

THE GREAT FAMINE IN SOVIET UKRAINE: TOWARD NEW AVENUES OF  
INQUIRY INTO THE HOLODOMOR

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Famine spread across the Union of Social Soviet Republics in 1932 and 1933, a deadly though unanticipated consequence of Joseph Stalin's attempt in 1928 to build socialism in one country through massive industrialization and forced collectivization of agriculture known as the first Five-Year Plan. This study uses published documents, collections, correspondence, memoirs, secondary sources and new insight to analyze the famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine and other Soviet republics. It presents the major scholarly works on the famine, research that often mirrors the diverse views and bitter public disagreement over the issue of intentionality and the ultimate culpability of Soviet leadership. The original contribution of this study is in the analysis of newly published primary documents of the 1920s and 1930s from the Russian Presidential Archives, especially vis-à-vis the role of Stalin and his chief lieutenants at the center of power and the various representatives at the republic-level periphery.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE. BACKGROUND TO THE SOVIET FAMINE OF 1932-1933 .....	5
CHAPTER TWO. CONQUEST AND COMPANY: ETHNIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 1932-1933 FAMINE IN SOVIET UKRAINE ...	22
CHAPTER THREE. THE DAVIES AND WHEATCROFT THESIS AND OTHER NON-ETHNIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FAMINE .....	39
CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSIS OF NEW DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE.....	53
CONCLUSION.....	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	80

## INTRODUCTION

Aleksander Dovshenko's acclaimed 1930 Soviet film *Earth* opens with a shot of a bountiful Ukrainian wheat field. The film presents country life as a study of contrasts. There is much idyllic imagery—a young woman dancing in sunflowers, apples ripening on a tree—but there is also boredom, stagnation and burdensome work. Into this peaceful but primitive setting arrive new Soviet-built tractors and the processes of collectivization, heralding a new era of prosperity and happiness. The story takes a dark turn as a villainous rich peasant intent on resisting modernization murders the story's Soviet protagonist. More than a work of Soviet propaganda, *Earth* captures in its images a Ukrainian countryside unknowingly on the verge of catastrophe.

Hunger and famine spread across the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1932 and 1933, a deadly though unanticipated consequence of Joseph Stalin's attempt inaugurated in 1928 to build socialism in one country through massive industrialization and the forced collectivization of agriculture, known together as the first Five-Year Plan. Stalin envisioned a mighty USSR that surpassed the western democracies in terms of industrial capacity, agricultural output and the material well-being of its citizens. His plan, however, did not include starving peasants forced to eat rotting animal carcasses or cannibalizing the corpses of children. Yet this is what took place in many regions of the USSR, including in Ukraine, where a humanitarian disaster of hellish proportions killed millions.

In the 1930s and through the remainder of the Soviet era, authorities remained steadfastly silent on the famine, allowing only veiled reference to the event to reach the Soviet public. The strict censorship of information meant that debate over the cause and nature of the famine began only in the 1980s, just prior to the dissolution of the USSR. Many Ukrainians believe Soviet

leaders, including general secretary Joseph Stalin, Politburo members Lazar Kaganovich and Vyacheslav Molotov, intentionally organized the famine as a means to exterminate the Ukrainian people. In post-Soviet Ukraine, the Great Famine—now called the *Holodomor* (“killing by starvation”)—became a central component in the construction of the new nation’s identity (Ukraine became an independent nation in 1991), embroiling the famine in combative political debates and complicating its study as an historical event.

This study uses published documents, collections, correspondence, memoirs, secondary sources and new insight to analyze the famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine and other Soviet republics. It presents the major scholarly works on the famine, research that often mirrors the diverse views and bitter public disagreement over the issue of intentionality and the ultimate culpability of Soviet leadership. It integrates primary sources into the analysis of the secondary source material to provide first-hand perspective on the event. The original contribution of this study is in its analysis of recently published primary documents of the 1920s and 1930s from the Russian Presidential Archives, especially vis-à-vis the role of Stalin and his chief lieutenants at the center of power and the various representatives at the republic-level periphery.

This study discusses the standard explanatory models of the famine, with the “twin pole” explanations of the event by Robert Conquest in his seminal 1986 work *Harvest of Sorrow* and Robert Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft in their 2004 work *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* prominent. The central theses of these two major works differ over the issues of intentionality and the allegedly targeted demographic of the famine. For Conquest, the famine was a deliberately organized attempt by the Soviet leadership to use hunger to destroy the Ukrainian peasantry. Davies and Wheatcroft contend that there is no evidence that Stalin either intentionally created a famine or intentionally directed it toward any specific nationality. In their

view, the event was an unwanted effect of rapid industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture. Further, they argue, drought conditions in 1931 and 1932 combined with critical mistakes on the part of Soviet leadership—mistakes caused by basic incompetence and misunderstanding of the agricultural economy—contributed to poor crops and the severity of the famine.

Western scholarship by Terry Martin, Andrea Graziozi, Robert Marples, and others, along with the work of Ukrainian historians including Stanislav Kulchytsky, insists the national question relating to the famine is not yet settled. This study acknowledges that sensitivity and awareness of the ethnic perspective are important. The complexity of the famine and the contemporary issues of collective identity and memory that it touches are reflected in the ongoing debate over responsibility. Divided or occupied for centuries by the Russian, Austrian and finally Soviet empires, modern Ukraine retains a composite nature; its eastern and western halves each possess distinct historical experiences and memories. It is notable that the *Holodomor* occurred in what is today's eastern Ukraine, with western Ukraine—a part of Poland in 1932—not suffering from starvation or famine in the early 1930s. This study also briefly discusses the development of a Ukrainian nation and its incorporation first into the Russian Empire and later the Soviet state.

The completion of this study coincides with the shattering events of spring 2014, when Ukraine exploded into violence amid protests directed at the perceived pro-Russian policies of President Yanukovich and his forced departure from office. As people are dying on the streets of Kiev and other cities in Ukraine and with Russian troops and tanks posted near the border of the two nations, it is likely that politicization of the famine issue will continue. The debate over public understanding of the famine, especially how it is viewed in east and west Ukraine, will

have significant consequences for the relationship with Russia, as well as for the successful economic, cultural and political development of a democratic, united Ukraine.

## CHAPTER ONE. BACKGROUND TO THE SOVIET FAMINE OF 1932-1933

Heated debate over intentionality and ethnic issues has largely overshadowed the fact that both the Conquest and Davies' camps view Stalin's dogged drive for Soviet industrialization—and its reliance on collectivization of agriculture to finance it—is directly linked to the famine. There is consensus that the adoption of these policies demonstrates the evolution of the Soviet state and Stalin's personal position regarding Soviet agricultural and industry throughout the 1920s. This argument provides important context for understanding the events of 1932-33.

Conquest notes that there was precedent for Soviet grain seizure during the famine years, specifically in the civil war years of 1917-1921 under the policy of war communism. "Bolshevik leaders," he writes of this period, "were frank about the necessity of creating the otherwise virtually non-existent class war in the village," and "the central issue was by now the abolition of the peasant right to sell his grain, and the battle to seize it in the name of the state."<sup>1</sup> Conquest holds that this policy was not simply a "war measure" meant to permit the survival of the nascent Soviet state, rather a "conscious attempt to create a new social order, to effect the immediate transformation of the country to full socialism."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the limits of war communism as a long-term policy were evident by 1921. Peasant dissatisfaction, soldier rebellion, famine and economic collapse all threatened the Bolshevik hold on power. In an interview, Politburo member Molotov, a prominent figure in this narrative as one of Stalin's chief lieutenants, recalled Lenin's thoughts during this volatile period. Lenin,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Conquest, 48.

according to Molotov, admitted, “We do not entirely enjoy confidence any longer. We are not trusted by the peasantry. If we do not find a way out of this situation, we’ll be driven out.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Red Revolution turned “rusty,” according to poet Nikolai Aseev’s phrase quoted by historians Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich. “The New Economic Policy (NEP),” Heller and Nekrich argue, “removed the tourniquets that had totally cut off the country’s blood supply.” While the quasi-capitalism of Lenin’s NEP that began in 1921 was a deviation from classical Marxism, they write, it enabled the fragile Soviet state to stay alive. NEP and its reinstitution of markets for grain producers created a climate of peaceful coexistence between the state and the peasantry and, for a time, agricultural production thrived.<sup>4</sup>

Not all Bolsheviks were comfortable with the change. As noted by Heller and Nekrich, “The NEP inevitably provoked discontent within the ruling Communist party” as “it seemed a complete betrayal of revolutionary ideals.”<sup>5</sup> “They accused us of jettisoning our line, of renouncing socialism, of renouncing leadership of the working class, of drifting with the current toward capitalism,” Molotov said, “but otherwise Soviet power would have been lost.”<sup>6</sup> Molotov here echoes Lenin’s own realistic assessment of the situation. Lenin believed that the battle to build socialism in Russia promised to be a prolonged one and ultimate victory required adaptive and dynamic thinking.

Conquest describes the breakdown of NEP beginning in 1928, when the Soviet state could not meet its grain needs. He argues that Soviet leaders turned a minor situation, predictable

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<sup>3</sup> Felix Ivanovich Chuev and Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics : Conversations with Felix Chuev*, ed. Albert Resis (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 246.

<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Heller and Aleksander Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union to the Present*, translated by Phyllis B. Carlos (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 125-126.

<sup>5</sup> Heller and Nekrich, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 247.

and based on cyclical factors, into a challenge to the Soviet state's existence. The basic problems were that state grain supplies were low and the peasantry did not want to give up its grain crop without adequate and fair compensation. "Faced with, or believing themselves to be faced with, a grain shortage, the Politburo voted unanimously for 'extraordinary' or 'emergency' measures."<sup>7</sup> This meant the state was going to expropriate, by force if necessary, grain from the peasantry. In Conquest's view, this successful forced-grain collection—the state exceeded its expectations—had two negative effects. First, with the profit motive removed, the peasantry simply refused to produce. Second, Soviet leaders took away the wrong lesson; confiscation would not always be the easiest or most productive approach to dealing with grain shortages.<sup>8</sup>

Davies and Wheatcroft, on the other hand, argue that as early as 1927 Moscow's goal of increased industrial output increased pressure on the peasantry. "In 1927," Davies writes, "the first substantial increase in investment upset the delicate balance of the New Economic Policy—the market relationship between the state and the peasantry introduced in 1921 after the civil war." Unhappy with the proposed state prices, peasants refused to sell, an action the state met with a plan to use force to bring in grain. In addition to this pressure, Davies adds that investment also caused inflation that affected the entire economy. The state responded by instituting price controls and rationing.<sup>9</sup>

A member of Stalin's inner circle in the Politburo from 1926 onward, Molotov recalled the brutal nature of the grain collections. "On January 1, 1928," he began, "I had to go to Melitopol on the grain procurement drive. In the Ukraine. To extort grain." "From the kulaks?" asked the interviewer. Molotov responded, "From everyone who had grain. Industrial workers

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<sup>7</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Williams Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 432.

and the army were in a desperate situation. Grain was all in private hands, and the task was to seize it from them. Each farmstead clung to its stock of grain.” He continued, “We took away the grain. We paid them in cash, but of course at miserably low prices. They gained nothing. I told them that for the present the peasants had to give us grain on loan. Industry had to be restored and the army maintained.”<sup>10</sup>

Molotov admitted to using “all kinds of rather harsh methods of persuasion” and “pressure tactics,” but there is no hint that authorities targeted Ukraine for any reason other than it was where they believed excess grain was located. Later in the interview, Molotov mentioned a trip to Siberia, where he pushed a similar program. “Stalin was interested in the grain areas,” including Siberia, Molotov asserted. “He wanted the peasants there to take better care of the crops,” and approved resolutions to guarantee the state received needed grain. Molotov added, “The kulaks who failed to meet the quotas fixed for grain deliveries would face repressive measures.”<sup>11</sup>

In a letter from August 10, 1929, Stalin himself urged Molotov and the rest of the Politburo to see the situation vis-à-vis agriculture as very dire and requiring pointed action. To Stalin, there were three problematic issues in late summer of 1929. First, he believed “a large number of urban speculators” provided the government unneeded competition for peasant’s grain crop. Second, he also blamed “competition between procurement organizations” for raising the price the government paid for grain. Third, he claimed many farmers were attempting to “hide grain surpluses and sell grain on the side.” Stalin was not equivocal in his demand that immediate action was necessary. “Measures,” Stalin wrote, “ought to be taken now against this

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<sup>10</sup> Chuev and Molotov, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Chuev and Molotov, 242.

evil if we really are thinking of finishing up the procurements in January or February and coming out of the campaign as victors.”<sup>12</sup>

The second half of this letter details Stalin’s solution to these problems, and his attitude reveals how, even at this early date in the drive to collectivize agriculture, the Soviet peasantry was going to suffer if it defied the state. Stalin advised, “Give a directive immediately to the (local) GPUs [Stalin is referring here to the republic-level State Political Directorate, the Soviet secret police in the 1920s and early 1930s] to immediately start punitive measures regarding urban (and urban-related) speculators in grain products (that is, arrest them and deport them and deport them from grain regions) in order to make the grain holders feel right now (at the beginning of the grain procurement campaign) that little can be gained from speculation.”<sup>13</sup> His second point of advice was to “hand over to the courts” any person involved in grain speculation, especially “Nepman...who have burrowed into our organizations like thieves and have maliciously helped to wreck the cause of the worker’s state.”<sup>14</sup> He concluded, “Those directors of collective farms caught holding back grain surpluses or selling them on the side will be immediately dismissed from their posts and tried for defrauding the state and for wrecking.”<sup>15</sup> Stalin had identified his villains, many of whom were soon to be victims.

Molotov’s recollection of this period had him, as Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), pushing the procurement campaign in Ukraine. “Stalin himself,” Molotov said, “went to Siberia and...Kaganovich and Mikoyan too travelled on grain-

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Stalin’s Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*, ed. Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov, and Oleg V. Klevniuk, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 165.

<sup>13</sup> Stalin, 165-166.

<sup>14</sup> Stalin, 166.

<sup>15</sup> Stalin, 166.

procurement missions.” Beginning in 1929, Molotov said that he “went out for grain five years in a row” and, he proudly proclaimed, “pumped out the grain.”<sup>16</sup>

Of this period at the end of NEP and through the first five-year plan, historian Hiroaki Kuromiya writes, “The five years from 1928 to 1932 witnessed a great metamorphosis affecting all spheres, arguably the most important event in the history of the Soviet Union.”<sup>17</sup> Kuromiya describes Stalin at this time as believing “moderation was more dangerous than excess.”<sup>18</sup> According to Kuromiya, almost 8 percent of Soviet farms were collectivized by October of 1929. This number reached nearly 53 percent by late February 1930. Kuromiya also discusses Stalin’s concurrent plan to remove the better-off Soviet peasants—the so-called kulaks—from the countryside, a policy that saw 400,000 killed or exiled from their homes two years into the five-year plan. “Treated like livestock,” Kuromiya writes, “they often died in transit because of cold, starvation, beatings in the convoys, and other miseries.”<sup>19</sup>

This was a period of great unrest and conflict in the Soviet grain-producing regions. Kuromiya and others, including historian Lynne Viola, have described this state of affairs in 1930 as peasant warfare against the state. Kuromiya cites All-Union State Political Directorate (OGPU) records showing there were “more than 13,000 peasant ‘mass actions’ ” that year and that the Red Army suffered 147 dead in the uprisings.<sup>20</sup> In addition to direct resistance, Soviet peasants protested collectivization by slaughtering their livestock, an act that greatly affected grain production and was ultimately a factor in bringing famine to the Soviet population.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chuev and Molotov, 242.

