extremely important to the “causes” of the war in Ukraine, so it is no surprise that the Holodomor has made an international resurgence as Russian forces continue to siege Ukrainian cities. As the war waged on, politicians from across the world – not only Ukraine – have and are using the Holodomor to create a historical pattern of “Russian” aggression against the Ukrainian people. Relying on the nationalizing strategies employed in the creation of the independent Ukrainian nation and the internationalizing strategies for recognition, Zelenskyy and other world leaders have deployed the Holodomor as a symbol of a dark Soviet past that had subjugated the Ukrainian people, a past that can be directly applied to the current situation in Ukraine. By blurring the lines of time and geopolitical space, Ukraine is portrayed as continuously suffering at the hands of a Russian aggressor.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, President Zelenskyy has blurred time and space with his use of “they” in reference to both past Soviet violence and current Russian violence. In his November 26, 2022, speech to summit goers, he said Ukrainians “remember how it is when they want to destroy your people…And we see what is happening today in the world,

353 Mirra, “Nato-mythmaking,” 146-7
354 Mirra, “Nato-mythmaking,” 146-7
355 Mirra, “Nato-mythmaking,” 146-7
what is happening in Ukraine. *They* want to destroy us again with bombs, bullets, cold, and again with hunger.” In this speech, Soviet and Russian violence – though occurring under two different regimes with leaders of different nationalities – are conflated into a continuous traumatic timeline. By using this continuous timeline of suffering, he portrayed Ukrainian history as one of constant struggle against the *same* aggressor, fusing the traumatic past with the urgency of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Zelenskyy internationalized this fusion of past and present to reignite demands to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide. At that same summit, President Zelenskyy claimed that “amid ongoing Russian aggression, it is no less important to recognize the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people.” While thanking countries, states, and officials who had already recognized the Holodomor as a genocide, he issued a call for action for those who had not yet done so. Zelenskyy insisted that countries “join this important historical truth,” as it will be a “strong manifestation of solidarity with Ukraine in these extremely difficult times for us.”

The Russo-Ukrainian War has provided a persuasive baseboard for Ukraine’s re-internationalization of the Holodomor. However, the politics of its recognition have changed from the situation in 2007 and 2008. Previously, Yushchenko’s government used the recognition of the Holodomor to achieve international legitimacy. Now, the war has refashioned recognition as both a historical truth and a political statement of solidarity against the aggressor, Russia.

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357 This idea of the continuous traumatic timeline comes from Ben Lieberman, “Nationalist Narratives, Violence between Neighbours and Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia-Herçegovina: A Case of Cognitive Dissonance.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 3 (September 2006): 301-4

These calls for recognition have extended to the Ukrainian government’s international appeals for war aid. In a November 29, 2022, press release regarding a meeting between Ukrainian and Moldovan officials to discuss Russian threats, the Ukrainian officials expressed gratitude to the “President of Moldova Maia Sandu and the decision of the country's parliament to recognize the Holodomor of 1932-1933 as a genocide of Ukrainians.”\footnote{Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine held a meeting with the Secretary General of the Cabinet of the President of the Republic of Moldova,” Office of the President of Ukraine, November 29, 2022, \url{https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/kerivnik-ofisu-prezidenta-ukrayini-proviv-zustrich-iz-genera-79521}} In a December 21, 2022, meeting with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Ihor Zhovkva, thanked German Minister of State Tobias Lindner for both the country’s contributions to the Ukrainian war effort and the Minister’s successful “personal efforts to restore historical justice and achieve the German Bundestag’s recognition of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine as a genocide of the Ukrainian people.”\footnote{Ihor Zhovkva held a meeting with the delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany,” Office of the President of Ukraine, December 21, 2022, \url{https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/igor-zhovkva-proviv-zustrich-iz-delegaciveyu-ministerstva-za-79993}} As evidenced by these two examples, support for the Ukrainian war effort can come in many forms. It can come through direct monetary and arms support to the war, or it can come through the symbolic acknowledgment of Russian aggression and Ukrainian victimhood through the recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide.

On 2022’s Holodomor Memorial Day, political figures from across the globe drew parallels between the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian War, with many focusing on the theme of Ukrainian resilience as they continued to resist Russian attack. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called on Canadians to remember and mourn for the victims lost in the famine as well as

to “stand with [Ukrainians] as they defend their country, and [Canadian and Ukrainian] shared values.”

President Biden lauded Ukrainians for enduring “devastation and tyranny,” during both the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian War as they try to “create a free and democratic society” and “courageously resist Russia’s assault on their democracy.”

When asking parishioners to join in the commemoration of the “terrible Holodomor genocide,” Pope Francis remarked that we must “pray for the victims of this genocide and let us pray for all Ukrainians, the children, the women and the elderly, the babies who are today suffering the martyrdom of aggression.”

While only Pope Francis referred to the Holodomor as a “genocide,” the violence between the past and the present has been brought into one continuous timeline of aggression by officials in the international sphere. The world’s major leaders are articulating condemnations of the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian war in the same breath.

In the Canadian Parliament, Yvan Baker, MP, has drawn on similar historical parallels as other Western officials, but he has relied on the rhetoric of genocide in defining the violence of the past and present. In his framing of the Holodomor, Baker attributed the high casualty count to international silence regarding the famine, and he called on the House of Parliament to take action to prevent these high casualties from happening again:

Year after year here in this house we commemorate genocides and atrocities and we say never again. Right now, in Russian occupied Ukraine, it is happening again. Russia is executing; Russia is torturing; Russia is raping women, and even children. Russia is committing genocide in Ukraine. Let us learn the lessons of the Holodomor…If we do not do this, then millions of Ukrainians will become victims of a genocide; we will show that we didn’t learn the lessons of the Holodomor, and we will have lost the right to ever

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Baker relied less on the historical accuracies of what happened during the Holodomor and focused more on the emotional appeals of genocide. He invoked a rhetoric of urgency, of a Western stake in the conflict beyond resources and arms. Here is a language of moral obligation to not only rectify the wrongs of the past but prevent the same atrocities from happening in the future. While he inculpated an aggressor – Russia – he focused on the historical pattern of victimhood; a victimhood that is enabled by the complicity of the world order. To Baker, the appellation of genocide is of the utmost importance in defining the violence of the Ukrainian past and present, and it is the moral responsibility of the international community to denounce genocide and protect the Ukrainian present and future.

For much of this century, the Holodomor has remained constant in the political discourse of the Ukrainian nation, but its usage has escalated with the ongoing Russian aggressions in Ukraine. The Russo-Ukrainian led to the Holodomor’s widespread recognition as a genocide on the international stage, with dozens of countries, parliaments, and states labeling the tragedy as a genocide. Now, as many – both in Ukraine and abroad – call for the Russo-Ukrainian war to be recognized as a genocide of the Ukrainian people, these parallels may only increase in importance.

Conclusion

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365 Yvan Baker (@Yvan_Baker), Twitter Post, 21 November 2022, 3:02pm. https://twitter.com/yvan_baker/status/1594783312698085380?s=46&t=UE4Fc4o6OspsdIj5oeZlyug
366 Yvan Baker (@Yvan_Baker), Twitter Post, 21 November 2022, 3:02pm. https://twitter.com/yvan_baker/status/1594783312698085380?s=46&t=UE4Fc4o6OspsdIj5oeZlyug
From the independence of Ukraine to the present day, the Holodomor has been used to provide Ukraine with a unique history. This history has been one of victimhood and of tragedy, but also of perseverance against all odds – and power politics – against them. For the past 30 years, the chosen trauma of the Holodomor has highlighted and solidified the Ukrainian identity through the redesigning of national narratives of reverence, of trauma, and of victimhood in a genocide. Attempts at internationalizing the Holodomor revealed deeper attempts at legitimizing the national narrative of Ukraine. These quests for legitimation did not come without consequence; Russia and Ukraine had competing narratives of the past, leading to tense memory wars.

In 2014, this changed. Until 2014, the Russian challenges to Ukrainian sovereignty were ones of resources, of memory wars. But in 2014, Russian forces annexed Crimea and ignited a war in the Donbas, asserting territorial claims that transferred memories of an idealized historic land to the geopolitical stage. With this geopolitical challenge, Russia began to assert that Ukraine was independent by Russia’s permission, not by Ukraine’s independent sovereignty. This “permission” was revoked in 2022, with the full-scale military invasion of Ukrainian territory. 2022 marked a point in which Ukraine's application of tragic memory became more than a liberation from a repressive Soviet past; now, there was actual liberation to fight for. The Holodomor provides a persuasive narrative for this fight, not only for Ukrainians but for the whole world. By blurring the temporal boundaries of past and present, Ukraine’s continuous victimhood at the hands of a malicious aggressor is illuminated and acted upon. Ukrainians are still fighting, and they have the support of the Western world.

