CONTEXTUALIZING THE HOLODOMOR: THE IMPACT OF THIRTY YEARS OF UKRAINIAN FAMINE STUDIES. Ed. Andrij Makuch and Frank E. Sysyn. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2015. viii, 126 pp., notes, bibliography. ISBN (paper) 978-1-894865-43-2.

In this volume on the impact of thirty years of Ukrainian famine studies, editors Andrij Makuch and Frank E. Sysyn put together essays that provide an overview of research on the Holodomor on the eve of its eightieth anniversary. Except for the introductory chapter by Sysyn (pp. 1–13), the five other contributions by Olga Andriewsky, Andrea Graziosi, Françoise Thom, Stanislav Kul´chyts´kyi, and Norman M. Naimark are based on papers presented at the conference "Contextualizing the Holodomor: A Conference on the 80th Anniversary," held at the University of Toronto in 2013. The short preface (pp. vii–viii) explains how the conference and the volume came together.

The introductory chapter, "Thirty Years of Research on the Holodomor: A Balance Sheet," by Frank E. Sysyn, provides a background to the other essays by discussing how Holodomor studies originated as a scholarly discipline. Sysyn sets the scene by exploring the role of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute in instigating research into the famine, which resulted in the publication of Robert Conquest's groundbreaking work *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization*

*and the Terror-Famine* (1986) and its immediate reception in Western academia and the USSR. The name of the chapter is somewhat misleading, as it is not a "balance sheet" but a thorough survey of how the field, together with its research questions, was shaped in the 1980s. Sysyn traces the interplay of politics and academic discussion of the questions that remain politicized today: the legal definition of the Holodomor, the number of victims, and the question of intent.

The second chapter, "Towards a Decentred History: The Study of the Holodomor and Ukrainian Historiography," by Olga Andriewsky (pp. 14–48), presents a robust balance sheet on the current state of Holodomor research by examining the dominant trends and findings in the field. It starts with significant achievements in documenting the famine—such as corpora of oral memory *33-i: Holod; Narodna Knyha-Memorial* (1933: Famine; The People's Memorial Book, 1991) and *Natsional´na knyha pam'iati* (National Book of Memory, 2008)—and popularizing the Holodomor in 2006–2010. Andriewsky examines the interaction of politics with academic research and observes how Holodomor studies have been dominated by the definition of the Holodomor as genocide, while its social history has remained understudied. She argues that further research into history from below will elucidate the fundamental impact of the famine on Ukrainian society. Andriewsky regards James Mace's conclusions on the Holodomor as vectors for the development of the field. Indeed, most of Mace's findings were later explored and confirmed by archival documents. For example, the closure of the borders of the Ukrainian republic in early 1933 reported in oral memory was later verified by the discovery of the decree prohibiting peasants from leaving famine-affected areas in Ukraine and the Kuban for other regions of the USSR.

Andriewsky's note on decentering history or departing from the Communist Party's perspective is essential. Indeed, a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of all participants. To understand the war in its entirety—and the Holodomor is often interpreted as such—the focus should be not only on generals but everyone, even the humblest of soldiers.[1] Moreover, as Andriewsky reveals, the debates on the genocidal nature of the Holodomor reduce the victims to numbers, and the rank-and-file perpetrators to "others." Here Andriewsky introduces a minor inaccuracy by stating that "each grain collection brigade was to be escorted

1. See Carlo Ginzburg, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 10–35.

by military units as well as shock brigades of militant Communists" (p. 30), whereas recent studies of rank-and-file perpetrators indicate that such searches were uncommon.[2] Andriewsky reviews two works that seem to address the gap in social history: *Transformatsiia hromadians´koho suspil´stva: Usna istoriia ukraïns´koï selians´koï kul´tury 1920–30 rokiv* (The Transformation of Civil Society: An Oral History of Ukrainian Peasant Culture of the 1920–1930s, 1999) edited by William Noll, and *Henotsyd ukraïntsiv: Deformatsiia narodnoï kul´tury* (The Genocide of Ukrainians: The Deformation of National Culture, 2008) by Olesia Stasiuk. While the first work features careful analysis and original discoveries and allows both survivors and perpetrators to speak for themselves, the latter provides an exclusively ethnic interpretation of the Holodomor. Andriewsky calls for going beyond the Soviet paradigm when assessing the Holodomor's impact on the understanding of Ukrainian history.