<sup>17</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 74.

<sup>18</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 92.

Stalin, as Kuromiya conveys, temporarily backed away from further confrontation at this time. In his famous March 1930 “Dizzy with Success” *Pravda* article, Stalin accused local communists of taking things too far in the collectivization effort, providing the infuriated peasants with a scapegoat to blame for the crisis in the Soviet countryside. Peasants took great advantage of Stalin’s pullback, fleeing the collectives in the spring of 1930. The number of collective farms by the following summer fell to one-third of the number in fall 1929.<sup>22</sup> This was a short-lived respite for the Soviet peasantry. A good 1930 harvest deescalated the situation to the point that Stalin felt it possible to renew the battle for collectivization beginning in the fall. The effort “was effected more carefully but equally forcefully,” Kuromiya writes, and “it made it virtually impossible for individual farmers to stay outside the collectives, inasmuch as they had to pay ten times as much tax as the collective farmers.”<sup>23</sup> This move, along with the increasing brutality of the war waged against the class-enemy kulaks throughout 1931, set the stage for the famine event of 1932 and 1933 in the Soviet countryside.

Viola’s 1996 book on the peasant uprisings during the years 1929-1930, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, emphasizes the point that collectivization was Stalin’s way of righting the original discrepancy of Lenin’s appropriation of Marx to his backwards Russia. “Collectivization,” Viola insists, “encapsulated the original fault lines of the Bolshevik revolution, between a minority class in whose name the Communists professed to rule and the majority peasantry whose very reality appeared to block the revolution.” Peasants resisted the state policies, Viola notes, because they “proposed a profound threat to the peasant way of life.” Peasants were likely to see the collectivization effort as a

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<sup>22</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 92.

means to bring back serfdom, which explains why they took such extreme measures to fight its implementation.<sup>24</sup>

Along with the end of grain requisitions and the start of NEP in 1921, Lenin instituted a new nationalities policy, a policy that affected Ukraine and therefore is salient to the famine discussion. As historian Lewis Siegelbaum writes, “The year 1921 was a turning point in Soviet history in many respects not the least of which was the relationship between Moscow and the non-Russian peoples of the former Tsarist empire.”<sup>25</sup> Siegelbaum notes that Lenin’s main concerns “revolved around how to weld together the newly created Soviet republics and in the process foster a common consciousness based on class as opposed to pre-existing and/or competing national, religious, or ethnic identities.”<sup>26</sup> Discussion of nationalities and the Soviet Union leads to the question of how the Ukrainian nation developed during the late period of nation-state formation and how it became part of Soviet Union. The following section briefly describes this process.

For centuries, the territory of what is modern Ukraine was spread between three empires—the Habsburg, Russian, and Soviet—and Ukraine today remains essentially divided into two ethnic regions, a residue of this divided past. In the nineteenth century, nationalist-minded Ukrainians began to trace the history of their people back to the Rus, an ancient tribe that allegedly founded a kingdom centered on the city of Kiev in the ninth century.<sup>27</sup> Nineteenth-century Ukrainian intellectuals also sought national legitimacy by claiming that Ukrainians were

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<sup>24</sup> Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 235.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions, 1918—1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 117.

<sup>26</sup> Siegelbaum, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *A History of Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 20-38.

direct descendents (and cultural and political heirs) of the Cossacks, a successful and supposedly democratic military power based in today's eastern Ukraine and southern Russia. Religion also played an important, if complex, role in the formation of the Ukrainian national identity. The adoption of Greek Orthodox Christianity in 988 by Prince Volodymyr of Kiev established the Orthodox Rite, rather than Roman Catholicism or even Islam, as the official liturgy of Volodymyr's people.<sup>28</sup> Yet the Latin Church competed for primacy among the people that occupied what is today the territory of modern Ukraine over the next millennium, a consequence of Catholic Poland and the Austrian Empire claiming a large portion of the Ukrainian population. While it was conceivable to construct a usable past from the Rus myth and Cossack heritage and to thus create the "imagined community" necessary to propagate a nation and reach the point where the political and national are "congruent"—to use the language of the great nationalism theorists Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner—nationalist efforts in Ukraine had largely failed before the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> While Ukraine possessed many elements of what historian Eric Hobsbawm terms proto-nationalism, his assertion that this is "clearly not enough to form nationalities, nations, let alone states" is also relevant to the Ukrainian situation.<sup>30</sup>

Historian Miroslav Hroch's approach to nationalism that divides the process of nation-formation into three phases—each characterized by the background and motivation of the actors involved—fits well to the muddled situation in Ukraine through the nineteenth century. Ukraine was indeed one of Hroch's "small nations," that category of Eastern European "non-dominant

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<sup>28</sup> Hrushevsky, 65.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>30</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77.

ethnic groups” with national aspirations that failed to make the leap to full nationhood.<sup>31</sup> Only briefly, in 1919, did an independent Ukraine state come into existence and this nascent state—headed by a coterie of intellectuals with little connection to the rural masses—was quickly forced to join the new Bolshevik republic when Lenin’s government consolidated its power over western Russia in the early 1920s.<sup>32</sup>

Why, then, did Ukraine fail in 1919 as a nation-state and succeed in 1991? Possible explanations include Hroch’s argument that stresses timing and contingency in nation-building. It is possible that Ukraine’s years as a Soviet Republic also prepared it for nationhood, both politically and socially, as will be discussed below. It is also true that the fleeting experience of nationhood in the early nineteenth provided many of the national symbols that were adopted by the new Ukrainian nation in the 1990s, including its national colors and national anthem.<sup>33</sup>

Hroch dislikes the term “nationalism,” preferring instead the term “national movement” because “it refers to empirically observable activity by concrete individuals.”<sup>34</sup> He is not as hesitant to provide a description of a ‘nation’:

For our purposes, let us define it at the outset as a large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political,

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<sup>31</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Comparative Studies in Modern European History: Nation, Nationalism, Social Change* (Aldershot, UK : Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 37.

<sup>32</sup> Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

<sup>34</sup> Hroch, *Comparative Studies in Modern European History: Nation, Nationalism, Social Change*, 95.

linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

These links do not appear in equal proportion in every national case, but there are three components, Hroch argues, that must be present for a successful conversion into a nation-state. They are: an awareness of a shared history that is viewed as a “destiny”; the strong presence of “linguistic and cultural ties” that allow a greater ease of social communication between members of the group than with those outside it; a sense of “equality” within the members of the group.<sup>36</sup> According to this argument, Ukraine, as an unsuccessful candidate for nationhood prior to 1991, lacked one or more of these elements. From the evidence that will be presented below, the third item was most likely.

As, mentioned previously, Hroch’s use of phases in his comparative approach to the study of nationalism is a prominent aspect of his methodology. Put simply, there are three phases in the process—Phase A, Phase B, and Phase C—and the primary actors in each phase differ in background and motivation. The first phase is marked by the presence of “nationally ‘neutral’ scholars” and intellectuals who decide, for reasons that are not clear, to formulate a concept of their own ‘nation’. The second phase occurs when new actors focus increasingly on national agitation to demand recognition of the discovery of the old ethnic identity (of course, not an “old” but rather a new, modern and “imaginary” creation in the Anderson and Gellner theoretical frameworks of nation-formation). The third phase, reached only by successful nation states, is

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<sup>35</sup> Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,” in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61.

<sup>36</sup> Hroch, *Becoming National*, 61.

initiated when the agitators of the second phase are able to transfer their nationalist ideology to the masses.<sup>37</sup>

Nineteenth-century Ukraine follows the Hrochian Phase model closely. Until the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of the area now called Ukraine were hardly aware of any common ethnic traits, apart perhaps from the knowledge that their shared language was viewed by the ruling Great Russian elite as a mere ‘dialect’ of the Russian language.<sup>38</sup> In classic fashion, Ukrainian national sentiment began in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a movement by cultural elites to recognize and promote the historical and linguistic heritage that they perceived made the Ukrainian people unique. The Ukrainian poets—Ivan Kotlarevsky and Taras Shevchenko—are usually associated with this first phase, the latter occupying the esteemed place in Ukrainian literary tradition that Russians give Alexander Pushkin.<sup>39</sup> They are both, Pushkin and Shevchenko, credited for pushing their respective languages to a higher level of literary expression and both relied heavily on themes articulating national identity. Shevchenko was born into serfdom in 1814, two years after Napoleon’s ill-fated invasion of Russia. Historian Andrew Wilson calls Shevchenko the “first Ukrainian radically to deconstruct that idea of empire” forced on the Russian borderlands by the dynasty in St. Petersburg, in effect offering a counter-myth for Ukrainian identity.<sup>40</sup> Wilson’s book, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*,

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<sup>37</sup> Hroch, *Comparative Studies in Modern European History: Nation, Nationalism, Social Change*, 95-96.

<sup>38</sup> Orest Subtelny, “The Ambiguities of National Identity: The Case of Ukraine,” in *Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Volodymyr Zvighyanich (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 186-87.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 90.

contains examples of Shevchenko's work that clearly displayed a new national sentiment, which is located in the shared history of Ukraine.

British historian Hugh Seton-Watson includes a section on the Ukrainians in *Nations and States* that also describes the role played by the intelligentsia in introducing the new concept of national identity to the people of Ukraine. Seton-Watson also provides historical background to explain where this sentiment may have originated. After the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Peter the Great punished the Cossacks because they had sided with the king of Sweden. He forced the inhabitants of the Cossack lands to use Great Russian instead of Little Russian as the state language of communication. The area was divided between Austria and Russia in 1772 and in the Russian-controlled territory the "Russian type of administration and the Russian type of serfdom were imposed on the people of Ukraine."<sup>41</sup> While the ruling Cossack elites were brought into the Russian nobility, much of the population despised the new arrangement. In 1804 the University of Kharkov was founded and served as a focal point for much of this discontent. The city is also where Shevchenko did much of his work.<sup>42</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the move into Phase B in Hroch's terminology was beginning to unfold. Information from Seton-Watson also fills out this period, as the development of the Ukrainian literary language as a significant moment in nineteenth-century Ukrainian identity formation. "It was this," Seton-Watson writes, "which transformed mere knowledge of differences, pride in local tradition and resentment of domination by others, into a conviction that the Ukrainians were a nation."<sup>43</sup> In 1846 the historian N.I Kostomarov formed the Society of St Cyril and St Methodius, an organization to advance the Ukrainian nationalist cause.

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<sup>41</sup> Seton-Watson, 186.

<sup>42</sup> Seton-Watson, 187.

<sup>43</sup> Seton-Watson, 187.

Taras Shevschenko also belonged to this group and after it was forcefully disbanded by the Tsarist police, Shevchenko was exiled to the Urals and forced to put away his pen. The city of Kiev was also increasingly becoming a center of nationalist action until 1876, when this activity too was crushed and the use of the Ukrainian language was forbidden “for the publication of anything except historical documents.”<sup>44</sup>

While the last years of the century saw the enforcement of a harsh Russification policy in Russian controlled-Ukraine, the environment for the Ukrainian population in Habsburg-controlled Galician Austria was much more conducive for the work of nationalists.<sup>45</sup> The historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky was a central figure in this locale and time. His epic work, *A History of Ukraine*, attempted to trace the heritage back to the “Dawn of Civilization,” the title of the first chapter in his book. His first sentence echoes Herodotus in scoping out a grand theme for his work: “This history of Ukraine aims at presenting a history in the old Greek sense of the word: the story of a land and of a people.”<sup>46</sup> The main argument presented hereafter is that the Ukrainian nation-state that emerged after 1991 is only minimally related to the nineteenth-century conception of Ukraine: it had been a failed state up to that point. What is most important to point out here is the existence of two separate political and social environs, a circumstance of profound consequence for later nationalists.<sup>47</sup>

The situation remained largely static until the remarkable events beginning in 1917 altered the course of European and world history. In the aftermath of the calamitous collapse of the Romanov Empire and the end of the First World War, competing nationalist groups centered

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<sup>44</sup> Seton-Watson, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Seton-Watson, 187-88.

<sup>46</sup> Hrushevsky, 1.

<sup>47</sup> John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 11-15.

in Kyiv and in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv found enough commonality and managed to form a briefly recognized state. This was a brief excursion into nation-state status however, because Ukraine was quickly incorporated into Lenin's USSR after the 1921 Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Ukraine failed to cross into Phase C of Hroch's model of nation formation. According to Hroch, a successful nation-building project must own a usable past and a common language, criteria filled by Ukraine. However, a possible explanation for failure in 1921 is the fact that competition between two geographically separated nationalist groups—one in east and one in west Ukraine—impaired the nation-building process and dashed the hopes of all Ukrainian nationalists. As mentioned above, Lenin happily took advantage of the failure to build a united Ukrainian state and moved quickly to bring eastern Ukraine into the new Soviet project.

While the early Soviet years were marked by Lenin's insistence on the promotion of local ethnic and linguistic identity as a means to promote a greater awareness of the need to embrace socialism, this position did not endure long after his death. Historian Roman Szporluk has written a study of the Soviet period in Ukrainian history called *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*. Several points emerge from his work that supports the thesis that it is from the Soviet experience that the true root of the modern Ukrainian state grows. First is the fact that it was only after the Second World War ended in 1945 that all the area of modern Ukraine was actually consolidated into a political entity, bringing western Ukraine, the central corridor around Kyiv, and the southern area around Odessa together for the first time. Szporluk also points out that the southern area had a far greater proportion of Russian speakers than the center or west, since it had been populated simultaneously by many ethnic groups during the

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<sup>48</sup> Seton-Watson, 188-89.

industrialization period of late Imperial Russia.<sup>49</sup> Szporluk also takes into consideration the structure of the USSR that was created in 1922 as a consequential event for subsequent relations between the center and the periphery of the Soviet empire. “The 1922 decision was fateful,” Szporluk writes, “because it related the communist project and the Soviet state to the ‘Russian’ nation by creating an arrangement that was to remain a source of tension and confusion until the very end of the USSR.”<sup>50</sup>

Another Ukrainian historian, Orest Subtelny, also stresses the significance of the legacy of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in providing legitimacy to the Ukrainian national identity. This type of legitimacy does not serve the purposes of the nationalists with an ethnic agenda, a point suggested by Subtelny’s argument:

In a truly dialectic arrangement, the expanding Ukrainian SSR coexisted with an increasingly intense Soviet policy of denationalization. Soviet nationality policy placed Ukrainians in an uncertain situation, for it forced them to choose between two ephemeral identities: ‘Ukrainian,’ which in the sense of a modern, national identity, had had little chance to establish itself throughout Ukraine, and ‘Soviet,’ which was still in the process of formation. In effect, when the USSR collapsed in 1991, Ukrainians found themselves drifting between two rather hazy concepts.<sup>51</sup>

Szporluk and Subtelny would agree with a main tenant of Hroch’s argument, one that most accurately gets to the heart of the national-movement in Ukraine. While it was possibly an “accident” of history that produced this “unexpected nation,” a nation it is, with its own observable past and culture, but this does not necessarily need to be called “nationalism.”

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<sup>49</sup> Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*, xxxiii.

<sup>50</sup> Szporluk, xxi.

<sup>51</sup> Subtelny, *Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity*, 4.