It was, and still is, wrong to conflate the Soviet with the Russian. They are two different powers, with different politics, motivations, geopolitical conditions, and peoples. Nonetheless,
the politics of the Holodomor’s memory transcends these temporal boundaries and will continue to do so as the war rages on and as claims of genocide are made.
Chapter III.
The Genocide Debate: Scholarly Interpretations of the Holodomor

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the historical politics of the Holodomor in contemporary Ukraine. There, we saw a historical debate between the Ukrainian and Russian governments about whether the Holodomor was a genocide. The Ukrainian government claimed that yes, the Holodomor was a genocide that explicitly aimed at suppressing, if not destroying, the Ukrainian nation. The Russian government disagreed, arguing that the famine affected the entirety of the Soviet Union and was a tragedy for all nationalities. As these debates played out in the political sphere, scholars of Russian, Ukrainian, and Soviet studies have also considered the “genocide question” of the Holodomor. Yet they face the same division as the Ukrainian and Russian governments; some believe that the Ukrainian-specific requisition targets, the measures to prevent starving peasants from leaving the territory, and the simultaneous attacks on Ukrainian national identity reveal an intent to destroy Ukrainians as a nationality, while others believe that the all-Union nature of the famine shows that the famine could not be limited to the targeting of a specific national group. After 30 years of debate, there is still no consensus.

In this chapter, I examine the arguments in favor of and against labeling the Holodomor as the crime of genocide. To do this, I first analyze the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948, explaining the intricacies and drawbacks of the definition. I then present how scholars have applied the Genocide Convention to the Holodomor and posit ways in which the Holodomor could be considered beyond the limitations of the Genocide Convention. Finally, I conclude with remarks on the state of the genocide debate, highlighting that irrespective of what one might conclude, the debate nonetheless brings into focus the nature and extent of the
suffering faced by the Ukrainian people and provides greater clarity to the historical politics of the Holodomor.

Defining and Understanding Genocide

In his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Raphael Lemkin penned a definition that would dramatically change how the world would evaluate large-scale atrocities. Combining the roots “genos” (meaning “race” or “kind”) and “cide” (meaning “kill”) he articulated a new concept that “signif[ied] a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups.” In 1948, this concept of “genocide” was codified into international law by the United Nations through the Genocide Convention, an agreement of (currently) 152 countries to prevent and prosecute genocide. The convention defined genocide as the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” As a legal concept, genocide has been criticized for its vagueness. To understand the genocide definition and what crimes fall under it, one must understand the four main parts of the definition: intent, destruction, in whole or in part, and the protected groups.

The first aspect of the definition of genocide is the concept of intent. In legal settings, intent is analyzed through a lens of *dolus specialis*, or “special deceit.” In *dolus specialis*, harm results from an act that was specifically designed and intended to cause harm. In the genocide definition, *dolus specialis* is a “constitutive element of the crime.” To prove genocide, proof of

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intent is required. No actor can “accidentally” commit genocide; there must be a specific intent to inflict large-scale, lethal harm on a group.

There is no consensus on how to prove intent, nor is there a consensus on what may be considered evidence of intent. Ideally, there would be an outright declaration of intent to harm, and then a clear process and organization for how that harm would be committed; this, however, is rarely the case in genocide. With this legal blurriness for what might demonstrate intent, scholars have proposed multiple avenues for how it can be identified. Raphael Lemkin suggested that intent requires a “coordinated plan,” much like the Nazis’ extensive paper trails and planned systematic process to exterminate the Jews.373 Alternatively, Pieter Drost argues that perpetrators must call for “deliberate destruction;”374 Irving Louis Horowitz believes organized, “systematic destruction” adequately proves intent;375 Helen Fein regards intent as “sustained purposeful action;”376 and Levon Chorbajian thinks intent can be proved with evidence of “premeditat[ion].”377 From these interpretations, intent can largely be identified by evidence of a plan to knowingly harm a group, evidence of processes that enable widespread harm, or evidence of continued harm over a period of time. Yet even with evident, large-scale harm, there may be no explicit declarations of governmental intent, such as paper trails, conversations, or propaganda, making it difficult to prove that harm was targeted to specific groups of people. Systemic organization may be evidence of intent, but sometimes the processes of organization could have defensible purposes for actions other than harm. This is further complicated by

373 Lemkin, Axis Rule, 81
atrocities of the past because the records of the regime may be lost or insufficient to prove intent and the perpetrators, now dead, cannot be interviewed. In sum, intent is extremely difficult to prove beyond a reasonable doubt.

The second aspect of the genocide definition outlines specific acts of destruction that may be involved in the genocide. The process of destruction can be accomplished through “killing members of the group,” “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group,” “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part,” “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group,” and/or “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

In identifying destruction, there is the question of whether destruction must happen within a certain time frame. Semantically, “to destroy” would mean to cause enough harm that a group is wiped out of existence. However, the modes of destruction outlined in the convention do not necessarily signal immediate destruction. Killing members of a group indicates efforts for immediate destruction, but causing serious mental and physical harm to members of a group may occur over a longer period of time. Efforts to decrease births in a group (for example, through sterilization or war rape, which “pollutes” the ethnic “gene pool”), aids in the long-term goal of eliminating a group over the course of a generation, but may not do much immediate damage to a group besides individual harm to the person affected. Because of this, “destruction” can refer to acts that cause both long-term and short-term harm, as long as these acts have an ultimate goal of the destruction of a group. However, it is difficult to determine what is and is not genocide when there is no time frame established for the acts to take place. Because destruction is not as

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378 UN, Genocide Convention
379 Article II (a) (b) of the Genocide Convention
380 Straus, “Contested Meanings,” 367
381 This is not to say that a timeframe should be instituted.
simple as wiping “out a present and future threat” away from a certain area, what counts as destruction and the time frame of destruction can add a blurriness to the definition and prosecution of genocide.\(^{382}\)

The third aspect of the genocide definition is the clause “in whole or in part.” The genocide definition does not numerically or spatially define the scope of genocide; it only specifies the intent to destroy a group “in whole or in part.” To Scott Straus, the scope of genocide is generally confined to the population of a group within the range of the perpetrator’s territorial control.\(^{383}\) This specific area of control may not be representative of the group population as a whole – the population could be spread out (for example, like the Jewish population in Europe). Other times, the targets of genocide can fall outside a region of control, or the group may only be targeted after the onset of a territorial invasion.

Because there is no specified spatial or numerical scope in defining “in part,” there is a lack of clarity on how small a “part” can be, or if the destruction of the “part” needs to be accomplished to count as sufficient destruction. International courts have ruled that removing a specific group out of one province and into another is not enough to count as genocide, but that ruling fails to consider if the majority of the group population lives within that one province.\(^{384}\) The regulatory “in whole or in part” also fails to acknowledge if there was a plan to destroy a specified group, but the plan is not acted upon to its original wording. It is unclear if the obvious intent to destroy is as incriminating as the act of destruction, nor is it clear if the destruction of a small number of group members, with the intent of destroying more, represents a significant enough part of group destruction.\(^{385}\)

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\(^{382}\) Straus, “Contested Meanings,” 366

\(^{383}\) Straus, “Contested Meanings,” 367


\(^{385}\) Straus, “Contested Meanings,” 360, 366, 367
The fourth aspect of the genocide definition is that it posits four protected groups: racial, ethnic, religious, and national groups. The definition reflects groups that were widely considered to be national minorities, most vulnerable to targeting across time. Significantly, political groups, class groups, cultural groups, and social groups were omitted from the definition, largely so the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain would sign onto the convention. International Courts have ruled that social and political groups are defined by choice rather than “stable” biological traits, and these “voluntary” groups are excluded from the definition because they can change their identities. As such, the convention’s protected groups reflect a belief that race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality are biologically innate to a person. However, this definitional rooting in biology is not rooted in fact.

The presupposed biological homogeneity of a racial, ethnic, national, or religious group is not a biological reality; instead, groups are bounded by imaginary, constructed ideas of what makes each person like one another. Racial groups are not genetically homogenous, and ethnic identity and ethnic group membership are constantly shifting. In reality, identities are fluid and based on interpretation. Across time and space, race has been a social construct developed to signify difference and dominance, and as such, the social constructs will always change based on the definitions of those in power. Scholars know that “genocide is not carried out against a

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388 Prosecutor v. Akayesu ruled that it “appears that the crime of genocide was allegedly perceived as targeting only 'stable' groups, constituted in a permanent fashion and membership of which is determined by birth, with the exclusion of the more 'mobile' groups which one joins through individual voluntary commitment, such as political and economic groups.” from Prosecutor v. Akayesu, Case No. I.C.T.R. 96-4-T, Judgment, para.511 (Sept. 2, 1998), quoted in Michael J. Kelly, “Genocide - Power of a Label,” Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law 40, no. 1/2 (2007-2008): 158
389 Michael Mann, “Rwanda, I: Into the Danger Zone,” in Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing (Cambridge University Press, 2004): 428; For example, in Rwanda, Hutus and Tutsis were fluid cultural identities with some differential relationships to the precolonial kingdom. However, the “Hutu” and “Tutsi” ethnic labels became distinct legal identities that were imposed by the Belgian colonial state, which associated different imaginary hereditary traits with each group for the purposes of divide-and-rule.
group bounded by essential internal properties. Rather, genocide is carried out against a group that the perpetrator believes has essential properties.”

