

## Mapping the Great Famine

One of the most insightful and moving eyewitness accounts of the Holodomor, or the Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33, was written by Oleksandra Radchenko, a teacher in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine. In her diary, which was confiscated by Stalin’s secret police and landed the author in the Gulag for ten long years, the 36-year-old teacher recorded not only what she saw around her but also what she thought about the tragedy unfolding before her eyes.

“I am so afraid of hunger; I’m afraid for the children,” wrote Radchenko, who had three young daughters, in February 1932. “May God protect us and have mercy on us. It would not be so offensive if it were due to a bad harvest, but they have taken away the grain and created an artificial famine.” That year she wrote about the starvation and suffering of her neighbors and acquaintances but recorded no deaths from hunger. It all changed in January 1933, when she encountered the first corpse of a famine victim on the road leading to her home. By the spring of 1933, she was regularly reporting mass deaths from starvation. “People are dying,” wrote Radchenko in her entry for May 16, 1933, “...they say that whole villages have died in southern Ukraine.”<sup>1</sup>

Was Radchenko’s story unique? Did people all over Ukraine indeed suffer from starvation in 1932 and then start dying en masse in 1933? Which areas of Ukraine were most affected? Was there a north-south divide, as the diary suggests, and, if so, did people suffer (and die) more in the south than in the north? Were there more deaths in the villages than in towns and cities? Were small towns affected? Did ethnicity matter? These are the core questions that *Mapa*, the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute’s Digital Map of Ukraine Project is attempting to answer by developing a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based Digital Atlas of the Holodomor. The maps included in the atlas are based on a newly created and growing database that makes it possible to link various levels of spatial analysis ranging from the raion to that of the Soviet Ukraine as a whole and to compare the demographic, economic, environmental, and political indicators in relation to a given administrative unit.

Most of the questions we are trying to answer with the help of the GIS database are informed by the vast literature on the Great Famine, with its focus on the causes of mass death from starvation, including environmental factors, levels of collectivization and, last but not least, nationality policy. By measuring the “footprint” of the Great Famine, we also seek to understand

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<sup>1</sup> “Z shchodennyka vchytel'ky O. Radchenko,” in *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: dokumenty i materialy*, ed. Ruslan Pyrih (Kyiv, 2007), pp. 1011–26.

the dynamics of the famine, the intentions of the authorities, the fate of the survivors, and the consequences of mass starvation.<sup>2</sup>

The scope of our research has been determined by the availability of geo-referenced maps and “mappable” data. We have been working with a variety of maps of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic in its interwar borders prepared with the assistance of cartographers at Kartohrafiia Publishers in Ukraine, led by Rostyslav Sossa. Those maps served as a basis for the maps prepared specifically for this website by the chief cartographer of the Digital Atlas of Ukraine, Gennadi Poberezhny, and its IT director, Kostyantyn Bondarenko. They reflect administrative changes in Ukraine’s external and internal borders, allowing us to compare the results of the 1926 and 1939 population censuses with data from the famine years of 1932–33. These maps help us answer many important questions, but they have also imposed limitations on our research, as they do not go beyond the raion level. At the current stage of the project, our