Historian Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak agrees, “A close look at recent political events in Ukraine suggests that the ideology of nationalism had little direct impact on the growth of sentiment for independence.” Instead, she argues, “economic, political, ecological, and societal concerns pushed even the Russians in Ukraine to vote for Ukrainian independence.”<sup>52</sup>

Undoubtedly, the citizens of Ukraine suffered much in the twentieth century, including the famine of the early 1930s. Yet, hopes for a brighter future for Ukraine will depend on its ability to discard old bitter memories. Tinged with blood and death, they are likely to bring further dissension and unrest in the ethnically divided nation. As this study reveals, the debate over the famine in Soviet Ukraine remains an unresolved issue. Ukraine and its variant of democratic civic nationalism is a potential bellwether of nationalism in the twenty first century. Civic nationalists promoting a progressive and pluralistic society in Ukraine must deal honestly with issues like the famine as well as factors that are beyond their control, such as Russian intervention and the nature of modern global economics (western European demand for Russian natural gas, for example), either of which could derail the ambitious agenda of a democratic and united Ukraine.

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<sup>52</sup> Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, “Women’s Organizations in Independent Ukraine, 1990-1998,” in *Ukraine: the Search for a National Identity*, ed. Sharon Wolchick and Volodymyr Zviglyanich (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 278.

## CHAPTER TWO. CONQUEST AND COMPANY: ETHNIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 1932-1933 FAMINE IN SOVIET UKRAINE

In the summer of 2010, U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan visited the Ukrainian Cultural Institute in Dickinson, ND. The purpose of the senator's stop was to donate a Ukrainian-language copy of the U.S. Congressional Commission investigation of the 1932-1933 famine in Soviet Ukraine that killed several million people. This investigation, based largely on oral interviews with Ukrainian emigrants who fled the Soviet Union in the 1930s, concluded that the famine was an organized act perpetrated by the Soviet leadership under Joseph Stalin with the intent of killing off the Ukrainian population of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Sen. Dorgan's remarks following the presentation echoed the emotional testimony of the Ukrainian survivors of the famine describing the horrible death preceded by agonizing suffering of the many victims of Stalin's alleged policy of murder by hunger.<sup>53</sup>

Sen. Dorgan's visit is included here because it clearly reflects Conquest's thesis of intentional famine. Conquest used the same types of sources and testimony in *Harvest of Sorrow*, the 1986 work largely credited for igniting Western scholarly interest in the famine, as the U.S. Congressional Commission. While his book powerfully indicted the Soviet Union for its brutal use of force to collectivize agriculture and the simultaneous effort to wipe out the class of kulaks—the better-off peasants blamed by Stalin for undermining collectivization efforts—Conquest's argument that the famine was intentional and that he targeted Ukraine created the greatest furor. Conquest writes, “The purpose of this book...is to register in the public

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<sup>53</sup> “U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan Visits UCI,” *Journal of Ukrainian Cultural Institute* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 1.

consciousness of the West a knowledge of and feeling for major events involving millions of people and millions of deaths, which took place in living memory.”<sup>54</sup>

Conquest begins his argument with the 1929 decision by Stalin and his closest advisors to initiate the policies of dekulakization and collectivization and the relationship these policies had with the administration’s new emphasis on rapid industrialization. In order to spur the countryside to facilitate the goal, Stalin “struck a double blow” against the Soviet peasantry with these policies. “Dekulakization,” Conquest writes, “meant the killing, or deportation to the Arctic with their families, of millions of peasants, in principle the better-off, in practice the most influential and, most recalcitrant to the Party’s plans.” “Collectivization,” he continues, “meant the effective abolition of private property in land, and the concentration of the remaining peasantry in collective farms under party control.” Conquest argues that the final phase of this effort began in 1932 when Stalin unleashed “a terror—famine...on the collectivized peasants of the Ukraine and the largely Ukrainian Kuban (together with the Don and Volga areas) by the methods of setting for them grain quotas far above the possible, removing every handful of food, and preventing help from outside—even from other areas of the USSR—from reaching the starving.”<sup>55</sup>

Conquest asserts that Stalin orchestrated a simultaneous “wide-ranging attack on all Ukrainian cultural and intellectual centres and leaders, and on the Ukrainian churches.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, according to Conquest, Stalin connected the alleged nationalism of the Ukrainian peasantry to their objection to the ongoing grain procurement campaigns and used it as an excuse to punish the obstinate population through starvation and cultural repression. Conquest acknowledges there

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<sup>54</sup> Conquest, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Conquest, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Conquest, 4.

is no hard proof that Stalin “planned the famine from the first,” but he cites Stalin’s actions after the famine took hold—not easing quota targets, not asking for international help, restricting travel from Ukraine—as evidence that he was certainly capable of that deed.<sup>57</sup>

Conquest hinges his argument on several points outlined at the close of his book. First, Stalin’s unrealistic grain quota levels and the state effort to meet them are the root “cause of the famine.” Second, although the Ukrainian Communist Party told him these goals were unreachable, Stalin did not yield. With brutal insistence, state authorities on Stalin’s orders confiscated grain until there was simply nothing to grow or eat. Third, as starvation took hold in the Ukrainian countryside, Stalin initiated policies that exacerbated rather than alleviated the situation. Conquest believes that Stalin intentionally withheld grain from the rural areas while making grain available in the cities, meaning city residents (and largely not ethnically Ukrainian) had a better chance of survival. Similarly, he says Stalin imposed a strict ban on the import of food items into the Ukrainian republic from Russia. Finally, Stalin sealed off the political border of the Ukrainian republic, trapping millions of starving peasants and sealing their fate. Conquest concludes, “The verdict must be that they knew that the decrees of 1932 would result in famine, that they knew in the course of the famine itself that that this had indeed been the result, and that orders were issued to ensure that the famine was not alleviated, and to confine it to certain areas.”<sup>58</sup>

Two significant works—one a memoir and the other a film—pre-date Conquest’s publication of *Harvest of Sorrow*. A survivor of the famine, Soviet émigré Miron Dolot, dedicated his 1985 book, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust*, “to those Ukrainian farmers who were deliberately starved to death during the Famine of 1932-1933.” While Dolot

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<sup>57</sup> Conquest, 326.

<sup>58</sup> Conquest, 329.

began his book with an account of how collectivization came to his Ukrainian village in 1929 and the destructive effect this Soviet policy had on both farmer morale and, later, life, he devoted most of the book to his own experience of the 1932-1933 famine. Like Conquest, Dolot concluded that Stalin and company directed the famine at the Ukrainian republic in order to eradicate the Ukrainian national identity in the Soviet Union. Unlike other nineteenth and twentieth-century famines, he wrote, “the famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine was a political famine...indeed it was a genocidal famine, the one that was employed by Stalin and his followers as a means of subduing the Ukrainian farmers.”<sup>59</sup>

Dolot argued that Stalin had a unique resentment toward the Ukrainian peasant. Stalin, according to Dolot, “realized that the Ukrainian farmers were the mainstay of the national movement, as they were the ones who most obstinately clung to their national identity and opposed both Russian colonial rule and the Soviet regime.”<sup>60</sup> Dolot singled out the Politburo member sent by Stalin to Ukraine in 1932, Pavel Postyshev, whom Dolot labels a “sadistically cruel Russian chauvinist,” as a main offender in the making of the famine:

It was Postyshev who brought along and implemented a new Soviet Russian policy in Ukraine. It was an openly proclaimed policy of deliberate and unrestricted destruction of everything that was Ukrainian. From now on, we were continually reminded that there were ‘bourgeois nationalists’ among us whom we must destroy. They were the ones causing our food difficulties.<sup>61</sup>

Part of Postyshev’s program, Dolot added, was the new emphasis on collection of seed for the upcoming sowing campaign, no longer just already harvested grain. “The fact that the farmers

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<sup>59</sup> Miron Dolot, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), xv.

<sup>60</sup> Dolot, xiv.

<sup>61</sup> Dolot, 210.

were starving did not bother the authorities at all,” he wrote, “It was made clear that the needed seed must be collected at all costs.”<sup>62</sup>

Originally released in Canada at a time when knowledge of the Ukrainian famine—and especially of its causes—was still thin, the Academy Award-nominated 1984 documentary film, *Harvest of Despair: The Unknown Holocaust*, compares the Ukrainian famine to the genocide suffered by European Jews at the hands of Nazi Germany. Presented in stark black and white, the images of starving peasants and stacked bodies do recall the now-familiar corpses so associated with Hitler’s Final Solution. In addition to the film footage (unfortunately, the source of this footage is not revealed), there are also several interviews with survivors of the famine. The film presents the event as intentionally genocidal and Stalin’s zeal to wipe out Ukrainian resistance through destruction as the equal of Hitler’s toward the destruction of European Jewry. The film makes a salient statistical point on the level of death in Ukraine in 1932: one person died from starvation every minute, 1600 every hour. Featuring unforgettably stunning images, the film is most valuable as visual evidence of the horror of the famine. It is also important as one of the first works to breach the decades-long silence on the nature of the event.<sup>63</sup>

The acclaim and warm reception that Conquest’s *Harvest of Sorrow* received was perhaps partly a reflection of how successful Soviet efforts to cover up the famine in the Soviet Union and the West were, although news of the event did appear in Ukrainian newspapers published in the United States. One, the New York-based and English-language “Ukrainian Weekly”, blamed the Moscow-controlled “Bolshevik regime” for organizing the famine, ostensibly “to deliberately starve out and depopulate the Ukrainian people in Ukraine.” The

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<sup>62</sup> Dolot, 210-211.

<sup>63</sup> *Harvest of Despair: The Unknown Holocaust*, DVD, produced by Slavko Nowytski, Yuriy Luhovy, and Peter Blow for Ukrainian Famine Research Committee (Chicago: International Historic Films, 2004).

paper's coverage of the famine presages several themes that would appear in Conquest's book decades later. It describes the devastating human toll of the famine in the countryside with five million dead from starvation. From an October 6 1933 article titled "Ukrainians Protest Deliberate Starvation of Ukraine by the Bolsheviks": "Scenes of extreme horror are described by eyewitnesses. There is absolutely nothing to eat. Even the rodents have all been eaten up. People die in their tracks and are left to rot. Many instances of cannibalism have been reported."<sup>64</sup> As to the cause of the famine, the *Ukrainian Weekly* clearly outlines an argument that appears in Conquest's work, that "the Reds...finally hit upon the most inhuman plan ever conceived, in order to achieve their end: and that is the deliberate carrying out of Ukraine practically all of the grain and other foodstuffs, with the result that over five million Ukrainians have died during the past year from starvation."<sup>65</sup>

An October 13 1933 *Ukrainian Weekly* article titled, "Starvation in Ukraine," estimated the number of victims "at more than 6,000,000 of human beings." This same issue of the newspaper pointed specifically to the exportation of precious grain as evidence of a crime. "Why are the people of the most fertile land in world, Ukraine, dying from the lack of food?" the article asked. The answer, "Because the tyrannical Red Russian Government requisitioned all of it for the purpose of dumping it on the world's markets."<sup>66</sup>

The *Ukrainian Weekly* covered news of the famine in each of its additions for the remainder of 1933. There is a notable Ukrainian nationalist sentiment in many of these articles.

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<sup>64</sup> "Ukrainians Protest Deliberate Starvation of Ukraine by the Bolsheviks," *Ukrainian Weekly*, October 6, 1933, [http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816561?access\\_key=key-ga6zd8rim6ineokgvh](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816561?access_key=key-ga6zd8rim6ineokgvh).

<sup>65</sup> "Ukrainians Protest Deliberate Starvation of Ukraine by the Bolsheviks," *Ukrainian Weekly*, October 6, 1933, [http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816561?access\\_key=key-ga6zd8rim6ineokgvh](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816561?access_key=key-ga6zd8rim6ineokgvh).

<sup>66</sup> "Starvation in Ukraine," *Ukrainian Weekly*, October 13, 1933, [http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816569?access\\_key=key-1w9hjbc6fj9iygxhdub](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816569?access_key=key-1w9hjbc6fj9iygxhdub).

In the paper of November 13, 1933 an article argues, “We should bring to America’s attention by means of the press the fact that Soviet Russia is not one nation but a conglomeration of enslaved nationalities who desire to live their own independent lives but are prevented from doing so only by the Bolshevik rule of brutal force and terror.” The article goes on to state that famine protests held in the United States were creating awareness of the Ukrainian national identity:

The Ukrainian anti-Soviet demonstrations held throughout America, protesting against the Soviets’ deliberately instigated and fostered famine in Ukraine, have been a success in that they brought vividly before the consciousness of America the fact that there is a certain nation known as Ukraine, which although obscured, persecuted, denationalized, and deliberately starved by its oppressors, maintains intact nevertheless its nationality, and is determined more than ever before—notwithstanding the tremendous sacrifices made—to achieve that to which it is rightfully entitled—freedom and independence.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note here that a nationalist interpretation of the famine—that Ukrainians were intentionally singled out by the Soviet regime for starvation because of their ethnic identity—clearly emerged nearly simultaneously with the 1933 famine. Why would Stalin give such a propaganda weapon to the very ethnic group he was allegedly trying to crush? The answer is he likely did not mean to provide the Ukrainian Diaspora in the United States reason to criticize the Soviet government on the ground that it was starving its own people.

Both Conquest and the United States Congressional Commission relied on personal testimony of the horrors of the famine to indict the Soviet regime. These same types of famine testimonials also appeared in 1932 and 1933 in the form of letters published in American newspapers catering to German speakers. These letters, written by German-speaking residents of

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<sup>67</sup> “Our Youth and the Soviets,” *Ukrainian Weekly*, November 17, 1933, [http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816620?access\\_key=key-e0armcp72xd9wkifttc](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/18816620?access_key=key-e0armcp72xd9wkifttc).

the Black Sea area of Soviet Ukraine to relatives living in the United States, and then passed to newspapers such as *Dakota Freie Presse* and *Dakota Rundschau*, clearly demonstrate that German-speaking areas of Soviet Ukraine suffered from lack of food to the point of death by starvation.

Setting aside for the moment what this might mean for the thesis of an intentionally organized famine to kill Ukrainians, the letters reflect a truly horrifying reality of unimaginable human suffering. One resident of the Black Sea village of Kassel wrote in June of 1933 to a relative living in North Dakota, “We want to let you know that we got your gift which saved us from certain death...But worst of all is how our people are afflicted, always with death before our eyes...So many of the people fall over dead, up to six people each day, with hardly anyone left to bury them in the snow.”<sup>68</sup> An anonymous letter written in May 1933 describes the scene in the village of Hoffnungstal: “Here there reigns the terrible hunger, hunger, hunger and again hunger. People eat the flesh of dead horses. It is still meat, even if the animal died. You just can’t imagine such a terrible famine.”<sup>69</sup>

Many of the letter writers relate the lack of food directly to collectivization. One letter mentions “the higher authorities have sent 150 men here to our village, whose job it is to plague us half to death.” According to the writer, representatives of the state upbraided the village for questioning the implementation of state power. A commandant told the village, “Hangings, shootings, starvation, and freezing—all of those will be done to you if you don’t work to exactly meet the requirements of the predetermined Plan.”<sup>70</sup> A letter writer from Kassel laments, “A

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<sup>68</sup> *We’ll Meet Again in Heaven: Germans in the Soviet Union Write Their Dakota Relatives 1925-1937*, trans. and ed. Ronald J. Vossler (Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Libraries, 2001), 196.

<sup>69</sup> Vossler, 200.