In the third chapter, "The Impact of Holodomor Studies on the Understanding of the USSR" (pp. 49–75), Andrea Graziosi posits that the Holodomor undermined the viability of the entire Soviet project, both socially and economically. The right to cultivate a small personal plot, which was granted to collective farmers in 1935, acknowledged the inefficiency of collective farms and pulled the newly established system in opposite directions (p. 55). The author uses various primary sources to demonstrate the lack of popular support for a "quasi-servile system" that the Soviet leadership had the opportunity to dismantle at different historical junctions to preserve the political system in a way that was similar to Deng's reforms in China in 1974. Graziosi also elucidates the link between the national and the social in Ukraine during the Soviet state's war against the peasantry, which he sees as key to understanding Soviet history. He explores Stalin's position on the issue and the Bolsheviks' experience of the Civil War in Ukraine. The role of the peasantry in supporting the Ukrainian national movement in 1919 had not gone unnoticed by the Soviet leadership. This is reflected, as Graziosi argues, in more significant losses from the famine in the regions that had most opposed Soviet rule a decade earlier. The famine, launched

2. According to 80 percent of the survivor accounts (210 testimonies) collected in Poltava oblast, the search brigades consisted exclusively of local people: activists, local village officials, teachers, Komsomol members, and others. Only 3 percent of survivors described searches being conducted by people from outside the village. Unlike during collectivization in 1930, in late 1932 searchers no longer had to be armed. See O. Bilous´ko et al., eds., *Natsional´na knyha pam'iati zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: Poltavs´ka oblast´* (Poltava: Oriiana, 2008), 916–1188.

simultaneously with Russification, also devastated the republic's rural ethnic minorities.

Finally, Graziosi explains why the attempts by fellow historians to approach collectivization as a "modernizing" project are untenable. He notes that the brutal methods of collectivization, along with servitude and the utter disregard for human life, were even harsher than those of the *ancien régime* and that the USSR was at best a "modern" *ancien régime* that ultimately could not survive this contradictory nature (pp. 71–72). Perhaps the distinction, suggested by Kenneth Pike, between "etic" and "emic" (etic being related to the observer's categories, emic to the actor's categories) could be applied here. In my view, modernization as an emic category has a role in the history of collectivization, at least for some individuals at the time, yet using it in etic form as an overarching category for a process accompanied by mass deaths and the further impoverishment and disenfranchisement of most survivors adds little analytical value. Like Andriewsky, Graziosi identifies the social history of the Holodomor and its aftermath as the new frontier in Holodomor studies.

In the fourth chapter, "Reflections on Stalin and the Holodomor" (pp. 76–87), Françoise Thom revisits the questions of "how" and "why" but from a different perspective. She explores how Stalin's views on collectivization evolved in the late 1920s and how collectivization helped Stalin reinforce personal power and the consequent merger of state and party at the highest level. Thom eloquently compares Stalin's strength to that of Robespierre ("He weighs on minds like the tyranny of uncertainty") and the Holodomor to the execution of King Louis XVI (pp. 78, 84), both crossing the Rubicon in the pursuit of political aims through conspicuous violence. A further comparison between collectivization in the USSR and China supports Thom's arguments about the famine's transformation into a political tool. Her references to similarly oppressive policies in Transcaucasia are equally enlightening. The answer to the "why" question in the case of the Holodomor can be found, according to Thom, in the resistance of non-Russians to collectivization and their proximity to the borders.

The ambitious chapter by Stanislav Kul´chyts´kyi, "The Holodomor of 1932–33: How and Why?" (pp. 88–111), attempts to assess the Holodomor in its entirety from the perspective of the party leadership and ideology. He looks at essential documents, explores the "ideological and economic conditions under Stalin," asserts a genocidal interpretation of the Holodomor, and draws conceptual differences between the Holocaust and the Holodomor. The aim of the chapter, to post-structuralist

chagrin, is to restore a "truthful narrative" of the 1932–1933 famine (p. 88). But does the author answer the questions of "how" and "why"?