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<sup>2</sup> For a variety of approaches to the study of the Great Ukrainian Famine, see S. Maksudov, “Losses Suffered by the Population of the USSR, 1918–1958,” in *The Samizdat Register II*, ed. R. Medvedev (London and New York, 1981); Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror–Famine* (New York and Edmonton, 1986); Mark B. Tauger, “The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1933,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 70–89; Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1918–1934* (Cambridge, Mass, 1996); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2001); *Komandyry velykoho holodu: Poïzdky V. Molotova i L. Kahanovycha v Ukraïnu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1932–1933 rr.*, ed. Valerii Vasyl’iev and Iurii Shapoval (Kyiv, 2001); J. Vallin, F. Meslé, S. Adamets, and S. Pyrozhev, “A New Estimate of Ukrainian Population Losses during the Crisis of the 1930s and 1940s,” *Population Studies* 56, no. 3 (November 2002); Mark Tauger, *Natural Disasters and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1933*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies (Pittsburgh, 2001); Stanislav Kul’chyts’kyi, *Demohrafichni naslidky Holodomoru 1933 r. v Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 2003); Stephen Wheatcroft, “Towards Explaining the Soviet Famine of 1931–3: Political and Natural Factors in Perspective,” *Food and Foodways* 12, nos. 2–3 (2004): 107–36; R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–33* (Basingstoke, 2004); Michael Ellman, “The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1934,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 6 (September 2005); Roman Serbyn, “The Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33 as Genocide in the Light of the UN Convention of 1948,” *Ukrainian Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2006): 181–94; *Hunger by Design: The Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context*, ed. Halyna Hryn (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); Hiroaki Kuromiya, “The Soviet Famine of 1932–33 Reconsidered,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 4 (2008): 663–75; V. V. Kondrashin, *Golod 1932–33 godov. Tragediia rossiiskoi derevni* (Moscow, 2008); N. A. Ivnickii, *Golod 1932–33 godov v SSSR: Ukraina, Kazakhstan, Povolzh’e, Tsentral’no-Chernozemnaia oblast’, Zapadnaia Sibir’, Ural* (Moscow, 2009); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010); Norman Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton, N.J., 2010); Stanislav Kul’chitskii [Kul’chyts’kyi], “Ukrainskii Golodomor kak genotsid,” in *Sovremennaia rossiisko-ukrainskaia istoriografiia goloda 1932–33 gg. v SSSR*, ed. V. V. Kondrashin (Moscow, 2011), pp. 217–316. For a historiographic survey of recent discussions on the Great Ukrainian famine, see Liudmyla Grynevych, “The Present State of Ukrainian Historiography on the Holodomor and Prospects for Its Development,” *Harriman Review* 16, no. 2 (2008): 10–20; Heorhii Kas’ianov, *Danse macabre. Holod 1932–33 rokiv u politytsi, masovii svidomosti ta istorohrafii (1980-ti — pochatok 2000-ki)* (Kyiv, 2010).

maps “stop” at the boundaries of Soviet Ukraine and do not include the neighboring areas of Russia, Belarus, Poland, and Romania, thereby restricting our focus to questions that could be answered within the boundaries of interwar Soviet Ukraine.

Another set of limitations we had to face was the absence of reliable data on population losses in Ukraine at the oblast and raion levels. Such data was produced specifically for the purposes of this project by a group of demographers including Oleh Wolowyna (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Omelian Rudnytsky, Natalia Levchuk, Pavlo Shevchuk, and Alla Savchuk (all four from the Institute for Demography and Social Studies in Kyiv). Joseph Livesey (University of New York) collected and systematized data on government policies. Heorhii Papakin (Institute of History, Kyiv) collected and systematized data on blacklisted communities. Hennadii Yefymenko (Institute of History, Kyiv) collected and systematized data on collectivization in Ukraine. Tetiana Boriak (National Academy of Cadres in Culture and Arts, Kyiv) systematized data based on the testimonies of Famine survivors. The map of the 1928 famine is based on data collected by Liudmyla Hrynevych (Institute of History, Kyiv). Hennadii Boriak (Institute of History, Kyiv) provided intellectual leadership for the research projects conducted in Ukraine in conjunction with the Digital Atlas of Ukraine project. Alexander Babyonyshev (Sergei Maksudov), an associate of the Davis Center at Harvard, advised our project on more than one occasion. Research on the project has been supported by the Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University and the Ukrainian Studies Fund.<sup>3</sup>

Not all the results of our research to date have materialized in the form of GIS-based maps. Work is still continuing on many of the projects mentioned above. The maps we offer today, presented in the Map Gallery, reflect the first results of our research. All these maps are also available as parts of the interactive map of the Great Famine, which offers everyone using the website an opportunity not only to check the accuracy of our hypotheses but also to formulate his or her own questions and conduct independent research by comparing different layers of the map. What follows is the first attempt to make sense of the data we have collected and the maps we have produced on its basis. It is presented in the form of a chronological narrative that includes references to individual maps, but is not and should not be regarded as an attempt at a comprehensive interpretation of the history of the Great Famine. Most of the archival documents used to discuss the meaning of the maps come from the most comprehensive collection of the documents of the Great Famine, published in 2007 by Ruslan Pyrih.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the Digital Atlas of the Holodomor as a collaborative project, see Hennadii Boriak and Rostyslav Sossa, “GIS-Atlas Holodomoru v Ukraïni 1932–33 rr.,” in *Natsional'ne kartohrafovannia: stan, problemy ta perspektyvy rozvytku*, vyp. 5 (Kyiv, 2012), pp. 30–34.

