SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Holodomor, the Ukrainian Holocaust?

Ilie, Alexandra

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Ilie, A. (2011). Holodomor, the Ukrainian Holocaust? *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, *11*(1), 137-154. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-445894

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:
This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Comercial-NoDerivatives). For more Information see:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Holodomor, the Ukrainian Holocaust?

ALEXANDRA ILIE

The words Holodomor and Holocaust sound similar. They both translate to grave man made catastrophes in the XXth century. Holodomor took place in 1932/33 and Holocaust followed almost 10 years later. The victims of the Holocaust have been recognized by the international community as being the victims of genocide; the people that died during the Holodomor are "just" victims of a crime against humanity. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian community insists that Holodomor was genocide and should be treated as such.

What would happen though, if one is to compare these two terrible tragedies? Would the similarities between them make matters clearer? Also, is Holodomor, in this sense, "the Ukrainian Holocaust"? Is the Great Famine a full blown genocide or does it have just a few genocidal characteristics?

Holodomor vs. the Holocaust: International Recognition

The term "Holocaust" is commonly defined as:

> "The Nazi German policy that sought the annihilation of European and North African Jews. It comes from the Greek, *holókauton*, meaning 'burnt sacrifice'. More rarely, the term is also used to describe Nazi German violence in general"[1].

The Jewish community prefers the term "Shoah", meaning "catastrophe". Others name it "The Final Solution".

The name Holodomor is explained as coming from the Ukrainian words "holod" which means hunger, and "mor" which means plague:

> "In the Ukrainian language, the famine of 1932 and 1933 famine is called 'holodomor', which means extermination by starvation. It is also referred to as the 'artificial famine', 'terror famine' and 'terror-genocide'"[2].

The two tragedies resulted in millions of deaths. Some have tried to link the Holodomor with the Holocaust in what concerns the number of the victims and through this to prove that the Ukrainian Famine is also genocide. The estimations for the two mass killings do revolve around the same number, about 6 million victims, but this is not a valid argument.

---

[1] Rudolph BINION, "The Holocaust", in *Encyclopedia Of Genocide And Crimes Against Humanity*, vol. 1, edited by Dinah L. Shelton, Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, p. 435.

[2] A.B. KASOZI, "Ukraine (Famine)", in *Encyclopedia Of Genocide And Crimes Against Humanity*, vol. 3, cit., p. 1055.

The theory that the Great Famine is genocide should focus more on the reasons and intent of the perpetrators and on the course of actions and international context of Holodomor. The comparison with the paradigmatic case of the Holocaust can give the result more credibility.

The first logical step is to apply the UN Genocide Convention's definition of genocide to the Holocaust and Holodomor. The definition states that:

> "Genocide is a crime under international law, contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world"[1].

Holocaust is considered from a legal point of view to be genocide, because it had both the mental element, the intent to destroy, proved by signed documents, orders, public speeches etc., and the physical elements, "killing members of the group", proved by witness accounts, mass burial grounds and written execution orders. The Holocaust incorporated all the five physical elements[2] that make up genocidal acts.

Although Holodomor was ruled out as not being genocide because the mental element, the intent to kill, could not be clearly demonstrated, some of the physical elements were nevertheless present: killing members of the group (approximately 6-7 million Ukrainians died between 1932/1933 because of the famine and a significant percentage of them were shot by the soviets under the accusation of being "kulaks"), causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group (most of the Ukrainians in that period died a slow and painful death through starvation, some were buried alive, others were shot, most of the survivors were mentally scarred for life), deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part (there is proof that Stalin at that time knew about the situation in Ukraine but did nothing to help the people, moreover, he increased the food quotas to the maximum point possible; he refused to help them; he put a blockade on Ukraine and then on the cities, he instituted internal passports so that people could not escape by any means the famine; he refused external help even though the situation was desperate).

With regards to the measures taken against children, it is a well known fact that Stalin had a problem in the mid 1930's with "bezpeizornie", which was the generation of orphaned children throughout the Soviet Union. When they became too numerous, they were usually shot[3].

Despite all this, Holodomor was considered by the European Parliament not genocide, like the Holocaust, but an ineffective economic policy of the Communist governments of the Republics of the Soviet Union and a crime against humanity.

---

[1] UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948 entry into force 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm (consulted on 12.05.2009).

[2] (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

[3] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film directed by Latvian director Edvins Snore, sponsored by the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) Group in the European Parliament, premiered in April, 2008 at the European Parliament.

On Thursday, 23 October 2008, at Strasbourg, the European Parliament approved a resolution for the commemoration of the Holodomor, the artificial famine in Ukraine (1932-1933)[1]. In the resolution, the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is mentioned, but the word "genocide" is not attached to the Holodomor.

Some have speculated that the EU has not labeled Holodomor as genocide in order not to upset Russia. This happened unfortunately because, from the point of view of independence, the European Union is not entirely autonomous from other actors on the international stage.