Kul´chyts´kyi proceeds in chronological order, first specifying how the Holodomor and the famines in the North Caucasus and the Lower Volga regions, which he refers to as "holodomors," were different from the all-Union famine. If the latter was "an undesired outcome" for the USSR, the former were "Chekist operations" aimed at punishing grain-producing areas for their resistance to collectivization and to the Bolsheviks a decade earlier. Contrary to the position espoused by the other contributors of the volume, Kul´chyts´kyi does not link peasant and national questions, apart from a brief mention of Stalin's fear of the Petliurites. Moreover, the main distinction between the Holocaust and the Holodomor, according to Kul´chyts´kyi, is the persecuted group: "Stalin was motivated by class considerations, while Hitler by the national" (p. 89). In line with this reasoning, the author draws extensively on the "doctrinal roots" and political reasoning that Stalin might have used for launching collectivization and, later, the famine to subjugate the entire society into obedience. At the same time, in early 1933 Stalin accepted the peasants' right to own private plots in the countryside in order to avoid economic collapse. Using the chronological sequence of Stalin's decisions, Kul´chyts´kyi convincingly shows the intent to exacerbate the already existing famine in Ukraine in 1932. He also addresses major criticisms by revisionist historians about the lack of a plan to use famine as a political tool. For instance, in their monograph on the 1931–1933 Soviet famine Davies and Wheatcroft explore resolutions about grain relief yet fail to disclose the resolutions that led to the crisis which necessitated this relief, or how meager relief was distributed mainly to activists.[3] Crucially, the author argues that the war scare cannot possibly be used to justify the confiscation of every kind of food (Molotov drafted the legislation about fines in lieu of grain with Stalin's approval).

If Kul´chyts´kyi answered the question of "why" by showing the possible motivations of the Soviet leadership, his answer to "how" does not go beyond the Communist Party's resolutions and operations (searches, confiscations, and physical blockades). The oblique mention that "the underprivileged were starving and did not have to be persuaded to engage in these activities" does not explain the mechanism on the

3. See R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933*, The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia 5 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

ground that had been established before the famine. Neither would Stalin be allowed "to do anything he wanted with the citizenry" without the role of the modern state in the genocide, as explored by Primo Levi, nor could the policy of indigenization be explained only as a result of the Bolsheviks' "politicizing ethnicity" (p. 109). Whereas Graziosi sees the Holodomor as the harbinger of the Soviet demise, Kul´chyts´kyi regards it as a successful preemption of the collapse of the USSR coming from Ukraine.

In the last chapter, "How the Holodomor Can Be Integrated into Our Understanding of Genocide" (pp. 112–26), Norman M. Naimark argues that approaching the Holodomor as genocide is beneficial both for its study and that of genocides, especially from a comparative perspective. Naimark's analysis of communist genocides vis-à-vis the Holodomor is enlightening. Furthermore, his suggestion to read the memoirs of genocide survivors in tandem with accounts of the Holodomor is rewarding. Like Roman Serbyn, Naimark understands the Holodomor as a concurrent attack on the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the Ukrainian language, and Ukrainian culture, along with the 1932–1933 famine in Ukraine. The author explores Raphael Lemkin's concept of genocide, particularly his understanding of the Holodomor as a four-pronged attempted destruction of the Ukrainian nation: its intellectuals, the clergy, the peasantry, and the dispersal of its population. As if in answer to the question of where the victims of other ethnic backgrounds fit within the ethnic aspect of the definition of the Holodomor as genocide, Naimark notes the porous nature of group identity in genocidal situations and warns against using ethnic criteria as the sole measure of genocide (p. 121). Overall, this collection is a strong starting point for anyone looking for an overview of Holodomor scholarship or pondering the impact of the Holodomor on Soviet or Ukrainian history.

What has changed in Holodomor studies since the publication of the volume? First, the social and cultural history of the famine continues to evolve in many promising directions, including gender;[4] rank-

4. Oksana Kis, "Defying Death: Women's Experience of the Holodomor, 1932–1933," *Aspasia* 7 (2013): 42–67; Victoria Malko, "Gender Aspects in the Holodomor Studies," in *Women and the Holodomor-Genocide: Victims, Survivors, Perpetrators*, ed. Victoria A. Malko (Fresno: The Press at California State University, 2019), 1–15; Daria Mattingly, "[Extra]ordinary Women: Female Perpetrators of the Holodomor," in Malko, *Women and the Holodomor-Genocide*, 51–89; Mattingly's article on sexual violence during the Holodomor is forthcoming.

and-file perpetrators;[5] cannibalism;[6] the role of professionals such as doctors[7] and teachers,[8] as well as institutions like KNS (Committees of Poor Peasants);[9] Torgsin ("Trade with Foreigners," a chain of state-run shops);[10] children's experiences of the famine;[11] cultural memory of the

5. Stepan Drovoziuk, "Povedinka sil´s´kykh aktyvistiv pid chas sutsil´noï kolektyvizatsiï ta holodomoru ukraïns´koho narodu (1932–1933 rr.)," *Istoriia Ukraïny: Malovidomi imena, podiï, fakty; Zbirnyk statei*, vyp. 34 (Kyiv: Instytut istoriï Ukraïny NAN Ukraïny, 2007), 67–79; Olena Lysenko, "Typolohiia povedinky sil´s´kykh aktyvistiv u konteksti zdiisnennia sutsil´noï kolektyvizatsiï sil´s´koho hospodarstva v Ukraïni (pochatok 1930-kh rr.)," in *Istoriia Ukraïny: Malovidomi imena, podiï, fakty*, vyp. 36 (Kyiv: Instytut istoriï Ukraïny NAN Ukraïny, 2010), 189–203; Daria Mattingly, "Idle, Drunk and Good for Nothing: Cultural Memory of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the 1932–33 Famine in Ukraine," in *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*, ed. Anna Wylegała and Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 19–48.