People are grouped and targeted together because they are imagined to be similar, and then the traits are “hereditized” (or, made biologically innate) to the group. Because of these properties, the protected groups have been criticized for being too exclusive, and many scholars have insisted that the definition be expanded to include “imagined groups,” defined as a group in which certain identities are politicized and ostracized on presumptive criteria. This way, other identities that have been politicized or “hereditized” can be included.

These definitions analyzed above are legal definitions under international law. They are intended to be functional guides for the international prosecution of crimes, but in academia, the definition has been utilized to create a conceptual framework of questions that allow historians to fully evaluate the nature and historical context of atrocities. For genocide, in particular, this framework, with its specificities of intent, organization, modes, and spatial and temporal dimensions of violence, helps historians and other scholars ask and answer questions about the evidence available for the violence they study and compare it to other episodes of violence across time and space.

Lastly, there are the social connotations of the genocide definition. Genocide, while not officially defined as such, has colloquially become the “crime of crimes.” The genocide label

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391 I include this word to highlight how some “voluntary” traits come to be considered innate. This term comes from class discussion with Professor Donald Bloxham at University of Edinburgh, so while not my own, it is also not widely used in academic discussions of genocide. This term is inspired by the events of the Indonesian genocide, in which being a communist was considered a “permanent, semi-hereditary condition.” If a person was deemed to be the direct descendant of, or closely related to, a known communist, they would be prohibited from holding government posts and certain other positions. (Robert Cribb, “Genocide in Indonesia, 1965-1966,” Journal of Genocide Research 3, no. 2 (June 2001): 236-7).
is a powerful means of capturing the essence of an international crime like no other, and there are tangible legal, moral, and socio-political implications.\(^\text{394}\) This was because the term genocide arose from one of the worst crimes ever committed: Nazi Germany’s genocide of Jews. Created in the aftermath of World War II, the term “genocide” was partially tailored to the crimes of the Nazi regime. Some think that the term genocide can only refer to the Holocaust, but this is not the case. Genocides have been committed long before and long after the Convention was created, and they have happened across the world. There can be, however, a certain Eurocentrism at work in comparing an atrocity to the Holocaust, particularly when the two atrocities are completely unrelated. Sometimes, in making a case for genocide, proponents will “downplay[sic] dissimilar aspects, and amplify[sic] similar ones” to the Holocaust to have their tragedy “qualify” as genocide, rather than placing the atrocity in its own historical context.\(^\text{395}\)

Furthermore, there are dangers to the overuse or improper application of the word genocide. The use of genocide as a term can incite a “politicized purpose” that aims to “strengthen the legitimacy of [a group or country’s] historical sufferings.”\(^\text{396}\) There is a politics of recognition associated with the genocide, particularly in its association with the Holocaust. People who identify as victims of genocide often wish for the kind of recognition awarded to the Holocaust.\(^\text{397}\) Sometimes, they view the recognition of their victimhood to be a moral conviction and an immovable moral stain on their oppressor. These politics of recognition debase the original purpose of the Genocide Convention. Alex de Waal highlights how the over-use and colloquialized application of the word “genocide” can cause the term to “slide from its wider,

\(\text{394}\) Kelly, “Power of a Label,” 158
\(\text{396}\) Norman Naimark, Stalin’s Genocides (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 124
\(\text{397}\) Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 413
legally specific meaning, to a branding of the perpetrators' group as collectively evil." Without caution and careful evaluation, the term “genocide” has the potential to become not just a legal classification, but a mourning metaphor.

**Applying the Holodomor to the Genocide Definition**

When we apply the Holodomor to the Genocide Convention of 1948, we must ask the following questions: What or who caused the famine, and with what goals in mind? Was there a particular group or groups that were targeted? If yes, then who was the targeted group during the famine? Why was the group targeted? Was there an intent to destroy the group through famine? How was the group targeted for destruction during the famine? Was the group destroyed in whole or in part during the famine?

These questions have been examined by the foremost respected scholars of Russian, Ukrainian, and Soviet Studies since the details of the Holodomor were brought to the public in the late 1980s. Yet even after 30 years, there is no consensus as to whether the distinctly Ukrainian Holodomor was a genocide. Some scholars believe that the Holodomor meets the definition of genocide as established by the convention because, with his collectivization policies and changes to nationality policy, Stalin seemingly intended to destroy Ukrainians as a nationality. Other scholars challenge notions of Stalin’s intent and the existence of a specific, targeted group. A small minority of scholars have moved beyond the limitations of the genocide definition, arguing that Stalin’s collectivization campaign and the subsequent famine would meet

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the definition of genocide if the protected groups were expanded to include political, class, or social groups.

Mostly, scholars can be divided into two “camps.” Both Hiroaki Kuromiya and Andrea Graziosi have devised a paradigm of historian alignment, with scholars of Ukraine as a region more likely to fall into the category of believing the Holodomor was a genocide, whereas scholars of the Soviet Union (or, those who study the famine on a “pan-Soviet” scale) tend to challenge the assertion that Stalin targeted a specific national group. This is significant because, with this paradigm in mind, it may inform the reader of why scholars may think in a certain way, why they examine evidence in certain ways, and how they draw their conclusions. It also suggests that by combining the perspectives of both camps, one will get the “most correct” answer.

The next section of this paper examines the various ways in which the Holodomor has been argued in favor of, against, and beyond the genocide definition. First, I present the pro-genocide arguments that maintain that Stalin intended to destroy Ukrainians with famine. Secondly, I counter the pro-genocide arguments with the scholarly opinions of those who are against the Holodomor being considered a genocide of Ukrainians. Then, I move on to scholars who refrain from using the term genocide because of the politics of the Genocide Convention and posit my own interpretation of how the famine could be considered outside the limits of the convention.

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401 Because this thesis is directly about the impact of the famine in Ukraine, I will not discuss the question of whether collectivization, demodization, and the resulting famine in Kazakhstan constituted a genocide. I will briefly comment on it in the “against genocide” section, but I will not give it the time and space that it deserves. For more information on the genocide debates on the Kazakh famine, I suggest the following sources: Norman Naimark’s *Stalin’s Genocides*; Stephen G. Wheatcroft, “Complexity of the Kazakh Famine: Food Problems and Faulty Perceptions,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 23 no. 4 (2021): 593-7.
The Holodomor as a Genocide of Ukrainians

In arguing that the Holodomor was a genocide, seven scholars have written the foremost scholarship. Raphael Lemkin, Andrea Graziosi, Yuri Shapoval, Norman Naimark, Stanislav Kulchytsky, Bodhan Klid, and Taras Kuzio have all argued that the Holodomor was a genocide, or part of a genocidal process, that specifically targeted the Ukrainian nation. They have argued that Soviet Ukraine was targeted by famine in two ways: 1.) Soviet Ukraine was treated more harshly during the famine than other Soviet Republics, and 2.) Stalin initiated an attack on Ukrainian nationalism during the famine. These arguments are complicated by a lack of clear intent to destroy the nation, but historians have filled these gaps by speculating intent based on the decisions of the Stalinist regime to continue to allow death despite obvious mass starvation.

Ukrainians as the Targeted Group

The earliest characterization of the Holodomor as a genocide was Raphael Lemkin’s “Soviet Genocide in Ukraine.” In this 1953 essay, he identified four integral components of the genocidal process in Ukraine: 1.) Attacks on the Ukrainian intelligentsia, 2.) attacks on the clergy of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 3.) the starvation of the Ukrainian farming population where “tradition, folklore and music, the national language and literature, the national spirit, of Ukraine” was grounded, and 4. ) the deportation of the Ukrainian population and replacing them with other nationalities from across the Soviet Union.\footnote{Raphael Lemkin, “Soviet Genocide in Ukraine in Raphael Lemkin Papers, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation, Raphael Lemkin ZL-273. Reel 3. Published in L.Y. Luciuk (ed), *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932–1933 in Soviet Ukraine* (Kingston: The Kashtan Press, 2008): 1-5 \url{https://willzuzak.ca/tp/holodomor2013/oliver20171004Lemkin.pdf}} When combined, these four components culminate in a genocide of Ukrainians as an ethno-nationality.\footnote{Lemkin, “Soviet Genocide in Ukraine,” 1-5} In Lemkin’s argument, the Holodomor is only one aspect of a genocide against Ukrainians during the rule of
Stalin. With this interpretation, Lemkin explicitly said that the process of the Holodomor was not against the whole people of Ukraine, but against a certain, crucial part: the peasantry. The peasantry was the most sizable portion of the Ukrainian population. Peasants numbered 24 million out of a total population of roughly 29 million.\(^404\) According to Lemkin’s analysis, the Ukrainians as a distinct people were rooted in the peasantry. By targeting the Ukrainian peasantry for destruction, the Ukrainian nation would be significantly incapacitated, even destroyed, if only “in part.”