<sup>4</sup> *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: dokumenty i materialy* (cited hereafter as *Holodomor*).

## The Geography of Death

Contemporary accounts indicate that Oleksandra Radchenko, whose diary was cited above, lived in one of the regions of Ukraine most severely affected by the Famine of 1932–33, even though the rumor she recorded in her diary designated southern Ukraine as a region that suffered even more than her own. The rumor made perfect sense, given the experience of people who lived through the Revolution and the first years of Soviet rule. Southern Ukraine, administratively divided in the early 1930s into the Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk (Stalino) oblasts (regions), had been the breadbasket of the Russian Empire and, subsequently, of the Soviet Union. Black earth made those lands especially fertile for growing grain in general and wheat in particular. But the Ukrainian steppe was also known for its occasionally harsh winters and, most of all, for the severe droughts that often afflicted the region, causing poor harvests, starvation, and sometimes famine.<sup>5</sup>

The famine of 1921–23 affected the southern parts of the republic, as did the famine of 1928, which was caused by a severe winter, massive loss of winter crops, and Soviet agricultural mismanagement (see Map Gallery, *The Famines of the 1920s*, nos. 2 and 3). Decades later, the famine of 1946–47 also ravaged the south more than any other part of Ukraine. While conditions of revolution and civil war and, later, government policies contributed to all three famines, the underlying factors were poor weather conditions and the resulting poor harvests in the black-earth steppe regions of Ukraine. For those who had lived through or knew of the famines of 1921–23 and 1928, it would be only natural to assume in 1932–33 that whatever was happening in Kharkiv and other central regions of Ukraine, the situation was much worse in the south.<sup>6</sup>

This is not the picture that emerges from the demographic data produced by our project. The traditional view of the geographic extent of the Famine of 1932–33, suggesting the south as the area of Ukraine most severely affected, has also recently been challenged by Stephen G. Wheatcroft and requires reevaluation in light of new demographic data. According to the estimates of direct losses, or total excess deaths, expressed as the difference between actual and “normal” deaths during the non-crisis years, provided by the demographic group led by Oleh Wolowyna, the oblasts of Ukraine that suffered most were not the steppe regions traditionally

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<sup>5</sup> On the steppe areas of Ukraine, see V. Dokuchaev, *Nashi stepi prezhde i teper'* (St. Petersburg, 1892); A. Izmail'skii, *Kak vysokhla nasha step'* (Poltava, 1893); V. Pashchenko, “Stepnaia zona,” in *Priroda Ukrainskoi SSR: Landshafty* (Kyiv, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> On twentieth-century famines in Ukraine, see O. M. Veselova et al., *Holodomory v Ukraïni 1921–23, 1932–33, 1946–47. Zlochyny proty narodu* (Kyiv and New York, 2002); Liudmyla Hrynevych, *Khronika kolektyvizatsii ta Holodomoru v Ukraïni*, vol. 1, bk. 2, *Pochatok nadzvychainykh zakhodiv. Holod 1928–1929 rokiv* (Kyiv, 2012).

affected by drought but the boreal-steppe zones of central Ukraine encompassing Kharkiv and Kyiv oblasts.<sup>7</sup>

The direct losses caused by the Great Famine, have been estimated by Wolowyna and his group at 3.9 million deaths, with 0.6 million unborn children, bringing the overall toll of the famine to 4.5 million.<sup>8</sup> The losses amounted to 1.1 million in Kyiv oblast and 1.3 million in Kharkiv oblast in 1932–34. In southern Ukraine, by contrast, the estimates are considerably lower: 368,000 in Dnipropetrovsk oblast and 327,000 in Odesa oblast (Map Gallery, Demography: Population Losses, no. 1). The same applies if we look at direct losses calculated per thousand of population during all three years in which the effects of the Great Famine were felt (Map Gallery, Demography: Population Losses, nos. 2–4). In 1933, the year that accounts for more than 90 percent of all losses, there were approximately 184 deaths per thousand in Kyiv oblast and 176 per thousand in Kharkiv oblast, while in Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa oblasts the death toll was roughly half that level—96 per thousand in Odesa oblast and 90 per thousand in Dnipropetrovsk oblast.