On the basis of the same reasons, Nazism has always been labeled by the EU as a vicious ideology, but communism, although it has also produced millions of innocent deaths all over the world, is not as frowned upon. Being a Nazi fan or praising Hitler is a grave legal offence, but being a communist enthusiast or publicly expressing one's admiration for Stalin has no legal repercussions. This is also related to memory and historical conscience. Some people still see in the former USSR the savior of Europe, the vanquisher of Nazism, although this is hardly so. For example, after liberating the Jewish people, the soviets filled the former Jewish ghettos with their war prisoners[2].

From a legal perspective, international law stipulates, through the UN Genocide Convention[3], that "genocide is a crime under international law, contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world"[4]. Article 2 of the Convention describes what genocide is and what it is punishable for in five points of interest, meaning that "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group"[5] is considered by international law genocide:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Article 2 implies that genocide has two distinct dimensions in order to be recognized as such, the mental element[6] and the physical element[7]. While the intent to kill can be easily identified when speaking about the Holocaust, in the case of the Great Famine in Ukraine, it is more difficult to prove that there was a clear intent to kill.

---

[1] The European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine artificial famine (1932-1933), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P6-TA-2008-0523 (consulted on 31.05.2009)

[2] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.

[3] UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948 entry into force 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm (consulted on 12.05.2009).

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Meaning the before mentioned "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such".

[7] The five instances mentioned above, points a, b, c, d and e.

Article 3 of the same convention describes five punishable forms of genocide crimes: genocide, conspiracy, incitement, attempt and complicity. Nevertheless, many have argued that this definition is too restrictive, limiting the victims of genocide to "national, ethnical or religious groups"[1] although, as Benjamin Valentino notes:

> "Many of the most infamous and important 'genocidal' events of this century, including the deaths of between 9 million and 32 million people in the Soviet Union, between 5 million and 35 million in China, and between 1 million and 2 million in Cambodia, have not primarily involved a clash between different ethnic or national groups"[2].

The UN Genocide Convention definition "does not include groups defined by their political orientation or class background"[3]. This definition, without the mentioned components, rules out some of the most extensive mass killings that were ever committed, including Holodomor. As Erick Weitz mentions in relation to this definition:

> "Nearly everyone who considers the definition finds it insufficient for one reason or another. It manages to be at the same time both too broad and too narrow"[4].

Michael Mann, the author of *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, also argues against the UN definition for genocide, because, he says, "it includes too much and too little"[5]. In his view, the definition is too broad because "it adds a sub-clause, allowing either 'total' or 'partial' destruction to count as genocide"[6]. The concept of "partial genocide" is rather difficult to grasp, not knowing whether it has a geographical connotation or not.

Weitz also speculates that:

> "In the negotiations in the 1940s, the Soviet Union and its allies forced the exclusion of these categories for fear that its policies toward the peasantry and political opponents could be considered genocide"[7].

If these categories were added, then the forced famine imposed to the Ukrainians between 1932/1933 would be legally considered genocide.

---

[1] UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948 entry into force 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm (consulted on 12.05.2009).

[2] Benjamin VALENTINO, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 15.

[3] Eric D. WEITZ, *A Century of Genocide – Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005, p. 9.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 21.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] Eric D. WEITZ, *A Century of Genocide*…cit., p. 9.

Therefore, Holodomor is not considered genocide form the point of view of the UN Genocide Convention definition. The European Parliament also avoided the use of the term genocide and described Holodomor as "a crime against humanity"[1].

Nevertheless, the Great Famine has some undeniable genocidal characteristics.

Holodomor vs. the Holocaust: Ideology

In both cases, the Holocaust and Holodomor, there were some ideological reasons underlying the intention to kill. The Holocaust perpetrators had established their creed on false biology and anti-Semitism, under a national-socialist view of the world. The people responsible for Holodomor, on the other hand, were communist fanatics, believing in false sociology, seeking to eliminate the kulak class but also to bring a nation (Ukraine) to its knees in order to strengthen their influence over it. Although the reasons for committing murder seem very different, the ideology that brought this about contains some common points.

Communism was a utopian view of the world, based on Karl Marx's writings. It lobbied for equality and unity for all, an idea which might not appear evil at first, but is clearly evil in the way in which it was implemented and understood. A fundamental step towards world harmony was, in Lenin's view, the war of the classes which would be concluded with the victory of the proletariat. Ironically enough, the communists thought the road towards achieving harmony had to start with destruction and death. The Bolshevik revolutions around the world "initially killed about 10% of the population"[2] in order to restructure the basis of society. Their favorite targets were the elites. Of course, not everybody embraced Marxism form the start, so the people in the resistance were usually killed as well. Michael Mann asserts that:

> "The people were the proletariat, and classes opposed to the proletariat were enemies of the people. Communists might be tempted to eliminate classes through murder. I term this classicide"[3].