Lemkin’s thesis of a Ukrainian genocide has been supported by numerous scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Andrea Graziosi and Bohdan Klid, for instance, subscribe to a Lemkinian line of reasoning that 1.) the Holodomor aided in the long-term destruction of the Ukrainian nation and 2.) that the various elements of the Holodomor “signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of the national group.”\(^405\) Bohdan Klid highlights, without much evidence, that Stalin's long-term goal was the total integration of the Kuban as a Russian Territory and the eventual Russification of the Ukrainian people.\(^406\) In his view, the famine crushed not only Ukrainians as a nationality but Ukrainians as dissidents to the Soviet regime. Serhii Plokhii continues these ideas, remarking on the undeniable “ethno-national coloration” of the Holodomor.\(^407\) Plokhii argues that Stalin used the Great Famine to turn Ukraine from an “autonomous and often independently minded republic” into an “exemplary Soviet republic.”\(^408\) Alternatively, Graziosi believes the regime

\(^{404}\) “Soviet Census of 1926,” Wikipedia, last modified February 9, 2023

\(^{405}\) Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 82


\(^{408}\) “Exemplary soviet republic” from Stalin letter to Kaganovich, citation not included by Plokhii (though, his translation is similar to the “Letter from Stalin to Kaganovich on changing Ukrainian SSR leadership (excerpt),” August 11 1932, quoted in Plokhii, *Gates of Europe*, 254
tailored the “Famine in an anti-Ukrainian sense” to attack the “spine” of the Ukrainian nation: the village.409 Because of this, Graziosi believes the assertion of the Holodomor as a Ukrainian genocide “cannot be but positive.”410

Stanislav Kulchytsky and Taras Kuzio, both Ukrainian historians, believe that the Holodomor was a genocide of Ukrainians, but question whether it targeted Ukrainians as an ethnicity or nationality. Kulchytsky rejects the ethnic explanation of a Holodomor genocide, mostly because of its equation with the Holocaust. Kulchytsky separates the Holodomor from the label of a “Ukrainian Holocaust” because he believes that Ukraine had a Holocaust ten years later, when 1.5 million Jews were killed on the territory of Ukraine while under Nazi Occupation. Secondly, Kulchytsky does not believe the Holodomor was a cleansing of ethnic Ukrainians. In support of this, he posited that Ukrainians were targeted for where they lived, not necessarily their ethnicity. Passports, for example, were issued based on where a person lived in the country. Furthermore, the borders to Ukraine were closed. Kulchytsky believes that the evidence “leaves no room for doubt that Stalin sought to turn the Ukrainian nation, which was dangerous to his personal power, into a politically toothless ethnic group.” Taras Kuzio agrees with Kulchytsky, contending that it was “indisputable that the Soviet leadership targeted Ukraine and the Ukrainian population (here understood as not just ethnic Ukrainians but all the people living in Ukraine).” Targeting does not equate to genocide, but it provides a basis for the arguments that Ukrainians were targeted for destruction based on their distinct nationality.

Intent

409 Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 104
410 Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 107; Klid, Holodomor Reader, 14
411 Stanislav Kulchytsky, “Investigating the Holodomor,” Holodomor Studies 1, No. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2009): 15
It is difficult to prove that Ukrainians were targeted with famine because Stalin never clearly expressed an intent to target Ukrainians. Though there is no direct evidence that demonstrates if, why, and how Ukraine was explicitly targeted with famine conditions, it has been widely speculated that Ukraine’s targeting stemmed from Stalin’s fear of Ukrainian nationalism. Historians know that Stalin was worried about Ukraine’s status in the Soviet Union. In an August 11, 1932, letter, Stalin outlined his suspicions of “petliurites,” or sympathizers to the former Civil War era independent Ukrainian state, in the Ukrainian Communist party and in the peasantry generally. Stalin was convinced that if the situation in Ukraine was not rectified immediately, we will lose Ukraine.”\(^{413}\) The letter signals that Stalin felt a need to suppress Ukrainian national urges during the period of famine.

Historians also know that fears of nationalism may have been exacerbated by a tense international situation. Stalin retained a fear of Japanese-Polish collusion against the USSR. Stalin feared that the Poles were waiting for the moment to incite a nationalist (or anti-Soviet) revolution in Ukraine.\(^{414}\) On the eastern front, Stalin suspected that Japan was advancing into Mongolia and Xinjiang, close to strategic areas of Mongolia and West Siberia.\(^{415}\) As a result, Stalin’s perceived vulnerability to international factors may have “aggravated” the domestic grain and famine situation.\(^{416}\) Hiroaki Kuromiya notes that as a result of this fear, it was “possible that Stalin sacrificed starving people within the Soviet Union because he was concerned about an external threat: he had to feed soldiers first and build up the military, particularly in the far east.”\(^{417}\) Or, perhaps, Stalin took advantage of the famine situation to starve out those with

\(^{413}\) Letter from Stalin to Kaganovich on changing Ukrainian SSR leadership (excerpt), August 11, 1932, in Pyrih Holodomor, 47-9
\(^{414}\) Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 671
\(^{415}\) Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 670
\(^{416}\) Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 670-1
\(^{417}\) Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 671; though Kuromiya speculates that Stalin could have done this, he does not believe that the Holodomor was a genocide against Ukrainians. As such, his arguments are included in a later section of this chapter.
potential loyalties to outside regimes, or to deliberately terrorize suspected Ukrainian nationalists and those he believed to be their potential supporters.418

The issue in identifying intent in the Holodomor is that historians must rely on speculation. Naimark, for example, speculates on plausible intent by interpreting the syntax and word choice of Stalin’s letters to his comrades. In the “We Will Lose Ukraine” letter, we can prove, at a minimum, that Stalin was worried about nationalism in Ukraine. We can speculate, to the fullest extent, that this letter was indicative of a plan to target and repress national elements through famine – thus “rectify[ing]” the situation.419 Though one letter is slim evidence, it indicates that there was widespread concern in the regime about Ukraine's future within the Soviet Union, at least in part due to concerns with Ukrainian nationalism. Naimark also highlights that as famine conditions worsened, the Soviet regime increasingly blamed the peasants and nationalists for sabotaging collectivization by hoarding grain, thus jeopardizing requisition targets.420 Though nationalists and peasants were viewed as suspicious across the Soviet Union, Naimark and other historians argue that Ukrainian peasants were viewed as more suspect than peasants of other nationalities.

Naimark finds other markers of intent to cause mass death when examining Stalin’s decisions to continue requisitions and to feed other parts of Soviet society while starvation raged in the countryside. He underscores multiple factors that he believes to be indicative of intent: 1.) The regime continued to order the requisition of foodstuff despite the reports of starvation and mass death 2.) Stalin chose not to release the strategic food reserves upon hearing about the starvation 3.) Grain was exported at a high rate even as the starvation in the villages worsened 4.)

418 Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 672
419 Letter from Stalin to Kaganovich on changing Ukrainian SSR leadership (excerpt), August 11, 1932, in Pyrih, Holodomor, 47-9
420 Naimark, Stalin’s Genocides, 74
The regime chose to feed workers and city residents but not the rural peasantry, despite the higher levels of starvation in the countryside. Relief was ultimately granted in mid-1933, but it was given after millions had already died. Naimark does not acknowledge that these markers of intent would have applied to the regime’s treatment of the peasantry and countryside across the Soviet Union, not just Ukraine. But if famine conditions were indeed designed to be worse in Ukraine, Stalin’s choice to not help the Ukrainian countryside would have been especially lethal.

Though historians cannot identify a clear, cohesive intent to target the Ukrainian nation, they speculate that evidence of continued aggression in the face of obvious starvation and mass death indicates an intent to harm Ukrainians as a national group.

Methods of Destruction

In the argument that Ukrainians were actively targeted for destruction, there are two main pieces of evidence. The first is that the famine was deliberately designed to be worse in Ukraine. The second is that as the famine worsened, the national framework of Soviet Ukraine was deconstructed, with supposed “nationalists” arrested and blamed for the famine. When taken together, some historians believe that the famine intentionally starved the peasantry (the “spine” of the Ukrainian nation, as said by Andrea Graziosi) while purging the elites who fostered Ukrainian nationalism. The famine, thus, was an attempt to stymie the Ukrainian nation.

Historians have argued that between 1932-1933, Soviet Ukraine’s extraordinarily high grain requisition quota led to multiple grain policies that were either applied only in Soviet Ukraine or were most harshly applied in Soviet Ukraine, exacerbating the peasant’s starvation in the Republic. In 1931, Ukraine was responsible for 35.1% of the Soviet Union’s grain production but failed to meet the requisition targets again and again. In response to these failures, Stalin declared that Ukraine would be “allowed” to produce less than the required harvest by 1.1

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million tons, but ordered that the lessened quota had to be met.422 Andrea Graziosi and Anne Applebaum point out that on November 18, 1932, the Ukrainian Communist Party issued two directives, suggesting that these policies were uniquely implemented only in Ukraine.423 The first directive ordered peasants to return the grain advances they received for previously achieving grain quotas.424 The second directive was the meat and potato penalty, in which peasants who failed to meet grain quotas were required to pay a special tax on meat – or livestock, if they still owned any at this point – and potatoes.425 Even after the meat and potatoes had been surrendered, the grain quotas still had to be met. A few weeks later, Ukraine became the only republic to receive a visit from Stalin’s top lieutenants, Lazar Kaganovich and Vyacheslav Molotov. After an all-night meeting, Molotov and Kaganovich strong-armed the Ukrainian Communist Party into forcing all collective farms that had not yet met the requisitioning quota to ship every ounce of grain reserve that they had within five days.426 As evidenced by these grain directives, the grain policies implemented in Ukraine were uniquely tailored to Ukraine’s unattainably high requisition quotas, revealing that Ukraine’s unique grain situation caused the Ukrainian peasant to be targeted for requisitions in distinct ways from other Soviet Union peasants.