<sup>70</sup> Vossler, 196.

great misfortune has fallen upon us because for our two years of work in the collective we've only earned enough to barely support my family... We lost everything, except the clothing on our limbs. Right now we have no shelter, no bread, no potatoes—absolutely and exactly nothing do we have.”<sup>71</sup>

At the least, the fact that many ethnic German villages were similarly suffering from starvation along with their ethnic Ukrainian neighbors calls into question the idea that Stalin was intentionally targeting only the Ukrainian population. It is conceivable that the German villages were simply collateral damage in Stalin's mind. However, it seems more likely, considering the weight of the evidence as presented in the third and fourth chapters of this study, that the pervasive famine conditions across ethnic lines show that Soviet leadership did not understand how the situation arose in the first place, much less how they could pinpoint damage to a specific ethnic group.

Yet, interestingly, the debate over intentionality and an ethnic interpretation of the famine has seemingly swung back to the Conquest view in much recent scholarship. In his 2010 book *Stalin's Genocides*, Stanford University historian Norman Naimark argued that the famine was a genocidal event perpetrated by Stalin and the Soviet leadership. He begins by laying out the consensus view of how the famine resulted from the Soviet modernization drive of the late 1920s, when “the state would pay for hyper-accelerated industrial growth” through collectivization and grain requisition and the supposedly well-off kulaks were targeted for “bloody” removal, thus laying the ground for poor harvests and more pressure on the peasantry from the center.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Vossler, 193.

<sup>72</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 71.

Naimark also points out Stalin's obsession with the nationalist aspirations of the Ukrainian peasants. "That the proponents of Ukrainian nationalism among the intelligentsia focused in their writings and speeches on the inherent characteristics of the Ukrainian national culture that were preserved by the masses of Ukrainian peasants," Naimark writes, "only increased Stalin's suspicions of rural Ukraine." Naimark contends, "Stalin harbored images of a fantastic plot in which the grain crisis would prompt Polish agents and Ukrainian nationalists to try to prize the republic loose from the union."<sup>73</sup>

This line of thought echoes several of the arguments put forth by Conquest. Naimark uses a letter from June 21, 1932 from Stalin and Molotov to the Ukrainian republic to make his point: "No manner of deviation—regarding either amounts or deadlines set for grain deliveries—can be permitted from the plan established for your region for collective and private farms or for the delivering grain to state farms."<sup>74</sup> Naimark also suggests Stalin closed the border between the Ukrainian and Russian republics to prevent escape for starving peasants while also preventing Ukrainians entrance into cities, where peasants hoped to find food.<sup>75</sup>

Naimark adds that Stalin was well aware of the famine conditions in Ukraine and that his denial indicates complicity. "The death agony of the Ukrainian countryside was hard on the Kremlin," he writes, "but neither Stalin nor anyone else in the leadership did anything about it. Nor did they seem to care." Naimark asserts that Stalin "continued to export grain in substantial quantities" and "feed the cities and workers" while the "Ukrainian class and national enemies in the countryside" perished from starvation.<sup>76</sup> Naimark's analysis of Stalin's motives (in denying the famine) is questionable. As documents presented below reveal, Stalin was receiving

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<sup>73</sup> Naimark, 72.

<sup>74</sup> Naimark, 72.

<sup>75</sup> Naimark, 73.

<sup>76</sup> Naimark, 74-75.

conflicting reports of the situation in the Ukrainian countryside, leaving open the question of exactly how much he knew. Stalin's level of awareness also does not necessarily indicate complicity. Further, Naimark's assertion that Stalin simply did not "care" about the situation in Ukraine is disproven by analysis of the documents presented in Chapter Four.

Like Naimark's work, Italian historian Andrea Graziosi's 2009 book, *Stalinism, Collectivization, and the Great Famine*, also argues that Soviet leaders are culpable for the genocidal famine aimed at Ukraine. Stalin, Graziosi writes, "consciously executed as a part of a drive directed at breaking the peasantry, an anti-Ukrainian policy aimed at mass extermination and causing a genocide...a genocide whose physical and psychological scars are still visible today."<sup>77</sup> Graziosi nuances his argument, however. He holds that while Stalin did not originally plan a famine, he "willfully maneuvered towards this end once it came about as the unanticipated result of the regime policies."<sup>78</sup>

Graziosi suggests that the 1932-1933 famine was actually two famines, with the famine of early and mid-1932 a result of the industrialization and collectivization drive of the late 1920s, whereas the late-1932 and 1933 famine was created by Stalin with the purpose of punishing Ukrainian peasants. Graziosi asserts that in Ukraine, "Stalin at a certain moment decided to use hunger to break the peasants' opposition to collectivization" permanently.<sup>79</sup> According to Graziosi, Stalin in mid-summer of 1932 increasingly saw Ukraine as "infected with nationalism." Because this "national spirit" was located in the Ukrainian countryside among the peasantry, Stalin took special measures to shatter it.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Andrea Graziosi, *Stalinism, Collectivization, and the Great Famine* (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Studies Fund, 2009), 81.

<sup>78</sup> Graziosi, 81.

<sup>79</sup> Graziosi, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Graziosi, 74-76.

Graziosi stakes his argument on several factors. First, he argues that in November of 1932 Ukrainian peasants were made to return “the meager grain advances over the new crop they had received in recompense for their work” and any local official accused of providing assistance to peasants was quickly executed or exiled. Ukrainians were also uniquely among the Soviet republics fleeced of all “meat and potatoes” as well as other goods. “Famine,” Graziosi adds, “thus took on forms and dimensions much bigger than if nature had followed its course.”<sup>81</sup>

Graziosi also mentions the December 1932 Politburo decrees nullifying portions of the policy on nationalities passed under Lenin in 1923. This policy, known as *korenizatsiia*, was Lenin’s way of warding off potential problems with the Soviet Union’s non-Russian population by giving positions of power at the local and republic level as well as the retention of non-Russian languages for official and cultural purposes. Graziosi suggests that the ending of *Ukrainization*, the *korenizatsiia* policy in Ukraine, and new repression of the Ukrainian priesthood and intelligentsia in late 1932 were part of Stalin’s war on Ukraine, a war he also waged with forced hunger.<sup>82</sup>

Harvard historian Terry Martin discusses this issue in his 2001 book, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Martin uses the term “Affirmative Action Empire” to refer to how Lenin’s policy of *korenizatsiia* held together the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. The first part of Martin’s argument is that the famine was a union-wide phenomenon. However, specific factors relating to Ukraine caused Soviet leadership to embrace a national view of the situation. In essence, Martin reverses the standard ethnic explanation, arguing that Stalin did not tie the famine with Ukrainian nationalism until after famine conditions broke out.

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<sup>81</sup> Graziosi, 77.

<sup>82</sup> Graziosi, 77.

Martin agrees with Graziosi that Stalin was growing increasingly wary of Ukrainian nationalism and that this did lead to a reevaluation of the *korenizatsiia* policy beginning in 1931. Martin adds that Stalin saw any “anti-Russian sentiments and conflict between titular nations as evidence of anti-center and pro-western feelings” and by 1932, Stalin had several reasons to worry about the Ukrainians at the periphery.<sup>83</sup>

One was the simmering border dispute between the Ukrainian Socialist Republic and the Russian Socialist Republic and Ukraine’s interest in protecting the Ukrainian population in that republic’s Kuban region. Another concern was the apparent “defection” of western Ukrainian communists in Poland from the Soviet line and the threat they posed to Soviet unity. Stalin, it seems, hoped for the opposite, that ethnic Ukrainians in the Soviet Union would recruit their western brethren with the potential of expanding Soviet influence if not territory. Stalin now worried that so-called “national communism might be transformed into nationalist communism” and create trouble for the center.<sup>84</sup>

Other concerns, according to Martin, were the complete failure of the 1932 harvest in Ukraine, the state’s inability to meet its grain quotas, and of course the growing famine. Martin argues that the implementation of collectivization in Ukraine was both a cause of these problems and a cause of further distrust of the periphery by the center, leading to the repression associated with the ending of the *korenizatsiia* policy as described by Graziosi. Martin writes, “The Kuban affair linked the central authorities growing concerns about *korenizatsiia* with their immediate famine emergency to produce a national interpretation of their grain requisitions crisis.”<sup>85</sup> This interpretation, in turn, led to what Martin calls a “nationalities terror” in Ukraine that lasted

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<sup>83</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 273.

<sup>84</sup> Martin, 292.

<sup>85</sup> Martin, 291.

throughout 1933. His conclusion is that “Ukraine and (Ukrainian) Kuban were singled out for special treatment specifically because of the national interpretation of the famine.”<sup>86</sup>

In his article, “*Holodomor* in Ukraine 1932-1933: an Interpretation of Facts,” the Ukrainian historian Stanislav Kulchytskyi also discusses the national aspect of the famine, including how Ukraine threatened the center’s perceived hold on power because of its “strong national (non-Soviet) inclination towards traditions of statehood.”<sup>87</sup> Citing the same Kuban affair that Martin mentions and the problems caused by the famine and grain disasters of 1932, Kulchytskyi argues that Stalin in December of 1932 unleashed the *Holodomor* in Ukraine to quell anti-Soviet sentiment before it could spread.<sup>88</sup> “The politicians who threw Ukraine into torment of terrifying repression are no longer alive,” Kulchytski closes his article, “nor does the totalitarian state whose leaders bear responsibility for the *Holodomor* any longer exists.” Nevertheless, the *Holodomor*, he stresses, was “an act of genocide” that must be acknowledged by the Russian government.<sup>89</sup>

Journalist Anna Reid’s survey of Ukrainian history engages the issue of the *Holodomor* by introducing the reader to a Ukrainian grandmother named Maria Pavlivna Kuryno, a lifelong resident of the village of Matussiv. In her interview with Reid, Maria Pavlivna says that she can remember all the way back to the time of the Revolution and the bandits that terrorized the village during the civil war that followed. Referring to the famine as the “Great Hunger,” Reid notes the difficulty in finding old people like Maria who are open to discussing their experiences

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<sup>86</sup> Martin, 307.

<sup>87</sup> Stanislav Kulchytskyi, “Holodomor in Ukraine 1932-1933: an Interpretation of Facts,” in *Holodomor and Gorta Mor: Histories, Memories and Representations of Famine in Ukraine and Ireland*, ed. Christian Noack, Lindsay Janssen, and Vincent Comerford (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2012), 28.

<sup>88</sup> Kulchytskyi, 29.

<sup>89</sup> Kulchytskyi, 32.

of that time. “The younger generations have been told little about it by their parents,” Reid writes, “for fear that such talk might compromise careers, even lives.”<sup>90</sup> Fear, it seems, survives long in the historical memory of many Ukrainian’s. Reid’s interviews with other residents of this town, including a woman named Hanna Hrytsay, provide reminiscences of the bitter process of collectivization—her family lost all of its possessions—and the years of deprivation and hunger that came in its wake. Hanna relates to Reid how hunger forced her family to eat stew made of mice and that she heard of parents in other villages eating their own children. Reid’s stance on the famine falls squarely in the intentional genocide position. It was the Ukrainian’s misfortune to represent two troublesome factions to the Bolshevik’s in their drive to consolidate power— independent, self-sufficient peasants (who, Reid argues, favored individual property ownership as opposed to the Russian communal system) and a nationally conscious ethnic group. Reid also notes that the repression of Ukraine under Stalin was a change in policy from the policy under Lenin.<sup>91</sup>

In a 2008 article titled, “The *Holodomor*: Genocide Against the Ukrainians,” historian Roman Serbyn makes an argument for the use of the term genocide in reference to the famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933. Serbyn begins by examining the etymology of the word *Holodomor*. The word comes from “holod,” meaning hunger, and “moryty,” meaning exhaust or waste. Serbyn notes, to Ukrainians, the meaning of the term *Holodomor* now has a similar connotation of genocide to the word Holocaust. Serbyn also discusses the infamous letter from Stalin to Lazar Kaganovich in which he wrote, “Unless we begin to straighten out the situation we may lose

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<sup>90</sup> Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey through the History of Ukraine* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 113-114.

<sup>91</sup> Reid, 117-118.

Ukraine.”<sup>92</sup> The famine then was Stalin’s genocidal method of averting the loss of this all-important piece of Soviet territory.

An article by Morgan Williams published in 2008 and titled, “*Holodomor: Through the Eyes of Ukrainian Artists*,” contains dozens of reprints of recent illustrations done by Ukrainian artists that have been collected and exhibited by Williams, the editor of the Action Ukraine Report and the president of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council. In the introductory essay, Williams claims that there are no existing photographs of the famine in Ukraine in the 1930s. Morgan contends that many of the photographs that claim to show the *Holodomor* actually originate in the post-civil war famine of 1921-1923. Williams has spent a decade searching for artists who use poster art to present the story of “human suffering imposed against Ukrainians under Stalin,” a story not allowed under the strict application of socialist realism in the arts. Representative works in this collection include “Genocide,” by Volodymyr Fed’ko; “Life Became Better, Life Became More Cheerful...” by Nestor Kyzenko; and “Serene World, Dear Land, My Ukraine...1932-1933,” by Vyacheslav Vasyanovych. The titles of these pieces describe the content very well and the visual statement made by each is quite powerful and haunting. Art and history can combine to produce a potent and compelling narrative, as is demonstrated here. Unfortunately, this combination is not always truthful and is easily used for less-honest purposes.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Roman Serbyn, “The *Holodomor*: Genocide Against the Ukrainians,” in *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-933 in Soviet Ukraine*, edited by Lubomyr Y. Luciuk and Lisa Grekul (Kingston, ON: The Kashtan Press, 2008), 61-66.

<sup>93</sup> Morgan Williams, “*Holodomor: Through the Eyes of Ukrainian Artists’ Collection*,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 42, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): iii-xxii, University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, accessed through North Dakota State University Interlibrary Loan.

While this study ultimately does not endorse the intentional or ethnic view of the 1932-1933 famine, it does not mean to discount the importance or veracity of the works by Conquest, Martin, Graziosi, Reid or Kulchytskyi discussed above. It is likely we will never know beyond doubt that Stalin did not think to himself, “I need to kill off those pesky Ukrainians and I am going to starve them to do it.” Yet, as is argued below, the weight of the evidence suggests that this was not the case.

### CHAPTER THREE. THE DAVIES AND WHEATCROFT THESIS AND OTHER NON-ETHNIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FAMINE

As mentioned previously, the Soviet government suppressed for decades public discussion of the famine. However, the 1960s Soviet-approved version of history as it appeared in *Soviet Ukraine* contains several thought-provoking passages dealing with Ukraine in the years of collectivization and the famine of the early 1930s. Like most official Soviet history textbooks, it is likely not good history. Yet such texts can provide insight into the Soviet and Ukrainian relationship while also, if one is familiar with the famine catastrophe, important clues to the Soviet understanding of the event.

The propagandist material in the book is easily discernible. For instance, it greatly simplifies and exaggerates the Soviet Union's relationship with Ukraine as a national unit. "Under Soviet rule," the authors claim, "the Ukrainian language and culture, which were oppressed during the rule of the emperors, landlords and capitalists, received unlimited freedom and opportunity for development."<sup>94</sup> This is probably a reference to Lenin's recognition that, in the interest of survival, it was best to acknowledge the diverse ethnic makeup of his fledgling socialist state and let the individual republics express themselves culturally, as long as they did not stray into matters of economic and social policy. We do know that while Stalin reversed much of this policy after 1933, this was a Union-wide reversal that included Ukraine.