A little known fact is that Marx at some point advanced the idea of genocide. Literary historian at Cambridge University, George Watson, points out that: "Marx and Engels called Basks, Bretons, and Serbs – 'racial trash', *Voelkerabfall*"[4]. Marx and Engels even advanced the idea that, for example, a country like Poland has no reason to exist and that people and races that are too weak to acknowledge the new world order and too backward economically will disappear in the "revolutionary holocaust".

The terminology "racial trash" immediately springs into mind Nazism though. This is not as farfetched as it seems because Hitler mentioned in a number of occasions that he learned a lot from reading Marx's works. His party was called "The National Social Germans Workers Party", and was based on a socialist ideology as well, but with a national emphasis.

---

[1] The European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine artificial famine (1932-1933), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P6-TA-2008-0523 (consulted on 31.05.2009).

[2] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.

[3] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 320.

[4] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.

The type of socialism that Lenin and Stalin advocated was more international in character, although it sometimes had a few nationalist accents. Its internationalism was advocated by Lenin who thought that:

> "In the last analysis all nations must merge and lose their national distinctions, including distinctions of culture and language"[1].

This theory led to the belief that the state was entitled to forcefully deport people and to commit purges, in order to "merge" the different peoples that inhabited the USSR.

On the other hand, at some point in the Soviet history, there was a clear idealization of the Russian culture and an attempt to impose the Russian language and cultural traits throughout the USSR. Weitz observes that, around the middle of the 1930s:

> "The state […] also asserted the cultural and political superiority of Russia […] Cultural russification, marketed especially by the mandatory teaching of Russian, became the watchword"[2]

and that:

> "The Russian people and culture were seen as manifestations of primordial being and the model for other nationalities"[3].

The concepts of nation and nationality have had many interpretations from the Bolshevik leaders. Nevertheless, there has been a common policy of repression:

> "The tactics of the Bolsheviks in regard to the nationality problem have again undergone changes […] but there has always been a return to the same policy of liquidating nations as such, a policy of deliberate genocide in various forms and of various types"[4].

Both the communists and the national-socialists had the goal of bringing about the birth of the "new man". Communists believed that people are supposed to be differentiated according to classes and that the "evil classes" will perish or be defeated in the revolution. The proletariat class will prevail and through this social engineering, the "new man" will be born, according to Marxism.

National-socialists believed in separating people according to race. After the extermination of the inferior races will be finished, the Arians will prevail and the birth of the "new man" will be possible. Both ideologies were "at war with human nature"[5] and looked forward to the birth of this new man. Both ideologies advocated

---

[1] Andrei LEBED, "Genocide as a Means of Creating a Unified Socialist Nation", in Nikolai K DEKER, Andrei LEBED (eds), *Genocide in the USSR, Studies in Group Destruction*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., New York, 1958, p. 4.

[2] Eric D. WEITZ, *A Century of Genocide*…cit., p. 77.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 78.

[4] Andrei LEBED, "Genocide as a Means of Creating a Unified Socialist Nation", cit., p. 3.

[5] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.

that it was not a question of whether to kill or not, but a question of who to kill, and this is where the difference intervenes.

Both the communists and the national-socialists used very harsh and dehumanizing words when describing their enemies. For example, in the 1920's:

> "Lenin described enemies in terms eerily anticipating the SS: bloodsuckers, spiders, leeches, parasites, insects, bedbugs, fleas, the language suggesting threatening and dehumanized enemies infecting the people, requiring cleansing"[1].

Similar words were used by Hitler in his autobiographical work *Mein Kampf* in order to describe the Jews:

> "Jews were the maggots feeding on a rotting corpse, the parasites that had to be surgically removed, the sexual predators preying on German women, a spider that sucks people's blood, a plague worse than the Black Death, the sponger who spreads like a noxious bacillus and then kills it host"[2].

Nevertheless, the communists had a constant problem in defining the kulak, the state enemy, because class is not as obvious as ethnicity or race. Michael Mann underlines the fact that:

> "During this phase the identity of the enemy broadened uncontrollably […] Since no one knew exactly who the kulak was, official definitions kept changing"[3].

So from the rich peasants that were initially the "state enemy", the definition broadened to the intellectuals, poor peasants that were thought to be "under the kulaks" and generally to anyone who opposed the regime.

Apart from these similarities that seem to have had an influence on both perpetrators, making them believe mass killings were not only normal but also necessary, there are people who believe that Nazism was actually born as a reaction to communism. They also think that the Nazi crimes were a replica of soviet crimes.

Ernst Nolte, a famous German historiographer, put forward a mind boggling hypothesis in his work *The European Civil War*:

> "The present book starts from the hypothesis that, indeed, the reason for Hitler's feelings and ideology has its root in the relationship of fear and hate against communism, he expressed through this, with a high intensity, the feelings of numerous German contemporaries and foreign people and that all these feelings and beliefs were understandable and up to some point justifiable"[4].

---

[1] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 322.

[2] Eric D. WEITZ, *A Century of Genocide*…cit., p. 105.

[3] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 324.