That same month, the “blacklist” was created as a tool to enforce requisition policies by isolating the peasants within their starving communities. Communities on the blacklist had no right to trade or receive deliveries, and they were cut off from food and outside support. Though they would be used throughout the Soviet Union, blacklists came to Ukraine earlier and were more rigorously enforced.427 In Russia and Belarus, the term “blacklist” was confined to grain

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423 Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 37; Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 104
424 Graziosi, *New Interpretation*, 104
427 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 194
producers, whereas in Ukraine, it could be applied to any entity that produced any type of foodstuff. Ukraine was also the only place to have whole districts blacklisted. The unique ways the blacklist was implemented in Soviet Ukraine suggest that Ukraine was treated differently from other Soviet republics, thus creating worse famine conditions and fewer opportunities for peasants to survive in the Ukrainian countryside.

Furthermore, Stalin placed Ukraine under lockdown while implementing an internal passport system that limited the peasantry’s access to cities across the Soviet Union. In January 1933, Moscow realized that peasants were attempting to flee Ukraine. The central committee was:

> convinced that this exodus, like that of the previous year, has been organized by enemies of Soviet power, Socialist Revolutionaries and Polish agents, in order to agitate by ‘using peasants’ against kolkhozes and, more generally, against Soviet power in the USSR's northern territories. Last year party, government, and police organs failed to uncover this counterrevolutionary plot... A repetition of such a mistake this year would be intolerable. ... A repetition of such a mistake this year would be intolerable.

To combat this hypothesized agitation, Stalin ordered the OGPU to stop peasants from fleeing Ukraine and the Kuban, preventing them from begging for help in other areas of the country. This order resulted in the closing of the borders from Soviet Ukraine and the shuttering of the walls of the cities across the Soviet Union. As this happened, internal passports were issued for all Soviet citizens who legally resided in cities, so only those with those passports could enter, exit, and travel. On January 23, 1933, the sale of long-distance rail tickets to peasants was banned. With the closed Ukrainian borders, the locked city walls, and the peasant inability to buy long-distance rail tickets, it was now impossible to leave the Ukrainian Republic without explicit government permission, and it was now impossible for the Ukrainian peasants to leave the

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428 Applebaum, Red Famine, 195
429 “Direktiva TsK VKP(b) i SNK SSSR o predotvrashchenii massovogo vyezda golodausheikh krest’ian” in Danilov, Manning, and Viola, Tragedii sovetskoi derevni 3: 635, quoted in Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 105
starving countryside. In the following month, the decree led to the arrest of 220,000 people attempting to flee Ukraine, predominantly hungry peasants in search of food; 190,000 of them were sent back to their villages to starve.430

The blacklists and border restrictions actively prevented food from reaching the Ukrainian countryside without government permission and prevented the Ukrainian peasant from escaping the famine conditions. This shows that everywhere, peasants were restricted to the rural countryside, even if that countryside was starving. If the famine conditions were indeed worse in Ukraine – as these historians argue was the case – these policies, in effect, worsened the Ukrainian peasant’s experience of famine and increased their likelihood of starving to death.431 In effect, these policies also prevented people living in surrounding areas from discovering the severity of the famine.

As the peasantry starved, Stalin attempted to stymie Ukrainian nationalism through adjustments to nationalism policy and purges of the Ukrainian leadership. The famine began in its earliest stages in 1931, and the korenizatsiya policy was reversed in late 1932, right when the famine reached drastic levels of death and destruction. On December 14 and 15, 1932, Stalin reversed the korenizatsiya policy that had promoted respect for the local language, tradition, and lore in cultural, administrative, and educational matters in Ukraine. This reversal was meant to prevent the growth of Ukrainian nationalism by suppressing the local culture and instead promoting the “Brotherhood” of the Soviet Union.432 Though indigenization policies were

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430 Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 105
eventually reversed across the Soviet Union, Andrea Graziosi stresses that indigenization policies were reversed earlier and more completely in Soviet Ukraine than in other republics.\(^{433}\)

This political choice, according to Hiroaki Kuromiya, reflected a belief by Moscow that the starving Ukrainian peasants, who had long been courted through the *korenizatsiya* policy, were at fault for the failed grain requisitions, making them now more politically dangerous than peasants of other nationalities because of their dire starvation – a starvation that was not as severe in other republics. As a result of this conclusion, starving peasants, now viewed as political threats, were the targets of harsher requisitioning.\(^{434}\) This suggests that fears of nationalism were exacerbated by collectivization and famine, and in turn, the fears of nationalism may have worsened the famine in Ukraine.

Ukrainian historian Yuri Shapoval emphasizes that concurrent to the starvation and adjustments in nationality policy was a witch hunt for the Ukrainian nationalists who had allegedly caused the famine. On December 5, 1932, Vsevolod Balytskyi – the special OGPU plenipotentiary in Ukraine – presented a justification for terrorizing Ukrainian officials into collecting grain, ordering his subordinates to inflict a “decisive strike at all counterrevolutionary kulak-Petliurite elements that are actively counteracting and wrecking the basic measures of the Soviet authorities and the party in the countryside.”\(^{435}\) A few weeks after Balytskyi mobilized his attack on Ukrainian nationalism, Pavel Postyshev – the second secretary of the CC CP(b)U – was

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\(^{433}\) On Dec 14 and 15, 1932, the Politburo reversed the *korenizatsiya* policy in Ukraine. With this decree, all Ukrainization programs were abolished. On 19 Dec, similar measures were introduced in Belarus, but they did not amount to a reversal of Belarusization. Graziosi cites the following Politburo decrees: "o sel'sko-khoziaistvennykh zagatovkakh v. Belorusii," Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) 17/3/912/8, 42-3, Politburo meeting of 16 December 1932, protocol no. 126, pg 1); "Ob izvrashchenii natsional’noi politiki VKP(b) v. Belorussии"Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) 17/3/917/7, quoted in Graziosi, “New Interpretations,” 105

\(^{434}\) Kuromiya, “Reconsidered,” 669

\(^{435}\) Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 43-4; In an update on December 20th, Balytskyi claimed that 7,000 pits, 100 illegal storehouses, and 11,340 tons of grain were found, along with Polish insurgent groups organized by the “government of the UNR [the pre-soviet Ukrainian National Republic],” from I. Shapoval and V. A. Zolotar’ov, *Vsevolod Balyts’kyi: osoba, chas, otochennia* (Kyiv, 2002): 189, quoted in Shapoval, “Prologue,” 102
ordered to find the “nationalists” who had “organized” the famine, looking in both the collective farms and the Ukrainian communist party for saboteurs. Ukrainian officials of “both the central oblast and raion leading party organs were” accused of being “insufficiently attentive” to the requisitioning, as well as overlooking and failing “to expose in a timely fashion the maneuvers of the class enemy.” In early 1933, the Soviet authorities announced that a “counter organization in the agriculture of the Ukrainian SSR” had been exposed, and quickly linked it to agronomists accused of being part of counterrevolutionary organizations in Moscow, Rostov, and Minsk. With these efforts, Ukrainian nationalism was depicted as alive, thriving, and actively sabotaging Soviet success.

A new wave of repression during 1933 climaxed with the targeting of Ukrainian officials and intellectuals, particularly Mykola Skrypnyk. These repressive actions were aimed at destroying the foremost national communists in Ukraine, and euphemistically became called the “struggle against Skrypnivshchyna.” As the People’s Commissar of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, Skrypnyk was accused of promoting Ukrainian “bourgeois-nationalist elements” in his curriculum designs. Realizing he was facing imminent death, he committed suicide in July 1933. Though Skrypnyk was scapegoated, the main target of the campaign was Ukraine’s system of culture, education, and scholarship. In addition to Skrypnyk, Moscow had not forgotten the fact that a certain (insignificant) number of party and state workers had pleaded with Moscow to reduce requisition targets and provide aid to the peasantry. Party members had been punished for this back in 1932, when Lazar Kaganovich, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Vsevolod Balytskyi took charge of Ukraine’s requisition policies, and the next purge of party

436 Pyrih, Holodomor, 371-2
437 Shapoval, “Prologue,” 104
438 Shapoval, “Prologue,” 110
439 Shapval, “Prologue,” 109-12
440 Shapoval, “Prologue,” 109-111
members was launched in 1933. Though not exclusive to the Ukrainian SSR, the purge had specific traits in the republic, such as a temporary moratorium that was placed on new party memberships. According to the data cited by Postyshev at the joint plenum of the CC and the CCC of the CP(b)U in November 1933, out of the 120,000 candidate-members who were caught up in the purge, 27,500 “class-enemies, irresolute elements, those who have crumbled” were purged as of October 15, 1933.\textsuperscript{441}

As the Ukrainian peasantry was devastated by ongoing grain requisitioning, the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership was targeted for its involvement in nationalist, “counter-revolutionary” activities. Not only did Soviet Ukraine’s countryside suffer from starvation, but the national leadership was gutted. When taken together, they reveal a pattern of attack on the Ukrainian nation, at both the top (the elite) and the bottom (the peasantry).