The authors also tout the Soviet achievement of turning Ukraine "from a backward agrarian land into a highly developed industrial country with large-scale highly productive

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<sup>94</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, *Soviet Ukraine* (Kiev: Editorial Office of the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia, Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian S.S.R, 1969), 10.

farming, supplied with modern machinery, and with a high level of culture and education.”<sup>95</sup>

Collectivization, according to this history, was the key to the transformation. Knowing the horrors of the collectivization drive and with the knowledge that many of the readers of this book in the 1960s were likely to have lived through the period, its treatment of the subject is of great interest. The authors seem aware that the events of 1930-1933 need addressing, perhaps at the risk of losing legitimacy, and there is a sense that they wrote this section of the book with Soviet critics in mind.

For example, a discussion of supposed kulak opposition to collectivization was prominent in a chapter covering the years preceding and current with the famine and a section acknowledges the supposed excess of local commissars and their role in provoking the peasantry. According to this history, “grave errors were committed in the Ukraine, as in other Soviet republics: violations of the Leninist principles of peasant farm co-operation, artificial speeding up of collectivization, and violations of the principle of voluntary entry.”<sup>96</sup> This line directly references Stalin’s “Dizzy with Success” article that blamed overzealous local communists for going beyond the state’s directives in installing the new agricultural system.

While there is no specific mention of famine or its cause, the authors do point to several problem areas that may reveal an awareness of a less-than-ideal situation in Ukraine. One statement reads, “As a result of landlord and kulak oppression, the bulk of the peasantry could not improve their farming methods.”<sup>97</sup> Kulaks, echoing Stalin’s line from the 1930s, were the ubiquitous class enemy stifling productivity and progress in agriculture production. The authors admit, “As a result of kulak sabotage and mass animal slaughter, the number of animals of all

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<sup>95</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 290.

kinds sharply decreased during the reorganizational period.”<sup>98</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft emphasize the importance of this phenomenon in their own work, as discussed below. The Soviet-era book also mentions Soviet aid provided to Ukraine during the height of the crisis period. “In the spring of 1933,” it argues, “the Republic received big loans of seeds, food stuff and fodder to offset the difficulties which arose in Ukraine’s agriculture in 1931-1932.”<sup>99</sup> This also appears to be a factual account, with the use of the word “big” most problematic. Pointed out later in this study is that Stalin did assist Ukraine at the end of 1932 and beginning of 1933 (thus, arguing against the ethnic interpretation of the famine), just not enough to truly alleviate the worse aspects of the food shortage.

Discussed above, Ukrainian nationalists successfully published in the west several anti-Soviet articles with a distinctly ethnic interpretation of the famine in the early 1930s. There were accounts published in the west that took a softer position. An article by British agricultural scientist John Russell in the July 1942 issue of *Science* is interesting for its rather clinical description of the collective farm and its role in the Soviet economy, but also for its commentary on peasant attitudes toward collectivization. Russell was allowed to tour the Soviet Union and examine the collective farms in Soviet Ukraine. Unfortunately, he does not include the dates of his visit. The publication date of July 1942 is likely significant—the German army was still well entrenched deep in Soviet territory and the West was just beginning to warm to its new ally. The article is notable for its frank discussion of the failure of Soviet propaganda to win peasants over as well as its suggestion that grain requisitions were partly responsible for the food shortages in 1932. Russell, here writing as a journalist, did not list his sources, but the impression is that he is using material gathered from personal communications as he toured the Ukrainian countryside.

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<sup>98</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 293.

<sup>99</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 139.

Importantly, there is no mention of Ukrainian nationalist sentiment and he places part of the blame for the famine of 1932-1933 on poor weather for growing crops. The article does discuss, however, class strife and the appearance of this article in a western magazine most likely caused alarm in Soviet high circles. Russell's article is a good representation of how the famine was presented and dealt with in the years before its emergence as a "new" historical topic in the 1980s.<sup>100</sup>

Soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the opening of archives to western historians, scholars brought new theories to the study of the famine. Historian Mark B. Tauger was one of the first to make use of the easier access to Soviet archives in the early 1990s. Tauger's 1991 article, "The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1933," argued that mainly due to weather factors the harvest of 1932 was dramatically worse than previously thought. This led Tauger to suggest that the new evidence did not support the genocidal explanation as put forth by Conquest in *Harvest of Sorrow*. He includes detailed charts of grain production in several Soviet regions that back up his claim that famine was inevitable after the poor harvest of 1932. Nevertheless, Tauger emphasizes that this does not absolve the Soviet regime of responsibility. He argues that the regime, faced with the inability to supply both cities and the countryside with enough food, chose to supply the former and starve the latter. It was, however, a "failure of economic policy...rather than a 'successful' nationality policy against Ukrainians or other ethnic groups."<sup>101</sup> Of course, severe drought and poor harvests are the plague of all grain producing states, so there are most likely other contributing factors—discussed below—to the famine in Soviet Ukraine.

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<sup>100</sup> John Russell, "Collective Farming in Russia and the Ukraine," *Science* 96, no. 2481 (July, 1942): 47-52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1669843>.

<sup>101</sup> Mark B. Tauger, "The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1933," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring, 1991): 70-89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2500600>, accessed March 15, 2010.

Historian Lynne Viola's previously mentioned 1996 work on peasant uprising in the Soviet Union also discusses the famine in Ukraine. Viola points out that a lack of food resources and hunger first affected the Soviet countryside beginning in spring 1930 and confirms that Ukraine suffered "mercilessly" from famine during the years 1932 and 1933. Yet, Viola also points out that shortages and hunger was spread across the Soviet Union. "The famine," she concludes, was "easily anticipated but hardly planned, was the result of the state's brutal requisitions, the chaos of collectivization, and a political culture in which peasants had little or no value as human beings."<sup>102</sup>

Viola's summation anticipates and dovetails nicely with the other major work on the Soviet famine produced by Davies and Wheatcroft. The Davies and Wheatcroft position asserts that after 1928—and the introduction of rapid industrialization and collectivization as part of the first five-year plan—unfortunate policy decisions by the Soviet leadership combined with poor harvests in 1931 and 1932 led to famine conditions across much of the Soviet Union, including Ukraine, the Volga region, and the Caucasus. Their work points out "an absolute lack of food was the background to the famine" and a "shortage of grain and other foods in the towns resulted in widespread malnourishment," while "the acute shortage of grain in the countryside resulted in widespread starvation." The seemingly obvious point that there was simply not enough food to avoid starvation is meaningful because it counters the Conquest theory of plentiful grain everywhere but the Ukrainian countryside.<sup>103</sup>

While they stress there is no evidence of an intentional policy to starve Ukrainians or any other group solely because of ethnicity, they also maintain Soviet leadership is culpable for the famine conditions, as "the fundamental cause of the deterioration of agriculture in 1928-33 was

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<sup>102</sup> Viola, 209.

<sup>103</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 434.

the unremitting state pressure on rural resources.”<sup>104</sup> As we have seen, this pressure was a direct result of Stalin and company’s insistence on industrialization—and collectivization and dekulakization—at any cost. Stalin believed collectivization was necessary to guarantee the state a steady grain supply for the needs of industrialization, whether for export or to feed factory workers in the newly industrial cities. As Davies and Wheatcroft point out, the process of “moving 25 million individual peasant economies into a quarter of a million socialized collective farms” was an extremely challenging undertaking. The entire operation, they argue, was compromised “by the inability of most communists, from Stalin to the party members sent into the countryside, to understand agriculture and the peasants, and offer sensible means of coping with the transformation of the countryside.”<sup>105</sup>

Singled out by Davies and Wheatcroft are four specific factors that Stalin and company either overlooked or failed to comprehend after 1931 that led to this situation. First, there was too much stress placed on expansion of sown land at the expense of fallow. They write, “The intense pressure to increase the sown area added to the disruption of existing land arrangements brought about by the two collectivization drives of 1930 and 1931,” adding “rational crop rotation disappeared in many villages and districts” which in turn led to “soil exhaustion.” Cropland “over-extension” was especially problematic in Ukraine, they argue, a germane point considering our thesis.<sup>106</sup>

A second cause of the harvest situation according to Davies and Wheatcroft was the decrease in livestock numbers, the “drought power” needed to furrow, reap and thresh, after 1928. This decrease in the number of working animals—horses and oxen—resulted from

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<sup>104</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 434.

<sup>105</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 435.

<sup>106</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 437.

excessive grain requisitioning, taking “food from the peasantry and fodder from the animals.” Stalin’s plan to replace horses with tractors as part of the five-year plan also fell far short of its goal through 1932, when “total drought power amounted to only some 23 million, compared with 30 million in 1928.” A lack of livestock also meant less manure, still a necessary fertilizer for the Soviet farmer.<sup>107</sup>

A third problem pointed out by Davies and Wheatcroft was a decline in the “quality of cultivation,” caused by low peasant morale and inexperience with the new tractor machinery. They write, “Ploughing, sowing and harvesting were all carried out in a slipshod manner.” The chaos inflicted by collectivization and the punishment meted out to the so-called kulaks in the process likely created the low morale of the peasant cultivators.<sup>108</sup>

Dry weather is the fourth issue mentioned by Davies and Wheatcroft. The region most affected by the famine—Ukraine, lower Volga region, and the Caucasus—were areas hit hardest by drought in 1931 and 1932. Although authorities had no control over the weather, of course, “the attitude to the weather of the political leaders and the principal planning officials compounded what was already a serious problem.” Stalin based his plans for great increases in agricultural output on ideal weather and harvests, leaving little room for error if the weather did not cooperate. The collectivization drive of 1930 coincided with decent growing weather and a respectable harvest. However, “the good harvest in a year of political turmoil undoubtedly strengthened the illusion among political leaders that agricultural difficulties would easily be overcome.”<sup>109</sup> Drought conditions similar to those in the Soviet grain-growing regions also prevailed on the North American Great Plains in the 1930s, conditions that necessitated drastic

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<sup>107</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 438-439.

<sup>108</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 439.

<sup>109</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*, 439.

(and controversial) action by the Canadian and United States government. How other nations and societies have dealt with effects of catastrophic weather conditions—effects with the potential to fundamentally alter economies, social institutions and governmental policies—opens a potential avenue for further inquiry and comparison to the Soviet case.

Davies and Wheatcroft cite several letters exchanged in the 1931-33 period between Stalin and Kaganovich in their work. These letters show that Stalin and company were alarmed at what was unfolding in the Ukrainian republic. Yet, there is nothing in the letters pointing to intentional famine directed at Ukraine and there is evidence of the same concerns directed at several Soviet republics.

On June 6, 1932, Kaganovich wrote to Stalin, “You know the figures on the sowing, if it were not for the Ukraine, we would be running 3 million hectares ahead of last year.” He also wrote, “We put pressure on the Urals, they are way behind, we sent them a chastising telegram, the Northern Caucasus is 400,000 hectares behind last year as well, but we haven’t sent them anything yet.”<sup>110</sup> We plainly see here Kaganovich express his disappointment at the slow planting in Ukraine, the Urals, and the Caucasus. On June 18, 1932 Stalin wrote the following to Kaganovich, quoted at length because it is one of only a few times Stalin uses the word “famine” in any of his correspondence. Stalin first refers to the poor grain harvest of 1931 before discussing how to improve the 1932 harvest. Again, there is very little in the following letter that suggests Stalin is trying to do anything but solve a dreadful grain shortage crisis. Stalin wrote:

The principle error of our grain-procurement work last year, especially in the Ukraine and the Urals, was that the grain-procurement plan was allocated among districts and

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<sup>110</sup> Lazar Kaganovich, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, ed. R.W. Davies, Oleg V. Khlevniuk, E.A. Rees, Liudmilla P. Kosheleva, and Larisa A. Rogovaya, trans. Steven Shabad (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 120-121.

collective farms and was carried out not in an organized manner but spontaneously, based on the “equalizing principle,” it was carried out mechanically, without taking account of the situation in each individual district, without taking account of the situation on each collective farm.<sup>111</sup>

What Stalin was critical of here—a disorganized 1931 grain-collection campaign—may not be as important as what he did not say: there is no hint Ukraine was singled out for punishment. Stalin continued,

This mechanical equalizing approach to the matter has resulted in glaring absurdities, so that a number of fertile districts in the Ukraine, despite a fairly good harvest, have found themselves in a state of impoverishment and famine, while the regional party committee in the Urals has deprived itself of the capacity to use the districts with good crops in the region to assist districts with bad harvests.<sup>112</sup>

This passage clearly shows Stalin’s disdain for party leaders in the Urals, contempt he spread around to other peripheral areas:

Moreover, a number of first secretaries (in the Ukraine...and part of Nizhny Novgorod Region) became preoccupied with the giants of industry and failed to devote a proper amount of attention to agriculture, forgetting that our industry cannot advance without a systematic growth in agriculture.<sup>113</sup>

This passage seems key to understanding Stalin’s mindset in mid-1932. The second half of this sentence absolutely demonstrates his concern that the main problem was that agriculture was failing. In a letter to Kaganovich on June 26, 1932, Stalin proposed to the Politburo “a

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<sup>111</sup>Joseph Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 138.

<sup>112</sup>Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 138.

<sup>113</sup>Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 138.

substantial reduction” in the planned exportation of the 1932 grain harvest, again suggesting that Stalin realized that his industrialization plans needed a productive agricultural sector.<sup>114</sup>

In a July 2, 1932 letter to Kaganovich, Stalin dealt specifically with the situation in Ukraine. In this passage, he singled out Ukrainian party leaders Vlas Chubar and Stanislav Kosior:

Give the most serious attention to the Ukraine. Chubar’s corruptness and opportunistic essence and Kosior’s rotten diplomacy...and criminally frivolous attitude toward his job will eventually ruin Ukraine. These comrades are not up to the challenge of leading the Ukraine today.<sup>115</sup>

In discussing an upcoming conference of leadership to address the issues in the Ukrainian republic, Stalin nominated Kaganovich. At the conference, he advised Kaganovich to “take every measure in order to improve the functionaries’ mood, isolate the whining and depraved diplomats (no matter who they are!) and ensure genuinely Bolshevik decisions by the conference.”<sup>116</sup> Proponents of the ethnic-intentional interpretation of the famine often point to this reference to “Bolshevik decisions” as Stalin’s declaration of war on Ukraine. However, the knowledge that Stalin was trying to increase agricultural output in such an important grain-growing region as Ukraine—as the abundance of evidence suggests—should discount this idea.

On this matter, Stalin wrote Kaganovich an especially insightful letter on July 17, 1932, a letter that confirms Stalin’s awareness of several agricultural issues and his concern with increasing crop production. “As for the issues of raising crop yields,” Stalin lectured Kaganovich, it was necessary to work on “improving cultivation, reducing costs, establishing

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<sup>114</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 149.

<sup>115</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 138.

<sup>116</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 152

economic accountability.” Stalin also points out that fertilizer needs to be correctly used in order to maximize production; something he said was not being done.<sup>117</sup> Stalin also warned Kaganovich, “These shortcomings are a great economic (and political!) danger to us.”<sup>118</sup> This statement clearly illustrates two aspects of our argument. First, Stalin is worried about how this mismanagement is affecting his bigger goal of industrialization. Second is the “political” danger of failure, a concern that goes far in explaining why the difficulties in agriculture—and subsequent famine—needed somehow to be explained away or, if necessary, covered up.