[4] Ernst NOLTE, *Războiul civil European (1917-1945). Național- Socialism și Bolșevism*, preface by Ernst NOLTE, Romanian transl. by Irina Cristea, Editura Corint, București, 2005, p. 24.

Ernst Nolte explains the reactive character of fascism towards communism and based on it he defines fascism as "a movement of reaction towards the theories and practices of bolshevism"[1].

According to Nolte, fascism could be defined as:

> "Anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvement of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy"[2].

No matter what the correct explanation is for describing the relationship between communism and national-socialism, the undeniable fact is that both ideologies contained the seeds of future genocides. These two ideologies advocated the need for purges, the need to "restructure society" and the need for a new world order.

These ideologies were flawed and ultimately failed, but before this happened their adepts had already done irreparable damages to the word. The murders done by the Nazis do not need to be justified, but by the same token, the world should not feel the need to justify the Soviet killings. The Nazi symbols are considered illegal; the Soviet symbols are just a "bad joke". This kind of behavior from the international community succeeds only in paving the way towards closing a blind eye to other political mass killings. Communist ideology included the same amount of deadly potential as the national-socialist ideology.

Holodomor vs. the Holocaust: Ukraine – Reasons for Committing Genocide

There are several reasons because of which Stalin might have been inclined to commit genocide against the Ukrainian nation, besides the ideological ones.

Ukraine, a country that had 80% of the population working in agriculture, was called Europe's "breadbasket" and was famous for its grains. The country also had a flourishing culture that slowly drifted them away from Russia. "Mother" Russia, on the other hand, always thought of Ukraine as an inherent part of its sphere of influence and in the 19th century the Soviets were afraid of losing this state:

> "The idea that this great region which Russian imperialists had always considered a part […] of Russia proper, might indeed wish to be free […] was devastating"[3].

Ukraine was important for Russia mainly for its agricultural potential and it is a well known fact that "Lenin […] regarded Ukrainian resources as vital"[4].

---

[1] François FURET, Ernst NOLTE, *Fascism and Communism*, Romanian transl. and preface Matei MARTIN, Univers, București, 2000, p. 12.

[2] Ernst NOLTE, *Three Faces of Fascism*, transl. from German to English by Leila Vennevitz, Reinheart and Winston, Holt, 1999, pp. 20-21.

[3] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-famine*, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 29.

[4] *Ibidem.*, p. 37.

Attempts to "Russify" Ukraine were made even before the Bolsheviks came to power. For example, Russians always believed that the Ukrainian language was nothing more than a dialect of Russian language, when in fact the two languages had only a common root, like the Spanish and Portuguese languages. The Ukrainian language was a clear sign of distinction, so for many years Russia had made attempts to diminish its daily use. For instance, "in 1883 an edict declared that there was no Ukrainian language […] and banned works in Ukrainian"[1]. After that, a decree issued in 1876 was put into practice "forbidding Ukrainian theatrical or musical performances, and closing the main organs […] of the movement"[2]. All these measures led to "an unprecedented increase in illiteracy, to some 80% of the population"[3].

What happened after Ukraine claimed its independence in 1917 is not only a large scale man-made famine, but also a full blown war against the Ukrainian elites. Robert Conquest asserts that the famine

> "was combined with a devastating attack on the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Ukrainian Party itself. In fact, the campaign may be said to resemble the 'laying waste' of hostile subject territories practiced by Jenghiz Khan and other figures of the past"[4].

Ukraine hoped to regain its independence after the 1917 revolts and fall of tsarist rule and consequently: "On 22 January, the Rada declared Ukraine an independent Soviet republic"[5]. Nevertheless, Lenin shattered their hopes after reclaiming all former tsarist territories. The 4 years of resisting the Red Army in war and their "nationalistic claims" have created tensions between Ukraine and Russia that have not been settled even today. Ukraine was forcefully incorporated into the USSR in 1921 and the people saw that "the Bolshevik invaders were accompanied by 'food detachments' […] to seize the grain in the villages, under Lenin's instructions"[6].

The first Soviet government "suppressed Ukrainian schools, cultural institutions and so forth. In fact, the Russianizing tendency in the early Ukrainian Soviet regime was intensely anti-Ukrainian"[7], as noted by Robert Conquest in his work *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet collectivization and the terror-famine.*

After the war, a national revival began to take place in Soviet Ukraine. The cultural, political and religious life in Ukraine started to develop yet again. Culture was based on western models, thanks to writers like Mykola Khvylovy that started to emerge. Also, the Ukrainian Church was re-established, Ukrainian language was re-introduced into Church services and a Church Council was created. The Ukrainian Autocephalic Church "was one of the best organized and most cohesive non-communist centers in Ukraine"[8].

---

[1] *Ibidem*, p. 29.

[2] *Ibidem.*

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] Robert CONQUEST, *The Great Terror – A Reassessment*, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 51.

[5] IDEM, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 34.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 35.