\textit{Scope of Destruction}

The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute estimates that between 1932-1934, over eight million people perished from starvation during the Great Famine. 3.9 million of those victims died within the borders of Soviet Ukraine. Of those, 3.6 million died in the countryside, while 300,000 died in cities. The next largest victim group was in Soviet Kazakhstan, where 1.3-1.5 million Kazakhs are estimated to have perished from famine and the Soviet Union’s forced sedentarization policy. In the RSFSR, 3.3 million died.\textsuperscript{442} Though the number of deaths may seem similar between Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine had a total mid-year population of 29.6 million in 1933, while Russia had a population of 103.9 million. Thus, Ukraine’s losses are four times higher than Russia’s: 13.3% of Ukraine’s population perished during the famine years,

\textsuperscript{441} Shapoval, “Prologue,” 114
\textsuperscript{442} Graziosi, “New Interpretation,” 102
versus 3.2% of Russia’s. Neither Ukraine nor Russia was as severely affected as Kazakhstan, which lost 35-40% of its total population during the famine years. Because of the lack of clarity in the genocide definition’s “in whole or in part” clause, a 13.3% loss of a population could likely count as an “in part” loss to a group.

All in all, the arguments presented by Lemkin, Graziosi, Shapoval, Naimark, Kulchytsky, Klid, and Kuzio show that both the peasant and the nationalist were seen as a threat to the success of Stalin’s Five-Year Plan. As the famine raged, there was an active fight against perceived Ukrainian nationalism that corresponded to crackdowns in requisition policy in mid to late 1932. As Shapoval argues, Stalin attempted to control Ukraine by “liquidating its nation-building potential which was never again to be revived.” It was, as German historian Gerhard Simon noted, not only a war against the kulak or the peasant but a war waged “against Ukrainian national self-identity.”

Of course, there are shortcomings to the arguments presented by these authors: the fact that nationalism policies were adjusted during the famine could be considered circumstantial evidence; many of the brutal collectivization and requisitioning policies were applied across the Soviet Union, not just to Ukraine; and the regime failed to provide aid to all of the Soviet Republics until large-scale starvation and death had occurred, not just in the case of Soviet Ukraine. Nonetheless, there is evidence that famine conditions were worse in Ukraine and that Ukraine experienced certain Soviet policies (such as the blacklist) differently from other Soviet

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444 Shapoval, “Prologue,” 107
445 Shapoval, “Prologue,” 107
republics. Furthermore, the fact that the evidence is circumstantial does not mean that the evidence is not relevant to the historical context of the famine.

**Historians Against the Genocide Label**

Historians who are against labeling the Holodomor as a genocide generally focus on two elements of the genocide debate: intent and the targeted group. The debate on intent is largely subjective to the historian: some believe that there is no evidence of intent, while others believe that there is a thin line between intent to kill and allowing death to happen. The debate on the lack of a targeted group generally considers that the famine was not targeted against Ukrainians but pan-Soviet in nature. This section will evaluate the arguments of R.W. Davies, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, Stephen Kotkin, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Michael Ellman, and Georgiy Kasianov, all of whom discuss these intricacies of the Great Famine in their own works. Because this argument largely focuses on intent and group, the mode of destruction is limited to the famine, and the scope of destruction is not evaluated beyond the pan-Soviet nature of the famine.

**Lack of Intent**

R.W. Davies, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, and Stephen Kotkin articulate the view that many historians share: they believe that the famine was undoubtedly a result of the brutal nature of Stalin’s regime but attribute the cause of the famine to rapid industrialization and incompetent collectivization policy. Davies and Wheatcroft – economic historians of the Soviet Union – argue that the atrocities occurred because of consecutive, disastrous harvests in 1931 and 1932, which prevented the government from building up adequate grain stocks for both feeding the population of the Soviet Union and exporting products abroad. In their studies, they find no
evidence of an attempt to deliberately starve the peasantry. Historian Stephen Kotkin agrees: he emphasizes that Stalin’s decisions were not based on an intention to kill, but a response to growing international concern with Japan and Poland and an ill-formed risk assessment of agricultural conditions. He emphasizes that Stalin heard what he wanted to hear regarding the famine situation, and instead of considering how his decisions might have caused the famine, Stalin blamed poor harvests on Poland, the peasants, and the activists who enforced the collectivization campaign.

All three authors highlight the aid given by Moscow to the famine-struck area, arguing that because Stalin begrudgingly provided aid to the countryside, he did not intend to cause mass death. Davies, Wheatcroft, and Kotkin note that once the Politburo was aware of the severity and mass scale of the famine, they issued secret directives that provided small amounts of food relief to Ukraine and the North Caucasus. Stalin, as Davies and Wheatcroft note, often initiated this aid. According to Kotkin, the following aid was approved in 1933: a reduction in the national grain procurement target from 24.3 to 19.6 million tons; the return of 5.7 million tons of grain back to agriculture, including 2 million tons from the reserve stock and 3.5 million tons from the procurement stock; the allowance of three dozen small food allocations to rural Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and Kazakhstan. In addition, the Politburo used hard currency to secretly purchase grain and livestock from abroad. Though the aid came too late and was insufficient to immediately stop the tragedy in the countryside, it was not insignificant. The aid did ultimately stop the famine in mid-to late-1933.

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If Stalin had wanted to deliberately starve the peasantry, Davies, Wheatcroft, and Hiroaki Kuromiya believe he would have explicitly revealed his intent and “scapegoated” the targeted group from the outset of the Five-Year Plan. To Davies and Wheatcroft, it “is only the naming of scapegoats before the event that can be adduced as evidence of a guilty intention. Scapegoating after the event is evidence only of a wish to escape blame for the consequences of a policy.”449 In 1929, Stalin declared his intention to “liquidate” the “kulak as a class,” but he never mentioned another group or nationality that would be targeted for liquidation. 450 Though collectivization was intended to revolutionize the peasant, the peasant was not to be destroyed. Stalin, as Davies and Wheatcroft argue, was hoping to escape blame for an unintended consequence of his industrial and agricultural plans by later placing the blame for the famine on non-state elements, such as the incompetent peasant, the nationalist, or the Polish saboteur. Hiroaki Kuromiya agrees. He thinks Stalin would have announced his intention to kill Ukrainians – like he did the kulaks – and speculates that while Stalin was not averse to the deaths, he did not intentionally cause the deaths.451

Because there was no clear declaration of intent to cause famine conditions, Davies, Wheatcroft, and Kotkin argue that it is unethical to speculate what Stalin’s intentions could have been.452 Davies and Wheatcroft maintain that rather than focusing on the actual decisions and institutions established under the Stalinist regime and their intended and unintended results, debates on the Holodomor have relied on “speculation about the inner workings of Stalin’s mind” and his possible attitudes towards Ukrainians and the peasantry. When there is no reliance

449 Davies and Wheatcroft, “Reply to Ellman,” 631-2

451 Kuromiya, “Famine Reconsidered,” 673-4
452 Davies and Wheatcroft, “Reply to Ellman,” 633
on speculation, Davies and Wheatcroft believe that the best explanation for the famine is that it was a consequence of the institutions or policies that were established under Stalin. Such institutions include his shipping of twenty-five thousand overzealous activists to the countryside, who then collectivized so quickly and violently that peasants revolted, or the blacklist, which punished villages for not meeting their requisition quotas. While many of the institutions were extremely repressive if not outright brutal, many were also a result of political ignorance of life in the countryside. To these three historians, all the institutions established by Stalin had intended and unintended consequences, and famine was likely an unintended consequence of collectivization rather than a method of genocide.