A comparison of the maps of the 1921–23, 1928, and 1932–33 famines suggests that the Great Famine had a different “footprint” than the two previous famines and cannot be considered to have been caused primarily by environmental factors, or the same set of environmental factors. This cautious conclusion is supported by the recent research on the air temperature and precipitation in Ukraine in 1932–33.<sup>9</sup> Does this mean that environmental factors should be dismissed altogether in explaining the causes of the Great Famine? Our research demonstrates that it would be premature to do so. It also shows that environment did matter, but not in the same way as in the famines of the 1920s. On the eve and in the course of the Great Ukrainian Famine, environmental factors influenced human actions, particularly government policies that eventually contributed to the death toll.

### Collectivization: Steppe vs. Forest

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<sup>7</sup> See Stiven Uitkroft [Stephen G. Wheatcroft], “Pokazateli demograficheskogo krizisa v period goloda v SSSR,” pp. 89–90 < <http://rusarchives.ru/publication/wheatcroft-pokazateli-demografy-crizis-golod-sssr/>>; cf. FamineWeb—Comparative History of Famines, Map Gallery <http://www.famine.unimelb.edu.au/ussr33bd/ukraine33d.php>>.

<sup>8</sup> O. Rudnytskyi, N. Levchuk., O. Wolowyna and P. Shevchuk, “1932–33 Famine Losses in Ukraine within the Context of the Soviet Union,” in Curran D., Luciuk, L. and Newby, A., eds., *Famines in European Economic History: The Last Great European Famines Reconsidered*. (Abingdon, 2013) (Forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> “Kharakterystyka temperatury povitria ta kil’kosti opadiv na terytorii Ukrainy u 1932–1933 rr.” Set of preliminary maps prepared for the Digital Atlas of Holodomor Project by Kartohrafiia Publishers (Kyiv).

The first in the long list of the official policies that put the Famine into the category of “man-made” or, to use Oleksandra Radchenko’s term, “artificial” famines, was the collectivization drive—the centerpiece of Soviet agricultural policy, launched by the central authorities in mid-1929. The map of levels of collectivization (Map Gallery, Government Policy: Collectivization, no. 1) shows significant differences between individual regions of the republic located in different ecological zones. By the autumn of 1932, 85 percent of peasant households in the steppe oblasts of Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Donetsk had been collectivized, while the rest of the country lagged significantly behind—from 47 percent of households collectivized in Chernihiv oblast to 72 percent in Kharkiv oblast. In Kyiv oblast, 67 percent of households had been collectivized.

What accounts for that difference? The main reason for the higher level of collectivization in the steppe oblasts was a policy designed and introduced by Joseph Stalin and his aides in Moscow and implemented by the Ukrainian party authorities in Kharkiv. As shown on the map of ecological zones of Ukraine (Map Gallery, Ecology and Agriculture, no. 1), the country is divided into four zones—two steppe and two boreal zones. It was the dividing line between the boreal and steppe zones that turned out to be the most important one in the eyes of the Moscow authorities as they produced plans for the collectivization drive.

For purposes of official reporting on the progress of collectivization, Ukraine was divided into four areas—Steppe, Left Bank, Right Bank, and Polisia. With the introduction of oblast administrative divisions in February 1932, the Steppe region encompassed the Moldavian Autonomous Republic, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts. In July 1932 Donetsk (Stalino) oblast was established, including the Donbas industrial region and parts of Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv oblasts. The Left Bank included Kharkiv oblast and parts of Kyiv oblast, and the Right Bank took in most of Kyiv oblast and all of Vinnytsia oblast. Polisia was originally divided between Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts, but in October 1932 most of it was included in the newly created Chernihiv oblast.<sup>10</sup>

In the summer of 1930, the Central Committee of the all-Union Communist Party in Moscow decreed that the level of collectivization in the steppe areas of Ukraine was to reach the 65–75 percent mark by the end of the 1930–31 agricultural year. In other regions of Ukraine, a collectivization level of 35–45 percent was to be attained during the same period. The black-