[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "The Ukrainian Autocephalic Church", in Nikolai K. DEKER, Andrei LEBED (eds), *Genocide in the USSR*…cit., p. 173.

The Bolsheviks were actually astonished by the level at which Ukrainian nationalism had grown and the complexity of their cultural life. After Lenin's death, Stalin took over USSR, through the violent elimination of the other candidates. He also took over the task to "tame" Ukraine and to put an end to its nationalistic manifestations.

The national revival of the cultural, economic and political life of Ukrainians led to the great fear of Stalin to lose Russia's sphere of influence over Ukraine[1] and might constitute the reason why he wished Ukraine's "Russfication", even if it came at a high price like mass murder. In a famous letter to Kaganovich, Stalin said that:

> "At this point the question of Ukraine is the most important. The situation in Ukraine is very bad. If we don't take steps now to improve the situation, we might lose Ukraine. The objective should be to transform Ukraine, in the shortest period of time, into a real fortress of the USSR"[2].

This is an excerpt of Stalin's letter to his close associate Lazar Kaganovich, sent on 11th September 1932.

In fact, some say that Stalin was from the very beginning against Ukraine as a nation: "Academician Sackharov writes of the 'Ukrainophobia' characteristic of Stalin"[3]. Stalin also allegedly said that the great luck of Ukrainians is that they are too many, which makes destroying the whole of them practically impossible:

> "Of great significance is Khrushchev's speech at the closed meeting of the Twentieth Party Congress, in which he declared that Stalin of course would have liked to destroy all Ukrainians but could not because the size of the group involved"[4].

After that, Khrushcew went on to say, in the same speech and with the same irony that:

> "The Ukrainians escaped this fate only because there were too many of them and there was no place to which they could be sent"[5].

All these possible reasons make plausible the theory of considering the Ukrainian famine genocide. Lenin put communist ideology first, even if it meant wiping out nations, and Stalin feared Ukrainian nationalism and saw in it a sign that Ukraine might be drifting away from the USSR's sphere of influence. Hypothetically, one

---

[1] *Harvest of Despair. The Unknown Holocaust – The Great Famine in Ukraine, 1932-1933*, documentary, Director: Slavko Nowytski, Produced by: Slavko Nowytski, Yurij Luhovy, the Ukrainian Canadian Research & Documentation Centre (UCRDC) in Toronto, Starring: Jon Granik, Joan Karasevych, Eric Peterson (Documentary Film, 55 min., 1985).

[2] http://www.faminegenocide.com/kuryliw/quotations_on_the_famine.htm (consulted on 31.05.2009).

[3] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 217.

[4] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "Genocide through Destruction of National Culture and Sense of Nationality", in Nikolai K. DEKER, Andrei LEBED (eds), *Genocide in the USSR*…cit., p. 18.

[5] IDEM, "The Ukrainians", in *ibidem*, pp. 145-146.

might assume that Stalin's next logical step, combined with his open hate for Ukraine, would be to bring Ukrainians to their knees by destroying their national identity, their cultural and political life, their religion and their intellectual elite.

Holodomor vs. the Holocaust: Ukraine – Crushing Nationalism and Elites

Holodomor, much like the Holocaust, has a number of facts that demonstrate that it had genocidal characteristics. While the history of the Holocaust is widely known, and the reasons why it is considered genocide have been enumerated on a wide range of occasions, the history of Holodomor and the reasons why it might be considered genocide are much less comprehended.

Killings in Ukraine have not been numerous only in the 1932-1933 famine. The death roll in Ukraine after the Bolsheviks came to power was also quite high. In the years before the famine, the Bolshevik regime tried to wipe out nationalistic feelings from the Ukrainian people by undergoing purges of the intellectual elite, imposing Russian language and disbanding the national church.

The importance of maintaining each country's national culture is crucial and this aspect

> "was stressed in the Preamble to the 1954 Hague Convention (paragraphs 2 and 3), where it is stated that 'damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world'"[1].

The fact that the Bolsheviks were trying to destroy the national identity of Ukrainians might also mean that the famine might not have been a failed attempt to force collectivization, but a successful attempt to crush Ukraine as a whole.

After the end of the war with the Ukrainian resistance, the Bolsheviks realized that crushing the cultural life and russifying Ukraine was a complex and difficult task. The first step towards achieving this was to increase the number of publications printed in Russian. In fact, "during the years of the consolidation of the Soviet regime in the Ukraine there was an increase in the proportion of publications in Russian"[2] and sometimes the number of publications in Russian exceeded by far those in Ukrainian.

The Ukrainian language was drastically modified after several attempts of the Soviets to "harmonize" it with Russian language. Although the Ukrainian language had been recently revised by a Ukrainian commission of linguistic experts,

> "a 'linguistic discussion' was arranged by the Deputy Commissar for Education of the Ukrainian SSR, who had been entrusted with the liquidation of nationalism in the system of national education and cultural life of Ukraine. The program was aimed at removal of the entire Ukrainian terminology"[3].