6. Olga Bertelsen, "Women at Sites of Mass Starvation: Ukraine, 1932–1933," in Malko, *Women and the Holodomor-Genocide*, 33–49.

7. Oksana Vynnyk, a research associate at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, is researching professional ethics and the role of medical personnel during the Holodomor. See Oksana Vynnyk, "Professional Ethics, Medical Experts and the Famine of 1932–1933 in Soviet Ukraine," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 17 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2247760.

8. Victoria A. Malko, *The Ukrainian Intelligentsia and Genocide: The Struggle for History, Language, and Culture in the 1920s and 1930s* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2021).

9. E. E. Levandovs´ka, "Rol´ komitetiv nezamozhnykh selian u vprovadzhenni radians´koï polityky na seli (1920–1933 rr.)," *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakul´tetu Zaporiz´koho natsional´noho universytetu*, no. 37 (2013): 118–23, here 122.

10. Mykola Horokh, *Zoloto—derzhavi! Torhsyn u radians´kii Ukraïni, 1931–1936* (Kyiv: HREC Press, 2020).

11. Iryna Skubii, a PhD graduate of Queen's University, Canada, has researched the material world of Ukrainian children during the Holodomor. See Iryna Skubii, "Goods for the Smallest Citizens: Consumption, Spaces, and the Material World of Toys in Early Soviet Ukraine," *Childhood in the Past* 14, no. 1 (2021): 55–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/17585716.2021.1898733.

Holodomor;[12] memorialization of the famine;[13] and the experience of ethnic minorities or refugees from the Ukrainian republic.[14] Researchers are going outside area studies and using interdisciplinary approaches.

Second, almost thirty years after *The Harvest of Sorrow*, Anne Applebaum published a pivotal book on the Holodomor, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (2017). She places the famine and simultaneous repressions against the Ukrainian intelligentsia, clergy, and political elite within a broader historical context of the Ukrainian struggle for independence. Its potent arguments on the political nature of the famine supported by now-available archival materials, *Red Famine* received positive reviews, reached readers across the globe,[15] and reinforced public and academic interest in the topic. While a considerable amount of attention in Holodomor studies remains dedicated to the politicized questions of legal definition and the number of victims, the scholarship is changing rapidly. Such developments since the publication of this volume necessitate another review of the state of the field. Until then, *Contextualizing the Holodomor* remains a comprehensive analysis for anyone who seeks to become acquainted with Holodomor studies.

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12. Charley Boerman of the Radbound Institute for Culture and History is currently working on her dissertation provisionally entitled "Framing Famines: Memory, Museums, and Visual Culture," in which she explores, among other things, cinematic representations of the Holodomor; Volodymyr Dibrova, "The Holodomor and the Contemporary Ukrainian Writer," in *After the Holodomor: The Enduring Impact of the Great Famine on Ukraine*, ed. Andrea Graziosi, Lubomyr A. Hajda, and Halyna Hryn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2013), 265–76; on common tropes in the representation of rank-and-file perpetrators in Ukrainian novels, plays, poetry, and film, see Daria Mattingly, "No Novel for Ordinary Men? Representation of the Rank-and-File Perpetrators of the Holodomor in Ukrainian Novels," *Euxeinos: Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region* 9, no. 27 (August 2019): 12–39.

13. Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek, "The Lieux de Mémoire of the Holodomor in the Cultural Landscape of Modern Ukraine," in Wylegała and Głowacka-Grajper, *Burden of the Past*, 49–73; Daria Mattingly, "Enforcing National Memory, Remembering Famine's Victims: The National Museum 'Holodomor Victims Memorial,'" in *Museums of Communism: New Memory Sites in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Stephen M. Norris (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 189–213.

14. Andreea Kaltenbrunner of the Institute of East European History at the University of Vienna is currently researching peasants who tried to escape the Holodomor by crossing the Dniester River between Soviet Ukraine and Romania.

15. As of September 2021, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* has been translated into more than fifteen languages and was awarded the Lionel Gelber Prize and the Pol Roger Duff Cooper Prize in 2018.