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<sup>10</sup> “Iz informatsionnoi svodki no. 52 Kolkhoztsentra o khode kollektivizatsii v zernovykh raionakh v kontse sentiabria–nachale oktiabria 1930 g., 18 oktiabria 1930 g.,” in *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni. Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 2, *Noiabr' 1929–dekabr' 1930* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 670–76; “Povidomlennia informatsiinoi hrupy Narkomzemu USRR pro khid sutsil'noi kolektivizatsii i stavlennia do nei riznykh verstv selianstva. 17 bereznia 1931 r.,” in *Kolektivizatsiia i holod na Ukraïni, 1929–1933. Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kyiv, 1992), no. 139. (Between 1925 and 1930, the division of Ukraine into administrative zones was changed more than once, but steppe areas were always treated as a distinct zone or set of zones.)

earth zones of the southern Ukraine steppe were considered the principal grain-growing areas of the Soviet Union and were therefore supposed to be collectivized sooner and faster than the others in order to increase the grain yield for the government. As shown on the map of levels of collectivization (Map Gallery, Government Policy: Collectivization, no. 1), by the autumn of 1932, according to official statistics, the Ukrainian authorities overshot the 75 percent target introduced for the previous year and reached the 85 percent mark in some of the southern areas. The other regions lagged behind by at least 10 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Our maps show no direct correlation between the level of collectivization and the level of famine losses. If more people had died in collectivized areas than in less collectivized ones, the death toll would have been greatest in Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Donetsk oblasts; if the converse were true, then Chernihiv oblast would head the list. In fact, none of these oblasts suffered the greatest death toll. Nevertheless, one cannot discount the collectivization as one of the factors contributing to the death toll during the Great Famine. The collectivization drive had created a new political, social, and technological situation in Ukraine. The areas of the republic with higher levels of collectivization had higher numbers of tractors and agricultural machinery, and, because of their ability to produce significantly more grain than areas to the north, were closer to the central concerns of the authorities in Moscow than the rest of Ukraine.

Stalin and his aides in Moscow constantly focused their attention on southern Ukraine. In March 1932, additional tractors were sent specifically to the Ukrainian steppelands at the expense of quotas originally allocated by the Moscow authorities to Russia and Belarus. In April of that year, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Stanislav Kosior, and other Kharkiv officials visited the southern regions of the Ukrainian steppe oblasts to oversee the sowing campaign firsthand. After the trip, Kosior personally reported on his findings to Joseph Stalin. He was glad to note favorable weather conditions and a good crop of winter cereals; he also predicted better sowing than in the previous year.<sup>12</sup>

## The Onset of Famine

Famine began to claim lives in central Ukraine and in the tiny Moldavian Autonomous Republic in the winter of 1931–32, about the same time as Oleksandra Radchenko made her first mention of famine in her diary.

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<sup>11</sup> “O tempe kollektivizatsii i merakh pomoshchi gosudarstva kolkhoznomu stroitel'stvu, Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b), 5 ianvaria 1930 g.,” in *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniiakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1984), pp. 72–75; “Direktivy Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) po kontrol'nyim tsifram na 1930/31 g. o programme rekonstruktsii sel'skogo khoziaistva, 25 iulia 1930 g.,” in *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 2: 548.

<sup>12</sup> “Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro traktory dlia Ukraïny,” in *Holodomor*, p. 95; “Lyst sekretaria TsK KP(b)U S. Kosiora do sekretaria TsK VKP(b) Io. Stalina,” 26 April 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 127–30.

In 1932 there were 13.9 excess deaths per thousand of population in Kyiv oblast, 9.4 in the Moldavian Republic, and 7.8 in Kharkiv oblast (Map Gallery, Demography: Population Losses, no. 2). Judging by available official correspondence, the areas hardest hit were in southern Kyiv oblast, around the cities of Bila Tserkva and Uman. Stanislav Kosior singled out those regions in his April letter to Stalin. “What they now mainly expect from those regions are reports that there is nothing to eat; that they will not do any sowing,” wrote Kosior, referring to the expectations of his underlings in Kharkiv. Judging by the tone and content of the letter, Kosior found himself between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he subscribed to the official Moscow line that there was no famine in Ukraine; on the other, he was sending clear signals that famine had already struck.<sup>13</sup>

What were the reasons for the famine of 1932 in southwestern parts of Kyiv oblast? That area was known as the prime sugar-beet region and often referred to as such in official correspondence, with officials paying special attention not only to the grain harvest but also to the yield of beets and potatoes. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, in southern Kyiv oblast, wheat—the main object of desire of the authorities in Moscow and Kharkiv—accounted for anywhere between 20 and 40 percent of the land allocated for growing grain (Map Gallery, Ecology and Agriculture, no. 2). Still, the wheat and grain harvest was the top official concern, as in any other part of Ukraine. Moscow regarded the entire republic as a grain-producing area and assigned plan targets to the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (Ukrainian SSR) as a whole, not to any group of oblasts belonging to a particular ecological zone of Ukraine.