---

[1] *Encyclopedia Of Genocide And Crimes Against Humanity*, vol. 1, cit., p. 312.

[2] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "Genocide through Destruction of National Culture…cit.", p. 11.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 12.

The campaign was supervised by Portyshev, a special emissary from the part of the Party Central Committee.

The outcome of the "linguistic discussion" was that Ukrainian lost many of its unique features and was Russified to the maximum:

> "The Ukrainian orthography […] was drastically altered in 1933, when a number of the laws of Ukrainian phonetics and etymology were violated in order to remove the 'artificial barriers' between the Ukrainian and Russian languages. The result […] ended in the Ukrainian language being deprived of freedom to reflect its special feature […] The action taken against the Ukrainian language was […] 'systematic linguacide', one of the methods of Communist genocide in the field of culture"[1].

The next step for the Soviets was to crush the resistance of the Ukrainian people by "destroying the most active elements, particularly the Ukrainian intellectuals"[2]. A complex campaign of murder and repression was thus initiated by the Soviet leaders. Mass executions took place mainly in the capital on the country:

> "The mass extermination of intellectuals in Kiev is also confirmed by Hrushevsky, at one time chairman of the Ukrainian Central Rada, who admitted that 'thousands of Ukrainian intellectuals and young people' were executed"[3].

Apparently, the faith of the Ukrainian intellectuals was decided beforehand because:

> "Stalin ordered the deaths of about 80% of Ukrainian intelligentsia by 1935. Some see his goal as 're-Russifying' Ukrainian cities and 'pastoralising' the Ukrainians, directly comparable to Hitler's policy in Poland in 1939"[4].

The repression against the intellectual strata was a long spanned action, comprising three different periods in time: the period of War communism and its campaign against the Ukrainian national forces (1918-1921), the period of "socialist reconstruction" (1929-1938) and the period following World War II[5]. The liquidation of the Ukrainian intellectuals has had serious repercussion for the cultural life but also for other interrelated domains of Ukraine. It is also a grave fact because there was no military situation to require it and it was a clear intention of the Soviets to crush opinion holders and elites.

At the beginning of the 30's a complex campaign was initiated against the intellectuals. In March 1930, a staged trial was organized, which caused much harm to the intellectuals and to the Church of Ukraine. The date of the trial of the Union for the Liberation of the Ukraine (SVU) coincided with the beginning of the agricultural collectivization. This happened because it was a "kill two birds with one

---

[1] *Ibidem*.
[2] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "The Ukrainians", cit., p. 138.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 139.
[4] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 327.
[5] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "The Ukrainians", cit., p. 138.

stone" situation, from the Soviet point of view; crushing both the intellectuals and the peasantry at the same time seemed more effective: "At the same time that Stalin made his move to crush the peasantry in 1929-30, he resumed the attack on the Ukraine and its national culture"[1]. The purpose of the trail was "to weaken the leaders of the Ukrainian non-communist intelligentsia"[2]. Officially, the trial was held because the SVU allegedly attempted to overthrow the Soviet regime. Robert Conquest also notes that "From 9 March to 20 April 1930, a whole cycle of faked cases against Ukrainian personalities began"[3].

During the actual trial, only 45 persons were brought to be judged

> "although in Kiev alone up to 600 persons were arrested […] One of the prisoners in the camps at Solovki during the 1930s stated that students from Kiev and Ekaterinoslav who reached the camp reported that many SVU members had been executed"[4].

The trial also served the purpose of liquidating the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church had long been under the watchful eye of the Soviets, receiving its first heavy blow in 1927 when "Church leaders (were) accused of counter revolutionary activity and the head of the Church, Metropolitan Lipkovsky, was forbidden to take part in religious work"[5]. After that, on 28th January 1930, in an emergency council, the clergy was obliged to sign a document drafted by the CPU, which provided "the dissolution of the Church"[6]. Nevertheless, "in 1935 the bishops still remaining at liberty were arrested"[7].

The SVU trial also directly targeted the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Other scientific institutes were also affected and became the direct target for repression:

> "The most prominent actors, artists, musicians, etc., were declared to be nationalist wreckers and were either executed or dispatched to dig canals or work in the taiga forests"[8].

Education, the core of any independent state, received a deadly blow when:

> "In the last eleven months of 1933 […] 4 000 teachers were purged and removed from the schools, as well as the entire staffs of the Ukrainian pedagogical institutes, on grounds of nationalism"[9].

The fact that they were targeted for their "nationalism" was a clear sign that the Soviets were trying to bend Ukraine.

---

[1] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 217.
[2] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "The Ukrainians", cit., p. 142.
[3] Robert CONQUEST *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 217.
[4] Alexander V. YURCENKO, "The Ukrainians", cit., p. 142.
[5] IDEM, "The Ukrainian Autocephalic Church", cit., p. 172.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 174.
[7] *Ibidem*.
[8] *Ibidem*, p. 143.
[9] *Ibidem*.