This, of course, is where persecution of the kulaks for supposed anti-Soviet attitude was convenient. In late July, Stalin presented this line of attack to Kaganovich and Molotov. This was the first advent of the infamous law on the theft of socialist property, which meant death or long prison terms for taking anything from state-owned enterprises, even a handful of grain still on the stalk. Stalin began, “Recently there has been an increase in the frequency, first of all, of thefts of freight on the railroads...and secondly, of thefts of property belonging to cooperatives and collective farms.” “The thefts are mostly organized by kulaks,” Stalin’s letter said, “and other antisocial elements who are trying to undermine our new system.” To solve this problem, Stalin wanted to “make the theft (or stealing) of property...punishable by a minimum of ten years’ imprisonment, and as rule, by death.”<sup>119</sup> On July 24, 1932, Stalin expounded in Marxist terms upon his reasoning for promoting such a harsh law:

Capitalism could not have smashed feudalism, it would not have developed and solidified if it had not declared the principle of private property to be the foundation of capitalistic society and if it had not made private property sacred property, with any violation of its

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<sup>117</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 160.

<sup>118</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 161.

<sup>119</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 164-165.

interests strictly punished and with the creation of its own state to protect it. Socialism will not be able to finish off and bury capitalist and individualistic, self-seeking habits, practices and traditions that shake the foundations of the new society unless it declares public property) belonging to cooperatives, collective farms or the state) to be sacred and inviolable.<sup>120</sup>

Although enforced arbitrarily, the law's harshness reflects Stalin's cold brutality. Many famine scholars vilify Stalin for the law, but there is no evidence he meant its application only in Ukraine. A letter written the next day, July 25, 1932, appears to contradict the argument of the famine as intentional and ethnic based. "Greetings Comrade Kaganovich!" Stalin opened the letter. "Yesterday I wrote to you in cipher about a partial reduction of the grain-procurements plan for collective farms and individual peasants in the Ukraine that have especially suffered." Earlier that summer, as we have seen, Stalin took a strong stance against lowering quotas as un-Bolshevik. As an explanation for the new order, Stalin wrote, "The end of June...and the beginning of July...were a period of organization of grain procurements and deployment of forces to fulfill the grain-procurement plan." "To have discussed a reduction of the plan during this period (even as an exception) in front of everyone and in the presence of the regional secretaries," Stalin argued, "would have disorganized the regional secretaries and disrupted grain procurements." With the harvest fully underway and hopefully organized more to Stalin's liking, it was now permissible to provide Ukraine with "assistance" in the form of reduced quotas.<sup>121</sup> Again, this seems very germane to the idea that there simply was no specific intent to punish Ukraine through famine. Rather, Stalin seemed intent to improve the food situation in Ukraine.

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<sup>120</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 166.

<sup>121</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 167-168.

We now know that the harvest of 1932 was—like 1931—disastrous, which led to another round of hunger and famine in early 1933. Kaganovich described the harvest and grain procurement to Stalin in early August as inadequate. To improve the situation, Kaganovich suggested “that people who are familiar with agriculture be taken from the cities but not from the factories and plants to give temporary help to state farms for about 10-15 days.”<sup>122</sup> This seems a wise if overdue measure. It reveals that at the Politburo level there was doubt over the ability of those placed in power to do an adequate job.

In a letter to Kaganovich on August 11, 1932, Stalin wrote perhaps the single most quoted line in studies of the famine. “Unless we begin to straighten out the situation in the Ukraine,” he stated, “we may lose the Ukraine.”<sup>123</sup> Proponents of a national interpretation of the famine argue that Stalin shows his hand here.<sup>124</sup> To supporters of the ethnic interpretation, when Stalin says “lose Ukraine” he means losing it as a Soviet-controlled territory. Yet, the statement can also be read as Stalin expressing concern with losing Ukraine’s all-important grain production, production necessary for successful industrialization.

Andrew Wilson devotes a section of his previously mentioned book, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, to the question of the famine and its effect on Ukrainian historical memory. Like Davies and Wheatcroft, Wilson does not believe national enmity was the root cause of the famine. However, he does feel there was intended use of hunger for political effect. He writes, “The famine was deliberate and brutal, but part of an ideological rather than a national war.” Further, “it pitted town against countryside, proletarian against peasant, poor peasant against ‘rich’ peasant, as much as Russian against Ukrainian.” This is not to say, according to Wilson,

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<sup>122</sup> Kaganovich, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 172.

<sup>123</sup> Stalin, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, 180.

<sup>124</sup> David Marples, “Ethnic Issues in the Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine,” in *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 3 (May, 2009): 505-518.

that the famine did not severely damage Ukrainian nationalistic designs. In fact, one of the famine's "practical effects" was to utterly crush "the social and cultural reservoir of Ukrainian identity in the countryside" while depriving the nationally minded elites in western Ukraine (then attached to Poland) without a target for their activity.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 145.

## CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSIS OF NEW DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

As we have seen, three main actors—Kaganovich, Molotov, and, of course, Stalin—are often singled out for their roles in the famine disaster. To this list could be added Ukrainian Politburo members Mendel Khataevich, Stanislaw Kosior, and Vlas Chubar. Newly declassified and published primary documents—accessible from the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation and many compiled in Famine in the USSR 1929-1934: New Documentary Evidence—examined below paint a picture of the famine not consistent with the ethnic interpretation of the famine but supporting the argument that it was an inadvertent and Union-wide phenomenon associated with Stalin's choice to eschew moderation in the path to industrialization. They do not absolve Stalin of the brutality of the collectivization drive that preceded the famine—characterized by oppressive and harsh state actions in the grain procurement campaign in many of the grain-growing areas of the Soviet Union—nor his ultimately ineffective reaction to the famine itself. Yet the documents clearly show the state effort to acquire grain at all cost existed in areas of the Soviet Union apart from Ukraine. They also show that Stalin and company attempted to alleviate the famine in Ukraine, an entirely inadequate effort though it was. Document analysis below will cover three general areas:

1. Evidence documenting Union-wide famine conditions along with Union-wide use of brutal procurement methods and repression.
2. Evidence of how Stalin and his men at the center of power as well as the secondary Party men at the periphery viewed the problem of famine and who was at fault.
3. Evidence Stalin reduced quotas and attempted alleviating measures, including in Ukraine.

The Russian Presidential Archive material contains items describing famine conditions across the Soviet Union beginning in 1929. This early date suggests that famine conditions that developed hereafter, including 1932-1933, are likely connected to collectivization. One petition from famine sufferers in the Volga region asked for relief from their hunger and possible death by starvation due to lack of bread and animals. “Our famine happened,” they wrote, “because we provided to the State seed grain of high quality, which as you know, shouldn’t be used for daily consumption, and so we turned it all to the State, but we were not compensated in kind, as we had contractual obligations and our seed grain was counted against our debt.”<sup>126</sup>

Moving into late 1930, but still in the lower Volga region, an OGPU report describes, “a worsening of food shortage, which now affect wider and wider circles of poor villagers, hired labourers and the village intelligentsia.” Here the cause cited is “mainly due to failure of grain crops.”<sup>127</sup> Famine in 1930 also touched the Central Asian republic of Turkmenistan and the Central Chernozem region of Russia.<sup>128</sup> Excerpts of the OGPU records from Chernozem report, “Due to shortage of bread and other produce, begging has increased in villages,” and “some of the individual and collective farmers are forced to sell their belongings and farm animals in order to finance purchase of bread for daily consumption.”<sup>129</sup> What do these OGPU documents say about the famine and what does the early date mean for our thesis? For one, they show that the OGPU was clearly not “in on” an intentionally created and directed famine.

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<sup>126</sup> Citizens of Lenisk to Buzluk District Executive Committee, petition, 20 December 1929, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934: New Documentary Evidence*, Federal Archive of the Russian Federation, trans. Nikita B. Katz, <http://www.rusarchives.ru/publication/famine/famine-ussr.pdf>, 93.

<sup>127</sup> Lower Volga OGPU, memorandum, 28 January 1930, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 94.

<sup>128</sup> Middle Asia OGPU, memorandum, 6 April 1930, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 109.

<sup>129</sup> Central Chernozem OGPU, summary, 24, July 1930, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 103-104.

Molotov received a telegram in June of 1932 from Middle Volga Party Secretary Vassily Shubrikov noting that the region was dealing with a decreased bread supply. Shubrikov wrote, “Due to impossibility of timely acquisition of bread on commercial basis, request permission to consume three-four thousand tons from the State reserves that are stored in those cities and account this as planned distribution.”<sup>130</sup>

The Marples and Androzianni arguments discussed previously attempt to distinguish the famine of 1932 from the famine of 1933. They argue that the 1933 famine was worse in Ukraine primarily because of Stalin’s decision to use hunger as a means to extinguish Ukrainian nationalist sentiment and punish Ukraine for insufficiently following Moscow’s direction. The evidence suggests that even in 1933, other areas experienced similar conditions and repression.

At the beginning of 1933, according to an OGPU summary, “food shortages” were prevalent across the lower Volga region. The OGPU reported, “By March 10<sup>th</sup>, 33 districts and 110 kolkhozes are recorded as hard-hit with food shortages” and “822 families were suffering from food deficiency.” According to a document from March 28, 1933, insufficient food supply affected a wide cross-section of the population, including “certain families of otherwise hardworking, active collective farmers” along with “families of collective farmers who dodge work,” and “families that belong to the socially-adversarial element.”<sup>131</sup>

An OGPU document from March 31, 1933 reveals that famine conditions existed in both Kazakhstan province of the Russian Federation and in the North Caucasus Region. The OGPU reported instances of cannibalism, including the sale at market of “cooked parts of a human corpse” in Kazakhstan and a case in North Caucasus of a man murdering his tenants, including

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<sup>130</sup> Vassily Shubrikov to Molotov, telegram, 13 June 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 111.

<sup>131</sup> Lower Volga OGPU, summary of data, 20 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 122.

four children, and selling “flesh from their corpses, both cooked and uncooked...at the local street market.”<sup>132</sup> In the Central Chernozem Province the OGPU reported on June 8, 1933, “Incomplete information suggests that 732 cases of death of starvation and 5 cases of cannibalism have happened.”<sup>133</sup>

The OGPU on June 11, 1933 described the situation in Siberia:

Grave shortage of food is noted in Kazachinsk District of Eastern Siberia. 19 people have died of famine. Cases of hydropsy due to starvation have been diagnosed. Collective farmers attempt to eat chaff, as well as clover and other weeds. Collective farmers of Klopovsk District had stopped sowing. Similar situation is observed in several other kolkhozes. There is no possibility of finding any suitable for human consumption grain in the district. Regional authorities have been notified.<sup>134</sup>

A document from July 1933, reads:

Recently, certain districts of lower Volga Region of the Russian Federation suffered from famine that lead to increase in cases of death by starvation, hydropsy and consumption of carryon—dead ground squirrels, dogs, cats, hedgehogs, etc...In the village of Ataevka 122 people died of starvation in April this year. Between January 1<sup>st</sup> 1933 and now, 12% of the population of this village has died. In The village of Shakhovskoe, 75 people died of famine in April. In the village of Lipovka, in April and May 52 people died of

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<sup>132</sup> OGPU Main Directorate, communication, 31 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 128-129.

<sup>133</sup> Central Chernozem OGPU, summary, 8 June 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 146.

<sup>134</sup> OGPU Special Political Department, communication, 11 June 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 152.

famine...Mass migration of families and individuals is noted, mostly to Siberia. People try to leave at night, hiding.<sup>135</sup>

Stalin and Molotov were informed by telegram of a food shortage crisis in Bashkir Autonomous Republic on July 5, 1933, “The situation with bread in several districts is extremely grave, mass famine is observed, including military families, there are cases of deaths due to famine, eating of corpses of dead animals.”<sup>136</sup>

The picture that emerges is one of dire hunger leading to disease, cannibalism, starvation and death across the Soviet countryside, including Ukraine. With famine conditions prevalent in many regions of the Soviet Union from 1929-1933, how did the Politburo trio of Stalin, Kaganovich and Molotov react? The evidence suggests that they responded similarly, and brutally, in each region affected by famine. They sent a telegram on January 27, 1931 to Urals Region of the Russian Federation leaders Kabakov and Oshvintzev demanding they follow through on a promise to fulfill an increased grain quota, the increase in exchange for an extension of the quota. It reads:

According to your *vstrechnyi* plan, you volunteered to procure 7 million *poods* [one *pood* equals 36.11 pounds] more than planned (by the central authorities). Based on the latest figures you have suffered complete demobilization and practically halted procurement. We consider this situation deplorable; the Central Committee (of the All-Union Communist party) proposes that you must achieve a decisive change in the course of

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<sup>135</sup> Encrypted communication, 14 July 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 148.

<sup>136</sup> Bashkir Autonomous Republic to Stalin and Molotov, telegram, 5 July 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 153.

grain procurement. We order you to procure, in the remaining days of February, an extra 3 million *poods* (49 metric tons). Report your progress in no more than two days.<sup>137</sup>

The Soviet leadership sent a similar telegram to Central Chernozem Province and the Middle Volga Region of the Russian Federation on the same day. On January 31, Stalin wrote to the Kazakhstan leadership, “The Central Committee insists on unconditional fulfillment of the reduced quota of 8 million *poods* and demands that you take all necessary measures in this regard.”<sup>138</sup>

The Central Committee on August 18, 1931 made the following decision “regarding grain procurement” in the Bashkortostan province of the Russian Federation: “a) Deny the request of Bashkir provincial party committee to reduce grain procurement quota for 1931. b) Suggest to Bashkir provincial party committee that all discussions regarding quotas for grain procurement must cease and that energetic work to fulfill quotas of grain procurement must start.”<sup>139</sup>

Moving into the famine year of 1932, documents show that Stalin did not discriminate by region in his harsh demands. On August 22, 1932, he rejected the North Caucasus federation request for quota deferral:

Your note about reduction of quotas have been received and forwarded to the Central Committee. I cannot support you in light of poor performance by your Region in the business of grain procurement. Since the Middle Volga that survived a drought was able to transfer to the state funds 4 million *poods*...in the third *pyatidnevka* (five-day working

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<sup>137</sup>Stalin, Kaganovich, and Molotov to Urals Region leadership, telegram, 27 January 1931, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Stalin to Kazakhstan leadership, telegram, 1 February 1931, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 30.

<sup>139</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee, meeting minutes, 18 August 1931, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 33.

period of August), while your Region didn't transfer even 2 million...it would mean that the regional party committee is either yellow-bellied in the face of hardship and surrendered to the apostles of gravity flow, or it is engaged in some kind of diplomacy and tries to pull the wool over the eyes of the Central Committee. I cannot support this kind of work.<sup>140</sup>

Stalin informed the Urals leadership on September 12 of the Central Committees' decision refusing "to further reduce quotas for grain procurement." Further, in a telegram sent December 7, 1932, Stalin and Molotov wrote Urals Party Secretary Ivan Kabokov:

Soviet of People's Commissars and the Central Committee order you to forward to Moscow names of the directors of the failing sovkhoses, and announce to these directors that, in case quotas remain unmet, they will be arrested as liars, saboteurs and enemies of the Soviet state in the same way as several directors of sovkhoses in Western Siberia, Ukraine, North Caucasus were arrested.<sup>141</sup>

A telegram sent to Stalin by a party official from the Gorkii region of the Russian Federation on December 14, 1932 and the Politburo's response unmistakably demonstrates, like the above documents, that Stalin and company indiscriminately used repression in areas outside of Ukraine and that Party members outside of the top leadership were complicit in the action (a factor considered later in this study as it pertained to Ukraine). Gorkii party Secretary Andrei Zhdanov wrote:

The Gorkii regional committee of the Communist Party requests the Central Committee to permit the following measures against 2 districts of our region, Spassky and

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<sup>140</sup> Stalin to Boris Sheboldaev, telegram, 22 August 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 62.