Michael Ellman continued the debate on intent by unpacking the idea of allowing death vs. deliberately ordering the deaths of millions of people. Many of his ideas stem from Amartya Sen’s 1986 Poverty and Famines, which argues that famines are rarely caused by a lack of food resources. Instead, Sen argues that most famines are caused by the improper distribution of food resources, with governments leaving people to starve while dispatching foodstuffs for purposes other than sustenance. For example, a country may deprive a population of food so they can continue to export large amounts of foodstuffs in exchange for hard currency. Ellman continues this improper distribution argument by highlighting how through acts of omission – by ignoring pleas for help, not actively providing aid until much too late, and not reaching out to the international community for food assistance – Stalin allowed millions to starve so he could export goods to fund his industrialization plan. Ellman argues through the lens of manslaughter vs. “(mass) murder.” Ellman believes that if Stalin were to be charged with murder, his only defense would be “to argue that he was ignorant of the consequences of his actions,” but Ellman

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453 Davies and Wheatcroft, “Reply to Ellman,” 633
doubts Stalin was “that ignorant.”** However, Ellman highlights how deliberately requisitioning and exporting high amounts of grain *knowing* that this action would cause peasants to starve, still *does not* count as intentionally starving the peasants.** Ellman notes that there were certainly peasants that Stalin certainly wanted to disappear, such as the “counterrevolutionaries,” “idlers,” kulaks, and “middle peasants.”** Nonetheless, wanting a group to disappear does not equal the act of deliberately planning for the group to disappear.

Hiroaki Kuromiya focuses on the credibility that Stalin stood to lose – and did lose – during the famine, and how this credibility suggests a lack of intent. Kuromiya states that Stalin appeared strong in his ability to use brutal force and terror to overcome the famine crisis by persecuting “saboteurs.”** The famine, however, caused a political and social crisis within the Soviet Union. Periodically throughout the famine years, peasants revolted and workers in the cities went on strike. At the peak of starvation, bandits roamed the countryside, as rumors of cannibalism plagued villages.** After the suicide of his wife in November 1932, Stalin withdrew from public life, remaining largely silent at the Seventeenth Party Congress and avoiding any major public speaking engagements until 1933, all while “rightists” in the party – who were later implicated in the 1932 Riutin Affair – allegedly labeled him “gravedigger of the revolution.”***

Many were concerned, disgusted, and frightened by his silence in the face of such obvious suffering, and viewed the deteriorating stability of the country as a reflection of his inadequacy as a leader.** These factors reveal that Stalin had more to lose with the famine than he did to gain. If the famine were intended, it likely would have been used to consolidate his rule. While,

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455 Ellman, “Stalin,” 681
456 Ellman, “Stalin” 664-5
457 Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (New York; Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005), 113
458 Kuromiya, *Stalin*: 105
459 Kuromiya, *Stalin*: 105-6
460 Kuromiya, *Stalin*: 105
during the famine, Stalin did achieve tyrannical power and the ability to quietly cover up the acts of his regime, these characteristics were achieved from attempts to preserve the regime’s control during the famine, not intentional planning.

Not a Ukrainian Famine, but a Pan-Soviet Famine

Some historians, such as Stephen Kotkin, challenge the argument that the famine was engineered to harm the Ukrainian nation. Kotkin is a proponent of the idea that the Great Famine was not a Ukrainian famine, but a pan-Soviet one. Nationalities from across the Soviet Union faced substantial population losses and starvation conditions. In this analysis, he brings forth the example of Kazakhstan. There, 35-40% of the population died from starvation or disease that resulted from forced sedentarization, compared to Ukraine’s 13.3%. To Kotkin, it seems evident that Kazakhstan suffered worse population losses that would amount to destruction. He also maintains that forced sedentarization comes closer to an attack on Kazakh nomadic culture than the famine did in Ukraine. Ultimately, Stalin’s harsh policy and unfavorable natural conditions created an unintentional blow to the Soviet Union, not only to Soviet Ukraine.461

Ukrainian historian Georgiy Kasianov contends that though not a victim of genocide, Soviet Ukraine suffered in a particularly unique way from other republics in the Soviet Union. Kasianov’s own interpretation of the famine is that it was caused by collectivization, and that because Ukraine was largely reliant on its grain and wheat production rather than the production of other foodstuffs, requisitions affected Ukraine more than the other republics of the Soviet Union.462 Kasianov accepts that there was also a national aspect to the famine, which he attributes

461 Kotkin, Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 129.
to a conflict between the “ruling class of the center and the social-cultural elite of the republic.” This conflict was a “very important variant from the all-union famine.” Moscow accused and targeted members of the Ukrainian Communist Party – such as Skrypnyk and his associates – for promoting nationalist policies, a phenomenon that did not occur in other republics during the famine years. However, in Kasianov’s interpretation, this peculiarity of Ukraine’s famine experience does not mean it was a genocide; rather, it was the culmination of political and agricultural situations during the famine years.

These historians– Kotkin, Davies, Wheatcroft, Kuromiya, Kasianov, and Ellman – have written the foremost scholarship on the Holodomor, and they are not convinced that the Holodomor was a genocide. Lacking clear-cut evidence of an intent to target the Ukrainian nation, all these scholars agree that though a crime of neglect, it was not a genocide. It is possible that one day, evidence of intent could be uncovered, but this is unlikely. According to David R. Marples, “archival studies to date suggest that there is no ‘smoking gun’ in the field of the 1932-1933 famine and one should not anticipate finding definitive proof that Stalin had a clearly defined goal to destroy the Ukrainians as a nation.” It is unclear if one will ever be able to conclusively prove the Holodomor was a genocide engineered to target Ukrainians without new evidence, but until that day comes, no decisive arguments can be made.

Other Avenues of Viewing the Holodomor

Two historians, Timothy Snyder and Anne Applebaum, refrain from labeling the Holodomor as a genocide because of the politics of the Genocide Convention. Snyder answers the genocide question with “yes, it was. But this does not get us far.” Because the genocide

463 Heorhii Kas’ianov, Danse macabre, 259-67
465 Snyder, Bloodlands, 413
convention was co-drafted by representatives of the Stalinist regime, Snyder highlights that the genocide definition “ar[o]se within and reflect[ed] a certain political setting,” one in which the Stalinist regime and its representatives yielded power over the convention’s creation of the definition so political and social groups would not be included. Thus, the regime’s crimes, like the Holodomor, would not be prosecutable under international law.466

Unlike Snyder, Applebaum acknowledges that the Holodomor does not meet the criterion for genocide because the famine “was not an attempt to eliminate every single living Ukrainian; it was also halted, in the summer of 1933, well before it could devastate an entire nation.”467 However, she, like Snyder, agrees that this was by design – not in the perpetuation of the Holodomor (which happened 15 years before the Convention), but in the creation of the genocide definition itself. According to Applebaum, the convention’s outlined modes of destruction and targeted groups do not fit the historical schemes of Soviet violence. Because the genocide definition was crafted by countries that had credibility at stake with the definition, Applebaum believes it is largely impossible to classify the famine or any other Soviet crime as genocide in international law through the Convention language they had concocted.468 To Applebaum, “[the Holodomor] was one of several such assaults in the twentieth century, not all of which fit into neat legal definitions…the famine happened… whether or not an international court confirms it.”469

The horrors of the Holodomor may miss the criteria to be considered genocide, but to Snyder and Applebaum, the Holodomor’s failure to meet the genocide definition reflects the politics of the Genocide Convention rather than the nature of the Holodomor itself.

466 Snyder, Bloodlands, 413
467 Applebaum, Red Famine, 350
468 Applebaum, Red Famine, 350
469 Applebaum, Red Famine, 355-6
What if the definition of genocide were expanded to include political, class, and social groups? Or, what if the definition were expanded to include any group of people, targeted on the basis of “imagined” traits that relate the group as one? Perhaps, with the expansion of the definition, there would be a way to erase the politics of the past and reframe the institutional violence that takes place in genocidal events. Of course, these amendments would likely not occur – not in a political climate where for instance, the United States and Russia refuse to sign on as members of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for fear of war crimes prosecution. Nonetheless, for the sake of an example, I posit an argument for how Stalin may have used collectivization and famine to commit a genocide on the basis of class and culture.

If one were to expand the definition of genocide to class and cultural groups, then it may be possible to consider the peasant as the intended genocidal target of collectivization and famine. The peasant way of life was incompatible with socialism prior to the Five-Year Plan. In the Marxist view of the peasantry, only the proletariat – as in the industrial working class, most often confined to the cities – could achieve a socialist revolution. According to Marx, the peasantry was isolated in their village life and largely reliant on their own means of production. The peasant only became politically minded when it served his own interest, and normally, that interest leaned towards capitalist ideas of private property. The peasant, thus, was incapable of recognizing the “full economic potentialities of society,” which would be achieved through state control of agriculture and industry. Though Lenin had revised Marx’s view of the peasantry and considered them to be potential socialist revolutionaries, Stalin viewed the peasantry as an obstacle to achieving his socialist victory. Peasants would resist Stalin’s idealized economic future, so Stalin had to “break” the peasantry to accomplish his Five-Year Plan. Some historians

470 Nigel Harris, “The Revolutionary Role of the Peasant,” International Socialism 1 no. 41 (December 1969/January 1970): 18-24, retrieved from Marxists Internet Archives
https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/harris/1969/12/peasants.htm
have suggested that by forcing peasants to live on collective farms and lose their agency in economic matters, Stalin deliberately destroyed the peasantry’s way of life. Lynne Viola et al writes that “[c]ollectivization was an all-out attack on the peasantry and on peasant culture.” Collectivization wiped out not only a large number of peasants, but it transformed the norms of peasant life into something more “Soviet.” It uprooted their tradition, folklore, and family unit, the very things that bound together village life. The village was no more; instead, it was the collective farm. Collectivization was a social and cultural attack on the peasantry, and the famine was perhaps a punishment for those who resisted the socialist future.