Some of the corpses of the intellectuals that were eliminated around these periods were found when an investigation of communal graves was set up in the summer of 1943 at Vinnitsa, a village near Kiev. There "the bodies of 11-12 000 persons were found who had been executed by the NKVD in 1937-1938. Of these it was estimated that 26% were intellectuals"[1]. The Soviets did not offer any explanation for them, or for any other communal graves with suspiciously many intellectuals found in the following years.

Stalin was well aware of what he was doing. The campaign against Ukrainian nationalism, directed against the Ukrainian language, religion and intellectuals, combined with the devastating effects of the famine, would make an interesting conspiracy theory aimed at discovering an evil plan behind Stalin's actions. This is yet to be proven, but what is certain is that:

> "Stalin clearly understood that the essence of Ukrainian nationhood was contained in the intelligentsia who articulated it, but also in the peasant masses who had sustained it over the centuries"[2].

From this point of view, the campaign against the intellectual core of the group might be presumed intentional and thus analyzed within the UN definition of genocide.

Holodomor – The Great Famine

The decimation of the intellectual, political and religious elite of Ukraine was followed by the task of crushing the peasantry. The peasantry accounted as the most numerous group of the entire population of Ukraine. After a short period of relative economic freedom, Stalin decided to implement his 5 year plan, starting with the forced collectivization. The famine was caused by the way in which the collectivization was implemented and it was made worse by the Soviet regime, through special measures: instituting internal passports, the interdiction to leave the country, the interdiction to leave famine affected areas (especially the villages), the law for the protection of state property, refusing external help etc. The goal of the Soviets was well planned out from the beginning:

> "In fact one of the aims of collectivization in the Ukraine had been officially stated as 'the destruction of Ukrainian nationalism's social base – the individual land-holdings"[3].

Some believe that the idea of staging a famine through collectivization came a short while after Stalin sent the famous letter to Kaganovich, on 11th September 1932, where he complained that the situation in Ukraine is very bad and something decisive must be done or else there is the risk of losing Ukraine[4]. After a few meetings, a plan of action was decided.

---

[1] *Ibidem,* p. 144.
[2] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 219.
[3] *Ibidem.*
[4] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.

When the first measures of collectivization were imposed, the peasants refused to sell their grain: "Not unexpectedly, the peasants, the mass of the population, resisted. At first they merely withheld grain, hoping to push up prices"[1]. The situation was made worse because party activists who hoped to be noticed welcomed the task of conducting collectivization:

> "There was such an enthusiastic response from party activists that the pace and violence of collectivization escalated into the more disorderly categories […] pogroms and wild deportation"[2].

Deportation in this period escalated to numbers of a few hundred thousand:

> "Ultimately, the regime deported in horrendous circumstances more than 2 million peasants, accused of kulak status, from their villages into resettlement areas, while millions of others were herded into collective farms. As a consequence of their brutal and radical uprooting in the early 1930s […] perhaps 300 000 died in deportations"[3].

The number of people that died is so high because of the horrendous circumstances in which the deportations were made:

> "The manner of deportations bears all the characteristics of other ethnic cleansings in the twentieth century, including the Holocaust"[4].

The deportations also had nationalistic accents, beginning with the year 1933 when "the regime deported Kuban Cossacks en masse, charging them not only with resistance to socialism but with Ukrainian nationalism"[5], according to historian Terry Martin.

The first year of great hardship for Ukraine was 1931, when the quotas were met with great difficulty. The harvest that year was poor and the quotas irrationally high. In order to fulfill the quotas:

> "Worker brigades extracted the grain by force, killing those who resisted. Peasants starved; others hoarded their grain, ate their animals, or stole collective farm produce"[6].

The next year's harvest was even poorer: "The harvest of 1932 was thus even worse, and the procurements worsened suffering"[7]. Stalin knew very well that the harvest was poor when he set the quota for the year 1932. The fact that the famine was staged and done with a clear intent can be deducted from the facts that surrounded Stalin's decision in 1932:

---

[1] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit, p. 322.
[2] *Ibidem*, p. 324.
[3] Eric D. WEITZ, *A Century of Genocide*…cit., p. 71.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 81.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 78.
[6] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit, p. 322.
[7] *Ibidem*.

"So, on Stalin's insistence, a decree went out which, if enforced, could only lead to starvation of the Ukrainian peasantry. This had been made clear to Moscow by the Ukrainian Communist authorities themselves"[1].

The decree went out and its effects were devastating. The quota that Stalin set was unreasonable:

"In July (1932) […] Stalin had again ordered a delivery target of 7.7 million tons (after bargaining, he lowered it to 6.6 million) out of a harvest which the conditions of collectivization reduced to two thirds of that of 1930"[2].

The first grain requisition was made in August and it left the countryside completely exhausted. The only solution for the peasants was to steal grain form the kolkhozes. The situation got even more desperate when the decree "On the safeguarding of state property", drafted by Stalin himself, was enacted on 7th August 1932. The decree stated that:

"Offenders against such property (like cattle, standing crops and agricultural produce from kolkhozes) were to be considered enemies of the people, and either be shot or, in extenuating circumstances, imprisoned for not less than ten years, with total confiscation of property"[3].