<sup>141</sup> Stalin and Molotov to Ivan Kabokav, telegram, 12 September 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 64-65.

Ardatovsky, that are about to fail—due to sabotage by kulaks...and resistance by some of the communists and local activists—main economic campaigns (grain, flax, potatoes, meat, capital gains, timber): seize the distribution of all goods and remove the goods from these districts; prohibit selling of goods produced by kolkhozes; declare all credits and fees extended to members of kolkhozes and individual farmers due immediately; purge the local authorities, cooperative and kolkhoz apparatus of elements unfriendly and hostile; take the counter-revolutionary elements into the custody of OGPU, and initiate ahead of schedule the purge of party committees of these districts.<sup>142</sup>

Stalin and company reacted quickly to Zhdanov's petition, as the Politburo approved the request on December 15, 1932. The record of this meeting reads:

By ballot of the members of the Political Bureau on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1932: Regarding comrade Zhdanov's telegram. Agree with the proposition of the Gorkii regional Communist party Committee to carry out repressive measures against Spassky and Ardatovsky districts that are failing basic agricultural campaigns."<sup>143</sup>

Peasant migration and the state response also come up in the documents, showing that procedures to impede mass movement from the countryside were not unique to Ukraine.

Stalingrad region 2<sup>nd</sup> party secretary Yakov Goldin wrote to Stalin on February 16, 1933 noting, "Several districts of our region are affected by mass migration of peasants with families...Central Chernozem Province of Russia, Middle Volga and other regions." Goldin requested of Stalin "that all measures taken in North Caucasus and Ukraine to prevent mass migration be extended to our region." While this statement reveals that Ukrainian peasants were

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<sup>142</sup> Andrei Zhdanov to Stalin, telegram, 14 December 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 70.

<sup>143</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee, meeting minutes, 15 December 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 71.

likely forced to remain in famine areas, the leadership's response again supports the thesis that Ukraine was not singled out for special suffering, even in 1933.<sup>144</sup>

Further evidence: On March 1, 1933 the Politburo, with Kaganovich, Molotov, and Kuybyshev, among others, present, issued an order to

Mandate the OGPU...to extend to lower Volga region of the Russian Federation the Directive of Soviet of People's Commissars and Central Committee...regarding attempts of peasants to cross the borders of region without permission, arrests and forcible return to their previous places of residence.<sup>145</sup>

The argument for an ethnic and intentional interpretation of the famine in Ukraine relies on several assumptions. First, it suggests Stalin and his cohorts could pinpoint where and when famine would strike and somehow contain the effects of famine. Otherwise, widespread and out-of-control hunger might threaten, not stabilize, the Soviet regime. Is there evidence for such a policy? The evidence presented here suggests that this was not the case. Throughout 1932, Stalin's communications with Ukrainian authorities Kosior and Khataevich, along with Kaganovich, Molotov, and Postyshev, say much about how Stalin's single-minded focus on gathering grain at all costs. However, the exchange of telegrams and letters presented here is notable for what they do not say—there is no evidence of intentional or directed famine. Finally, fully aware of famine conditions by early 1933 and the problems associated with them, the documents show Stalin made attempts—though ultimately futile—to avert further starvation in both Ukraine and other republics. This is the one fact that is most damaging to the ethnic interpretation of the famine. Analysis of how the center of power reacted to the news of famine

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<sup>144</sup> Yakov Goldin to Stalin, telegram, 16 February 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 80.

<sup>145</sup> Political Bureau of the Central Committee, meeting minutes, 1 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 81.

in the Soviet countryside bears out the thesis of inadvertent disaster caused by bad policy at the center and then blamed on the periphery.

Early in 1932, Stalin and the Politburo sent a letter, titled “Regarding Grain Procurement,” to Central Committee member Anastas Mikoyan. The January 11<sup>th</sup> letter informed Mikoyan of the Politburo’s decision to “make it mandatory for the Central Committees of Communist Parties of national republics, regional and provincial Communist party committees to continue extraordinary procurement of grain even after reaching quotas planned for their Province.”<sup>146</sup>

On March 15, 1932, Ukrainian party secretary Kosior responded with a telegram sent to Stalin describing how he saw conditions there. His telegram provides insight into the mindset of our main actors and context for subsequent actions. Kosior, while insisting “that without doubt kolkhozes have grain,” believed state-pressure and kulak propaganda had scared many into hiding what grain they had. He wrote to Stalin:

Kolkhozes have no grain in barns, as all grain has been handed out, legally or illegally, to the farmers. Both collective farmers and individual peasants have been hoarding grain because of the heavy-handed, and, in some cases, overzealous approach of the local authorities during harvesting, and because of campaigning by kulaks who spread rumors that all bread will be commandeered.<sup>147</sup>

Kosior, in the eyes of Moscow, failed to recognize the true situation in the Ukrainian countryside. The Politburo on March 16, 1932 concluded “that shortage of seed grain in Ukraine is many times worse than what was described in comrade Kosior’s telegram; therefore, the

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<sup>146</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee to Mikoyan, letter, 11 January 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 40.

<sup>147</sup> Kosior to Stalin, telegram, 15 March 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 41.

Political Bureau recommends the Central Committee of the Communist party of Ukraine to take all measures within its reach to prevent the threat of failing to sow in Ukraine.”<sup>148</sup>

Kosior, most likely sensing pressure from his superiors at the center, wrote Stalin on April 26, 1932, relating the problems in the field as he saw them:

In the Ukrainian Steppe we have 10-15 especially hard-hit districts, where, as we are learning now, serious mistakes in drawing up quotas for grain procurement were allowed to take place as well as serious deviations from the party course, and completely unjustified pressure during grain procurement... There are also isolated cases of starvation, and even whole villages; however, this is only the result of bungling on the local level... All rumors about “famine” in Ukraine must be unconditionally rejected. The crucial help that was provided for Ukraine will give us the opportunity to eradicate all such outbreaks.<sup>149</sup>

A worried Stalin did not share Kosior’s optimism, telling him in an April 26 letter, “Comrade Kosior! You must read attached summaries... it looks like the Soviet authority has ceased to exist in some areas of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.”<sup>150</sup>

Others in Ukraine also expressed doubts on the situation, especially by the latter half of 1932. Mendel Khataevich wrote Stalin on October 22, 1932 that Ukraine would not meet its grain quota for the year due to, in his words, “the indifference and greatest lethargy that reign over the significant part of the activists on the district and local level.” Khataevich bluntly told Stalin the quotas needed lowering while at the same time keeping “pressure” on Ukraine to

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<sup>148</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee, meeting minutes, 16 March 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 43.

<sup>149</sup> Kosior to Stalin, letter, 26 April 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 44.

<sup>150</sup> Stalin to Kosior, letter, 16 April 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 47.

produce grain. Note that there is nothing said about crushing Ukraine for the sake of crushing Ukraine.<sup>151</sup>

Kosior's letter to Stalin from October 1932 hints at a rivalry with Khataevich. It begins, "Today, I have received a copy of Khataevich's letter to you regarding grain procurement. I believe Khataevich was wrong to do this behind my back." In the letter Kosior agrees with Khataevich that the grain procurement quotas for 1932 were likely not going to be met, yet he maintained that it was too early to give up completely on the harvest. He wrote:

At the moment, there is a lot of unthreshed wheat still left in the field stacks. There are instances of overburdening of certain kolkhozes, as Khataevich indicated; however, at the moment it is impossible to assess, with any degree of accuracy, how many kolkhozes are overburdened... The mood in a lot of kolkhozes is also not bad.<sup>152</sup>

In December 1932, when it was obvious that the year's harvest was disastrous, Khataevich wrote Stalin, "I don't know whether I'm telling you anything new, but nonetheless I find it necessary to relay my views regarding reasons for the ugly unsatisfactory advance of grain procurement that we had here in Ukraine."<sup>153</sup> Khataevich pointed to "one basic main cause of the present-day big difficulties with grain procurement in Ukraine; namely: unacceptable blunders that took place at the level of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in the task of organizing grain procurement." While Khataevich, like Stalin, saw the situation in Ukraine as largely a managerial failure, the importance to our thesis of his attitude is what he

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<sup>151</sup> Mendel Khataevich to Stalin, letter, 22 October 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 51-52.

<sup>152</sup> Kosior to Stalin, letter 23 October 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 53-54.

<sup>153</sup> Khataevich to Stalin, letter, 27 December 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 56.

does not say. His writes that it is necessary to “help” Ukraine by providing “tough, well-trained organizers.”<sup>154</sup>

By March 1933, Kosior could no longer deny the extent of the agricultural and societal disaster unfolding in Ukraine, yet he, like Khataevich, blamed the famine on mismanagement at the local level and the vague notion that too harsh treatment by local officials led to a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness of the farmer not conducive to producing good crops. He wrote Stalin, in a letter notable for use of the term famine, on March 15, 1933:

The key reason for famine—poor management and unacceptable attitude towards communal property (losses, pilfering and overuse of grain), which is becoming more prominently and sharply visible to the masses...The flight from the villages, in spite of utilized impediments, has spread to large extent. That starvation has not yet taught very many collective farmers good judgment is evident by the unsatisfactory preparation to sowing in the indigent districts.<sup>155</sup>

Kosior closed his letter with an appeal to Stalin for more tractors and manpower, with the goal of a better 1933 harvest:

Based on all mentioned, we request that the Central Committee additionally allocate at least 700 tractors from the production capacity of the Kharkov tractor factory. In addition, we request that permission be given...to utilize detachments of the Red Army, draught animals, and tractors assigned to these detachments, to help with sowing.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Khataevich to Stalin, letter, 27 December 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 58.

<sup>155</sup> Kosior to Stalin, memorandum, 15 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 114-115.

<sup>156</sup> Kosior to Stalin, memorandum, 15 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 119.

In these two paragraphs, we see two important aspects of how the periphery of power, here represented by Kosior, understood what was happening. His words suggest that he, at least, is not aware of any attempt to deliberately starve Ukraine.

Writing to Stalin, Pavel Postyshev described problems in the Volga of the Russian federation similar to what was happening in Ukraine in 1932. He wrote:

First of all, I would like to comment on some of the general issues that affect agriculture in the lower Volga Region. These issues are: planning which fields are to be sown, quality of preparation of the soil, and management of the grain harvesting campaign.<sup>157</sup>

Like Kosior and Khataevich, Postyshev believed the problem lay with “poor planning” by local officials and that a too-large increase in sown area was detrimental to efficient crop production.

He wrote:

The regional authorities of the lower Volga has established the quota for the surface area to be sown in Arkadak district, which happens to be larger by 12 thousand hectares than the total surface area of arable land in the district. As a result, in the district there are no lands left fallow whatsoever.<sup>158</sup>

Postyshev knew who to blame, as “wheat harvesting in the lower Volga region went without any supervision by regional and district authorities.” In addition, Postyshev argued that knowledge local leaders were asking for grain quotas to be reduced “caused defeatist moods.”

One can judge how misleading was the petition of the lower Volga regional committee and how lethargic was the mood regarding the unacceptably early ending of wheat harvesting by the fact that by the beginning of December no less than several hundred thousand hectares were left unharvested. That the lower Volga organization is infected

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<sup>157</sup> Pavel Postyshev to Stalin, summary, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 72.

<sup>158</sup> Postyshev to Stalin, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 72.

with defeatist moods is also supported by the facts that by my arrival a large number of districts was left without any attention from the representatives of the regional Communist party and the regional Executive committee, that threshing was left unmanaged and went very slowly...some threshers were idle while districts with large volume of unthreshed wheat experienced acute shortage of threshers and tractors.<sup>159</sup>

Postyshev also repeated an idea echoed by Stalin's belief that the kulaks were causing the agricultural crisis:

I have discovered widespread massive theft of grain during transportation from fields to barns and grain elevators...The kulaks...are completely out of bounds, become impudent and, in some cases, gained control over kolkhozes and village Soviets and in a whole lot of cases, were in actual control of grain procurement.<sup>160</sup>

In a document dated September 17, 1932, Agriculture Commissar Yakov Yakolev informed Stalin that the USSR's grain difficulties were largely the result of the arbitrary enforcement of grain collections. He wrote:

The crucial flaw of the currently implemented system of grain procurement is that the size of the quota for each separate kolkhoz is determined by the whim of the district authorities. There isn't any set criteria, established by law, to determine the amount of grain that can be procured. This crucial flaw of the currently implemented system causes procurement to look, in many cases, more like requisition, and is aggravated by the fact that the district authorities lack vital knowledge about the specifics of kolkhozes.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Postyshev to Stalin, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 74-75.

<sup>160</sup> Postyshev to Stalin, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 75-77.

<sup>161</sup> Yakov Yakolev to Stalin, memorandum, 17 September 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 78.

Yakolev believed that if the district officials and the farmer knew exactly what was expected, the system would have ran smoother. His message to Stalin continued:

In a majority of cases...the district chooses the path of least resistance, i.e., takes all the excess grain. If every kolkhoz and every collective farmer were able to calculate, based on a rule, made public by the government, the amount of grain that the kolkhoz owes to the State, we would have benefited greatly from both the standpoint of procurement, and from the standpoint of relations with the peasants.<sup>162</sup>

Again, although this document appears to be discussing the Union-wide problems of grain procurement, it is notable for its genuine concern for the peasant attitude and its relation to the amount of grain produced for the State. If Stalin's goal was to produce the maximum amount of grain to feed his industrialization ambitions, it made little sense to intentionally starve Ukraine knowing that without a healthy populace there would be no grain production.

Two other 1932 documents focus on the local-leader angle to place blame. One is a letter forwarded to Kaganovich from one of Kosior's underlings. It recounts the visit to Ukraine by General Semyon Budyenny in June 1932. During his trip, Budyenny reportedly told Ukrainian villagers he spoke with, "Your predicament is that the authorities do not know that you have no bread, your 'Ukrainian' and local leaders are to blame, they over-promised all these 'self-imposed extensions' of quotas for grain procurement, and took your grain, and left you without bread."<sup>163</sup>

The second document, from 1933, is a letter from a Ukrainian doctor addressed to the People's Commissar for Health of Ukraine. After describing the generally horrible conditions in Ukraine, the doctor argues that a kind of hatred of those who are suffering has taken hold of the

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<sup>162</sup> Yakov to Stalin, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 78.

<sup>163</sup> Alexeev to Kaganovich, memorandum, 27 June 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 48.

local leadership. He wrote of a “kind of commoditized, abusive attitude towards the starving.” “They are viewed not as people in a catastrophic situation,” the doctor continued, “but rather as living drones that should be only used as a workforce. Hence famine is fought not as a humanitarian disaster of all the people, but as a directive to restore the workforce, and horses often fare better than people.” Although there is certainly evidence of a hardening of the human soul to suffering in this document, there is no evidence that ethnicity played any part in who lived and died.<sup>164</sup>

The final group of documents we will examine here bear out the contention that Stalin made efforts to reduce the effects of famine in Ukraine and other republics. This fact is extremely important to the argument against an ethnic interpretation of the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine.