If the definition of genocide were to be expanded to include class or other “imagined” groups, it may be possible to prove that the Five-Year Plan intended to destroy the kulak. Kulaks were an “imagined” group, constructed by their perceived class status as wealthier peasants. Often, they were successful farmers who owned their own land and hired other peasants to help work their land. Other times, a person became a “kulak” when a neighbor accused them of being a kulak, even if they were not particularly wealthy. To Stalin, the kulaks were remnants of a bourgeois-capitalist era, and their successes as private, land-owning farmers represented the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union. At the outset of the Five-Year Plan, Stalin initiated an attack on the kulak by declaring his intention to “liquid[ate] the kulaks as a class.” Thereafter, many kulaks were forcibly dispossessed, exiled, or imprisoned. Those related to kulaks struggled to find work or lodging after dispossession, revealing how the status of a kulak became a “hereditized” trait, meant to prevent the supposed kulaks from participating in Soviet society. Though, because many kulaks were forcibly displaced and not killed, there is an argument that what happened to the kulaks would be akin to “ethnic cleansing,” not genocide.

472 Joseph Stalin, “Problems of Agrarian Policy,” December 27, 1929
Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no scholarly consensus on the genocide debate. The Genocide Convention is an imperfect document; it reflects the politics of the aftermath of World War II and provided the Global Superpowers a way to protect their own interests while deciding what atrocities can be recognized as genocide. As such, in my scholarly opinion, the Holodomor does not reach the UN definition of genocide. The Ukrainian peasantry undeniably suffered; they faced an agonizing torture and slow death from hunger. Yet they were not the only members of Soviet society to face this plight. While Ukraine did face unique political situations that worsened the Ukrainian peasant’s experience of famine, there is limited evidence that these policies were intended to eradicate the peasant. Instead, it seems that the policies were implemented to requisition grain the government was convinced was hidden (even though it did not exist), to convince the peasantry to hand over this grain, and to prevent the labor force from leaving Ukraine. These famine conditions could have been exacerbated by the perceived international threat that caused any domestic nationalism to be viewed as suspect, but there is no clear evidence that this happened. This targeting, however, was only a prequel to the terror that the Ukrainian elites, along with the rest of the Soviet Union, would face in 1937-8. Stalin viewed nationalism as a factor in peasant unwillingness and inability to surrender adequate grain, but at this point in Soviet history, Ukrainian nationalism was not a target for destruction.

Though legally and academically the Holodomor is likely not a genocide, it is still proclaimed as one by certain governments, political figures, and scholars. Perhaps this is because genocide is thought of as the “crime of crimes,” and asserting oneself as a historical victim of genocide implies a specific type of victimhood on par with crimes of the Holocaust. As we know, Ukraine has employed the Holodomor as its “chosen trauma,” and a trauma’s association with
genocide elevates that trauma into a new status of atrocity. Though it is likely incorrect to refer to the Holodomor as a genocide, it is important to note what parts of the Holodomor are emphasized by people who proclaim it to be one and to understand how the term genocide is used in reference to the Holodomor.

Though I do not think that the event attains the definition of genocide, it does not negate the suffering undergone by millions from 1932-3, nor does it negate the suffering felt by the Ukrainian nation still today. Whether or not an international court confirms a genocide occurred, it is undeniable that millions suffered, leaving an indelible, dark stain on Ukrainian cultural memory for generations to come.
Conclusion

Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan and its concomitant collectivization campaign subjected the Soviet peasantry to catastrophic conditions. In the process of collectivization and forced requisitions, peasants were dispossessed, brutalized, and starved. In their communities, entire families were ripped apart by death, and those who survived lived in fear not only of party activists but also of the bandits (and rumored cannibals) that roamed nearby. Across the Soviet Union, an estimated seven to eight million people perished from starvation during the famine years. The Holodomor took the lives of nearly 4 million people.

For decades, these horrors, and the state’s role in them, were suppressed. The state forged census data to hide the population losses and for almost fifty years, never publicly mentioned the famine. After over five decades of silence, the horrors of the Holodomor came to light in the Western world and in the 1980s reached the Soviet public for the first time.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of independent Ukraine, the Holodomor and the debates of its memory have occupied the political and academic landscape, with much of the focus on the “genocidal” character of the famine. In academia, premier scholars of Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian History have sifted through archives and argued about the possible labels for the Holodomor. While many have argued that the Holodomor was a genocide, others have denied that the famine meets the definition. To me, it seems that the famine was too widespread to have targeted only Ukrainians. This does not mean that Ukrainians did not suffer in unique ways. This also does not negate the fact that Stalin still allowed starvation to fester in the countryside. The Genocide Convention of 1948 is an imperfect, limited document, one that is clouded by genocidaires having actively taken part in its creation. Its definition, as such, excludes the possible ways the Holodomor may have targeted distinct class-based areas of the
Soviet population for genocide, such as the kulak or the peasant. Nonetheless, there is no scholarly consensus on how to define, label, and conceptualize the tragedy, and there certainly is not a consensus of public opinion. The Holodomor, and debates around its memory, live on.

In Ukraine, the historical politics of the Holodomor was utilized in the creation of the Ukrainian national narrative. When leaders began to construct a new history of the Ukrainian past in the early 1990s, the Holodomor became the foundation of the nation’s trauma, meant to establish the Ukrainian nation as justifiably independent and separate from its Soviet past. As its “chosen trauma,” the Holodomor was both a commemorable tragedy and a source of identity, with Ukrainians represented as a cohesive, victimized people. But not only were Ukrainians victims of the Holodomor tragedy; in the national narratives incubated partially during the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma but widely during the Viktor Yushchenko presidency, Ukrainians had been the victims of a genocide in the 1930s. The Holodomor as a genocide, as such, has been institutionalized not only in the national narrative but in public policy through the Holodomor Law and public space through memorials. Through its various representations in law, politics, and public image, Ukrainian leaders have used the Holodomor to shape a new, independent narrative of the past, one that connected all Ukrainians to a communal trauma.

By pursuing the recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide on the international stage, Ukrainian officials sought to legitimize their narrative of the past. The 2007-2008 quest for international recognition was largely unsuccessful because of the influence of Russia. Russia, in contrast to Ukraine, argued that the Holodomor had not been a solely Ukrainian experience; rather, the Great Famine was a pan-Soviet phenomenon in which many nationalities had suffered. Russia also worried because the Russian state was considered the “successor state” to
the Soviet Union, this Ukrainian quest for recognition would implicate the Russian government as genocidaires. Consequently, the Russian government viewed genocide recognition as an attempt by Ukraine to stain Russia’s image. The quest for recognition and these conflicting narratives of the famine increased tensions between Ukraine and Russia, resulting in a memory war that expanded beyond just the Holodomor and focused on the Ukrainian national identity as a whole. Russia was critical of Ukraine’s de-sovietization process of the 2010s, claiming that Ukraine’s commemoration of historical Ukrainian nationalists was akin to supporting Nazism.

These tensions have been compounded by geopolitical moves by Russia: the 2014 annexation of Crimea and exacerbation of the separatist war in the Donbas; and most recently, of course, in the current war in Ukraine. With this war, Ukrainian political rhetoric about the Holodomor as a genocide and Ukrainian quests for international recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide have resurged. The Holodomor has been used to fuse the violence of the past with the violence of the present to implicate the Russian government as a historical aggressor against the Ukrainian nation. In this narrative, temporal and spatial boundaries have been blurred, thus obfuscating the historical realities that Stalin’s Soviet Union and Putin’s Russia are different countries and regimes, 90 years apart.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy has seemingly followed Yushchenko’s internationalizing framework but with much more success. The quest for recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide has gone hand-in-hand with appeals for war aid. Recognition has re-appeared on the agendas of foreign countries and international organizations, and many of them have, in the past year, recognized the Holodomor as a genocide. Foreign leaders have publicly drawn parallels between the Holodomor and the Russo-Ukrainian war. Other leaders have contended that Putin’s war may be a repeat genocide of Ukrainians.
It is evident that the war has caused the Holodomor to re-enter public consciousness, and it has particularly re-entered public consciousness as a genocide. Though scholarly works suggest that the Holodomor does not evidently meet the criteria of the Genocide Convention, the Holodomor has repeatedly been framed as a genocide by not only Ukrainians, but now by the leaders in the Western world. As the war continues, and as the Western world continues to reckon with the victimization of Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian war, it is possible that the Holodomor might come to occupy a permanent place in European public consciousness. The memory of the Holodomor occasions a moral reckoning of Ukraine’s past, present, and future. As Ukraine’s future is determined on the battlefield, the Holodomor will continue to play an important role in how both Ukrainians and international communities will grapple with the Soviet Union and Russia’s legacies of violence.
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