The decree was carried out with the outmost rigor and sometimes with unnecessary brutality.

Another measure that escalated the mortality rates was the decision to implement an internal passport system on December 27, 1932. The passports were given to most of the people living in towns but "no passports were given to the peasants. The stamp in the passport (*propiska*) became a matter of life and death, a novel form of persecution"[4]. The absence of the stamp can be compared to the Jewish star band the Jewish people were forced to wear. The absence of the stamp and the presence of the band meant almost certain death. Many Ukrainians died right in the railway stations, not being able to flee from the famine affected areas. They were not allowed to cross the border to Russia either.

What was even more ironical, in a morbid way, was the fact that while millions were starving to death, the state granaries had plentiful reserves because:

"Not all grain was exported or sent to the cities or the army. Local granaries held stock of 'state reserves'. These were for emergencies, such as war: the famine itself was not a sufficient occasion for their release. For example, the warehouses in the Poltava Province are described as 'almost bursting' with grain"[5].

---

[1] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 223.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 222.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 184.

[4] Robert GELLATELY, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler, The Age of Social Catastrophe*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2007, p. 232.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 235.

Often, grain was piled up to rot in the middle of the streets, but was guarded under strict surveillance by the OGPU men.

The children were also a target of merciless Soviet policies:

> "A whole generation of rural children, in the USSR as a whole, but especially in Ukraine, was destroyed or maimed […] in the perspective of the country's future, both the shrinkage of a generation and the experiences of the survivors have effects which are still felt"[1].

Most children had become orphans because of the famine that claimed their parents. They were called "bezpeizornie", wandered the streets of many big cities, including Moscow, and were not a pretty sight for "foreign visitors". In order to tackle this problem, Stalin authorized the shooting of children from the age of twelve[2]. There were also "children's labor camps that is prison camps, to which a child might be formally sentenced"[3].

The Soviet leaders, and even Stalin, knew very well what was happening in Ukraine, but did nothing and even refused external help. For example:

> "Mikhail Sholokhov, honored author of *And Quiet Flows the Don*, wrote to Stalin to protest this treatment of 'the respected tillers of the soil'. Stalin riposted: 'The respected tillers of the soil…have conducted sabotage and would not have any qualms about leaving the working class and the Red Army without bread […] a «quiet» war against the Soviet power, a war to starve us out, comrade Sholokhov'"[4].

Actually, this is another strategy of the perpetrators of genocide, to place the blame on their victims and claim that they are the ones being persecuted.

Extensive measures were taken in order for the word of the famine to not get out. It was forbidden to write in the press about it and:

> "Doctors, who were state employees, put down all sorts of diseases as the causes of death […] by the winter of 1932-33 death certificates no longer appear"[5].

Because of these measures, the total number of the victims is very hard to be approximated. Nevertheless, most people agree with Nicolas Werth's numbers, who "estimates a total of six million deaths in the 1932-33 famine"[6].

Michael Mann observes that:

> "Killings also contained ethnic undercurrents. Famine and deportations were unevenly distributed by region […] Famine and deportations also fell more heavily on the Ukraine than elsewhere"[7],

---

[1] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit, p. 283.
[2] *The Soviet Story* (2008), documentary film.
[3] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 290.
[4] Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 322.
[5] Robert CONQUEST, *The Harvest of Sorrow*…cit., p. 250.
[6] Robert GELLATELY, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler*…cit., p. 235.
[7] Michael MANN *The Dark Side of Democracy*…cit., p. 327.

where the number of victims is estimated to be between 4-5 million. Also highly affected by the famine was the Kuban area, which has a large population of Ukrainians. The fact that the most affected areas were inhabited by Ukrainians can also be considered proof for the intent to crush Ukrainian nationalism through a large scale famine.

Kazakhstan lost approximately one million people in the famine, and another million died in the North Caucasus and Black Earth area. Ukraine lost the most people and it is considered a "special case" among the former Soviet republics.

Conclusion

It is very hard to draw a relevant conclusion on the whole case of whether or not Holodomor should also be considered genocide and should receive the same legal framework as the Holocaust, because there are many more aspects to be considered and more evidence is needed. A proper conclusion on the matter can only be drawn after Russia releases all the documents and statistics related to the 1932/1933 famine.

Nevertheless, there are undeniable facts that cannot be overlooked. The Ukrainian famine has received considerably less attention from the international community than the Holocaust, although they have both been large scale catastrophes. The only pressure on Russia to declassify information comes from Ukraine and the Ukrainian Diaspora (notably Canada), and very little from international legal bodies.

Maybe it is time to review the UN definition of genocide so as to better reflect the tragedies that left millions upon millions of people dead in the XXth century and it is only fair that Russia makes the first step.