The first document, bearing Molotov’s signature and dated March 29, 1932, is titled “Regarding Lending of Seed Grain to Ukraine.” The document reads:

As an exception, authorize the disbursement to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine of an interest-free loan of seed grain of barley in the amount of 1,350 thousand *poods*; of which 750 thousand *poods* from the centralized emergency resources in Ukraine; 350 thousand *poods* from the emergency reserves of the Soviet of People’s Commissars Central Chernozem Province of Russia, and 250 thousand *poods* from the emergency reserves of the Soviet People’s Commissars in Western Province of Russia.<sup>165</sup>

A document from April 20, 1932 shows that the Politburo, reacting to “the need to extend food assistance to collective farmers who experience most severe need during the sowing campaign,” authorized Ukraine provincial authorities to “distribute” to Kiev, Odessa,

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<sup>164</sup> Blonsky to Kantrovich, letter, 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 157.

<sup>165</sup> Molotov, decision, 20 March 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 169.

Dnepropetrovsk, Vinnitsa, Moldavia, and Kharkov Provinces 2200 metric tons of millet for food.<sup>166</sup> A document from June 8 shows that the Politburo approved the loaning of 1000 metric tons of seed grain to Kiev Province of Ukraine in the summer of 1932.<sup>167</sup> Another document from July 9, 1932 and signed by Kaganovich records the allocation of grain during that summer. It reads, “Hand out to Ukraine 400 thousand *poods* of wheat for distribution during the weed extirpation season.”<sup>168</sup>

On August 17, 1932, according to a document labeled “On grain procurement in Ukraine,” the Politburo agreed to “adopt comrade Stalin’s proposal to reduce the grain procurement quotas for Ukraine by 40 million *poods* as an exception for the especially hard-hit districts, with quotas for kolkhozes reduced by half and for the individual farmers reduced by one third.” The fact that Ukraine received this aid, kept secret for the fear of any appearance of weakness, contradicts the theory that Ukraine was singled out in 1932.<sup>169</sup>

But what of the Marples and Graziosi theory that the 1933 famine was a separate event, caused not by the Union-wide factors present in 1932, but by Stalin’s special concern of Ukrainian nationalism and his decision to use the famine to destroy Ukraine? Evidence shows that Stalin made concessions to the situation in Ukraine even in the year 1933. A January 25, 1933 document bearing Khataevich’s signature reads, “Transfer to the provincial authorities the centralized emergency reserves of flour that were set aside in January...to Kharkov Province of

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<sup>166</sup> Political Bureau of Ukrainian Central Committee, 20 April 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 170.

<sup>167</sup> Political Bureau of the Central Committee, decision, 8 June 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 171.

<sup>168</sup> Political Bureau of the Central Committee, decision, 9 July 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 174.

<sup>169</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee, decision, 25 August 1932, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 177.

Ukraine (255.9 metric tons) and to Dnepropetrovsk Province of Ukraine (366.4 metric tons)...for the purposes of bread distribution to the public.”<sup>170</sup>

A document from February 8, 1933 authorizing grain allocations to the Ukrainian provinces of Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk bears Stalin’s own signature. It reads:

Transfer 200 thousand *poods* of rye...to be used for the purposes of food assistance to workers of sovkhoses, MTS, MTM as well as activists, regardless of membership in the Communist party, of kolkhoses that are experiencing food shortages.<sup>171</sup>

A Politburo document dated February 18, 1933 shows a further lending of seed grain and “food assistance” to Ukraine.<sup>172</sup> Another shows that Stalin and Molotov upbraided a Russian provincial authority for failing to provide Ukraine with 26,000 metric pounds of potatoes. They wrote: “The Central Committee possesses information that you forbade transfer of seed tubers of potatoes to Donbass (Region of Ukraine)...The Central Committee and the SNK request that you rescind your objection and take all necessary measure to assure the speediest handing out and transfer of seed tubers.”<sup>173</sup>

The final documents examined here demonstrate attempts in 1933 to mitigate the effects of food shortages while laying out the main underlying problems. On February 22, 1933 the Ukrainian Provincial Committee met and decided, according to a document from this date, to

Mandate that all RIKs (Regional Executive Committees) immediately begin eradication of outbreaks of extreme vita exhaustion due to starvation among members of kolkhoses

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<sup>170</sup> Political Bureau of Ukrainian Central Committee, meeting minutes, 25 January 1933, *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 178.

<sup>171</sup> Political Bureau of the Central Committee, meeting minutes, 8 February 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 179.

<sup>172</sup> Political Bureau of Central Committee, decision, 18 February 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 183.

<sup>173</sup> Stalin and Molotov to Joseph Vareikis, communication, 31 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 195.

and individual farmers with the goal of elimination by March 5<sup>th</sup> of all cases of hydropsy and restoration to health everyone who became completely disabled due to malnourishment...In affected villages mandate the distribution of hot breakfasts in schools, with extension to all children under school age who are malnourished.<sup>174</sup>

The document also indicates the Ukrainian Provincial Committee believed famine conditions were exploited not by Stalin and the center, rather by opponents of the Soviet state. They wrote: “Due to constant presence of attempts of our enemies to use these facts against creation of kolkhozes, Communist party committees on the district level must intensify systematic instructive work, uncovering the real reasons for cases of famine (mismanagement, work-dodging and a drop in labor discipline).” On March 15, 1933 the same Ukrainian committee wrote, “In spite of the fact that assistance has been received, incidents of death by starvation continue to happen, as do isolated cases of cannibalism.” The reason, they argued, was “due to lack of responsibility shown by District party committees, District Executive committees, chairmen of village Soviets, kolkhozes and leaders of task forces.”<sup>175</sup>

A pamphlet titled “Regarding measures to counteract food shortages in certain districts” was circulated on March 19, 1933 by the Ukrainian GPU. “As a result of sabotage that took place in the agricultural sector in Ukraine,” the document began, “activity of counter-revolutionary anti-Soviet and kulak elements that infiltrated kolkhozes—several villages and kolkhozes suffer from food shortages.” This statement contains the standard specious official state version of why the famine occurred, but it is the next portion of the document that clearly

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<sup>174</sup> Provincial Committee of Ukraine, meeting minutes, 22 February 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 184.

<sup>175</sup> Ukrainian Provincial Committee, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 185.

supports the thesis of this study—that Ukraine was not singled out for special repression or punishment by Stalin during the famine years of 1932-33. It reads:

The Central committee of the party passed a series of decisions regarding immediate food assistance to the needy. Extended assistance must, first and foremost, assure the success of sowing campaign in districts, villages and kolkhozes that suffer from food shortages.<sup>176</sup>

Finally, a document from June 27, 1933 contains a message from Khataevich to Stalin asking for further food aid for Ukraine. “Rain, that continued persistently for the last 10 days” Khataevich began, “has severely delayed ripening of wheat and its harvesting. Kolkhozes of several districts have either completely consumed, or are about to finish bread that has been handed out as food assistance.” “Situation with food deteriorated badly,” he continued, “which is particularly dangerous in the last days before harvesting.” And, he finished, “I request strongly that additional 50 thousand *poods* of food loan were given to us.” Stalin’s response is recorded in pencil on the document itself, where he wrote, “Must give” and signed his name.<sup>177</sup> The weight of the evidence presented in this chapter, largely in Stalin’s own words and demonstrable by his actions (and the words and actions of his alleged famine conspirators) suggests that Stalin neither planned to murder millions of Ukrainians by starvation, nor did he use circumstances to bring about their deaths.

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<sup>176</sup> Ukrainian GPU, circular letter, 19 March 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 188.

<sup>177</sup> Khataevich to Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Chernov, communication, 27 June 1933, in *Famine in the USSR 1929-1934*, 197.

## CONCLUSION

The famine that afflicted the Ukrainian countryside in the early 1930s—now referred to as the *Holodomor*—was an unquestionably horrifying event. To many Ukrainians, the word *Holodomor* has developed connotations of murder and genocide. Estimates of the death toll from this famine range from five to ten million people with the majority of these casualties being Ukrainian peasants. For most of the twentieth century the famine was viewed as a product of forced collectivization, which itself may have been motivated by Stalin’s fanatical drive to industrialize the Soviet Union. In this scenario, Stalin needed to sell Ukrainian grain to the West in order to pay for his plan of accelerated industrialization. Real research into the causes of the famine began only in the 1980s, with Robert Conquest often credited for writing the first in-depth scholarly study of the famine in his 1986 book *Harvest of Sorrow*.

Within the historiography of the *Holodomor* run themes of nationalism, historical memory, and the legacy of Stalinism, all conducted in the tense, often heated political and cultural milieu that is today’s Ukraine. Push-pull mechanisms of national identification are likely at play here, with the debate over the *Holodomor* one of many “push” factors dividing ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. Other such factors include disagreements over use of the Russian language in Ukraine, governmental representation and structure (centralization vs. federalism) for the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine, the alleged overt “nationalism” of western Ukraine, and Russian interventionist policies that have recently emboldened violent separatist groups in eastern Ukraine. Together they have created an atmosphere of distrust and hatred that threatens Ukraine’s future. For the moment, and for reasons discussed below, it seems the “pull” factors that united east and west Ukraine in 1991—a shared Soviet past, respect for democratic values, the idea that Ukraine can successfully embrace Western Europe, culturally

and economically, while retaining a friendly relationship with Russia—are of decreasing significance.

One aspect of the famine debate centers on whether the *Holodomor* should be properly called a genocidal event. Within this context is a basic disagreement over the extent that the famine was purposely directed at the ethnically Ukrainian population as a means to crush nationalist sentiment or whether it was primarily meant to crush the peasants as a class because of their opposition to collectivization. Although this debate is important, of course, and it remains an especially weighty issue in Ukrainian-Russian relations, the thesis of this study does not support a genocidal interpretation of the famine.

Historian Johann Dietsch suggests that it is time to move beyond the intentionalist, or Stalinist, explanation to take a more functionalist approach. While not excluding discussion of ideology as motivation, this would involve looking at how individuals and officials carried out either their real or perceived orders as well as the social or political mechanisms used to cause such mass starvation. As it did with the Holocaust, this approach could yield new perspectives on an event that some historians believe has become stale.<sup>178</sup>

The question of why the famine struck hardest in the Ukrainian countryside, where the vast majority of ethnic Ukrainians lived, and spared the cities and more urbanized areas of Ukraine, as argued by Conquest, is worth further analysis. If this is true, what process or motive was at work? If the Soviet government intentionally allowed or caused the famine in the countryside, for the purpose of either class or ethnic cleansing, how and why did it keep famine from entering the cities? Knowing that for a great many Marxists the attainment of communism

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<sup>178</sup> Johan Dietsch, “The 1932-1933 Ukrainian Famine Genocide: Argumento Ex Silentio,” in *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-933 in Soviet Ukraine*, edited by Lubomyr Y. Luciuk and Lisa Grekul (Kingston, ON: The Kashtan Press, 2008), 179-190.

meant the triumph of urbanization at the assumed expense of the rural ethos, was the famine used by Soviet officials to bring about the forceful fulfillment of this goal? While such a placement of the Ukrainian famine into a broader context of anti-agrarianism will perhaps not please those who see it as a Ukraine-specific event, it may prove fruitful to look for similar episodes or parallels in other communist revolutions or societies.

The Great Famine in Mao Tse-tung's People's Republic of China, a famine that killed dozens of millions in 1959-1962, seems especially relevant to the Soviet famine. Both communist societies suffered from hunger and starvation while in the process of undertaking agricultural collectivization, a period referred to by Mao's communist government as the Great Leap Forward. According to journalist Yang Jisheng, author of the 2012 book, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, Mao's policies relying on brutal state repression and harsh grain requisition were strikingly similar to the decisions made by Stalin and his top men beginning in 1929, with equally (or worse) disastrous results.<sup>179</sup> In a 2009 article, "Regime Changes of Memory: Creating the Official History of the Ukrainian and Chinese Famines under State Socialism and after the Cold War," historian Felix Wemheuer contrasts the historiography of the two famines. Wemhauer points out that because the Chinese Communist government remains in power, the famine years—referred to officially as “the three years of difficulties”—the public memory of the famine is “fragmented” and the topic largely ignored by both western and Chinese intellectuals.<sup>180</sup> It is conceivable, then, that the work of Jisheng and others (notably Dutch historian Frank Dikötter in his 2011 book, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's*

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<sup>179</sup>Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, ed. Edward Friedman, Guo Jian, and Stacy Mosher, trans. Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012), Apple iBook, 566.

<sup>180</sup>Felix Wemheuer, "Regime Changes of Memory: Creating the Official History of the Ukrainian and Chinese Famines under State Socialism and after the Cold War" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 31-59, <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

*Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962*) portend a significant shift in discourse on the Chinese famine.

The documents analyzed in Chapter Four above point to a devastating famine resulting from mismanagement at the high and local levels of government and a failure to anticipate or properly deal with the results of poor agriculture policy. Stalin and the leadership circle acted with much cruel disregard for human life in the years 1929-1933—actions that meant the deaths of millions of Soviet citizens—but those actions did not include organized or directed famine. Largely unanswered in the historiography of the famine is how and why people stopped dying of starvation by the end of 1934. On this matter Conquest implies that the famine, as a war against the Ukrainian peasantry, only ended when Stalin believed he had won, and “Ukraine...lay crushed.” “Stalin’s measures,” Conquest writes, “must have seemed to him to be adequate to his purpose.”<sup>181</sup> Although Davies and Wheatcroft do not directly discuss how or why the famine ended, they do provide clues. First, they point out that “from the beginning of 1933, grain exports were curtailed drastically,” meaning that more grain might have remained in country.<sup>182</sup> Recall also that, in the Davies and Wheatcroft argument, drought in 1931 and 1932 was a key cause of the famine. From this it is possible to surmise that the 1934 harvest year likely saw weather more conducive to productive crop growing.<sup>183</sup> To follow the thesis presented in this study, it is also possible that Soviet leadership belatedly realized that its agricultural policies were counterproductive, thus made efforts to end the grain and food crisis. We have seen evidence of this above, with Stalin approving of emergency food distribution in Ukraine early in

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<sup>181</sup> Conquest, 272.

<sup>182</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, 440.

<sup>183</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, 449.

1933. In any event, it is likely that, as with the coming of the famine, no single factor caused it to cease.

The dramatic events in Ukraine beginning in early 2014 have clouded the future and further complicated its relationship to Russia. In December 2013, President Yanukovich rejected further integration into the European economic sphere and agreed to accept financial aid from the Russia Federation. The move toward Russia enraged many in Ukraine. Protestors in Kiev and elsewhere succeeded in ousting Yanukovich in February 2014, with as many as 100 protestor deaths reported during an especially tense period of weeks culminating with Yanukovich's fleeing to Russia on February 11. On March 16, Crimea—given to Soviet Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954—voted to join the Russian Federation, a plebiscite undoubtedly influenced by the presence of the Russian military on Ukrainian territory. Russia president Vladimir Putin has argued that the Russian annexation of Crimea is legal under international law, a bold proclamation and move sure to inflame an already volatile situation. Putin's ultimate motive and endgame remain unclear. Does Russia move on eastern Ukraine on the pretext of protecting ethnic Russians from alleged Ukrainian "fascists", as it did in Crimea?

Ideally, study of the famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-1933 could be separated from the poisonous political atmosphere that seems to define the debate. Passions unleashed in the early months of 2014 are sure to complicate famine scholarship. The famine debate it seems is very much a central part of this unfolding nationalist drama pitting ethnic Ukrainians against ethnic Russians, exposing and threatening the composite nature of modern, democratic Ukraine. This is of course an unfortunate development as it could make a fuller understanding of the complex events of 1932-1933 more difficult to attain. Access to important archives and perhaps the archives themselves are threatened when nations resort to belligerence and threats of invasion, as

Russia has done recently, and it is likely to be some time before objective analysis trumps political agenda.

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