In June 1932 the Ukrainian premier, Vlas Chubar, sent Stalin a letter in which he presented his understanding of the causes of famine in southern Kyiv oblast. “The failure of legume and spring crops in those raions, above all, was not taken into account, and the insufficiency of those crops was made up with foodstuffs in order to fulfill the grain-requisition plans. Given the overall impossibility of fulfilling the grain-requisition plan, the basic reason for which was the lesser harvest in Ukraine as a whole and the colossal losses incurred during the harvest (a result of the weak economic organization of the collective farms and their utterly inadequate management from the raions and from the center), a system was put in place of confiscating all grain produced by individual farmers, including seed stocks, and almost complete confiscation of all produce from the collective farms.”<sup>14</sup>

What that meant in practice was described in the private diary of Dmytro Zavoloka, a party official in Kyiv oblast. “Grain was requisitioned right up to the top,” wrote Zavoloka in May 1932. “What they found in the granaries and the houses was taken, almost to the last pound (not everywhere, of course). And the poor or middle peasant or collective farmer often had his last pood [of grain] taken away because someone said that he was hiding kulak grain. In certain places grain requisition...turned into cruel treatment of the inhabitants, bordering on usurpation.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Lyst V. Chubaria do V. Molotova ta Io. Stalina,” 10 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 201.



Also, very often, they dekulakized ‘kulaks’ who were never kulaks at all. But they came up with any old reason and sold [the farm].”<sup>15</sup>

At the time Zavoloka wrote his assessment of the grain-requisition campaign and its consequences, the famine was reaping its harvest in the boreal-steppe oblasts of Ukraine. According to Vlas Chubar, those most severely affected by the famine were individual non-collectivized peasants whose property was requisitioned by the state for their failure to fulfill the procurement quotas. Next on the list were members of collective farms with large families. By March and April 1932, most villages had hundreds of people either starving or dying of hunger. In May 1932 a representative of the Kyiv Central Committee of the Communist Party picked seven villages in the Uman district at random. There were 216 registered deaths from hunger, and 686 individuals were expected to die in the next few days. In one of those villages, Horodnytsia, wrote the party official to Stanislav Kosior, “up to 100 have died; the daily death toll is 8–12; people are swollen with hunger on 100 of 600 homesteads.”<sup>16</sup>

The situation in neighboring Kharkiv oblast was little better. The Ukrainian party official Hryhorii Petrovsky wrote to Stalin in June 1932, after his tour of Kharkiv oblast, that “famine has engulfed a good part of the countryside.” He asked for assistance in the amount of two million poods of grain. “It will take a month or a month and a half for new grain to appear,” wrote Petrovsky. “This means that famine will intensify.” A month earlier, officials in Moscow and Kharkiv had received a letter whose authors claimed to represent five thousand peasants, mostly from Kharkiv oblast, who were trying to board trains heading out of Ukraine in order to get bread and feed their families. “We can sign this declaration with our own blood,” wrote the authors of the letter, “but we are not certain that there is any point in doing so. We inform you in all honesty that until the fruits and vegetables ripen, we are living on the refuse not needed as feed for the chickens, pigs, and dogs of Leningrad, Minsk, Homel, and other oblasts in the vicinity of Moscow.”<sup>17</sup>

In June 1932, when party officials in Kharkiv put together a list of raions most affected by the famine, Kyiv oblast led with ten raions, followed by two other boreal-steppe oblasts, Vinnytsia with eleven raions and Kharkiv with seven. The steppe oblast of Dnipropetrovsk had five such raions, while Odesa oblast did not make the list.<sup>18</sup> In the same month Vlas Chubar asked Moscow to send 1.5 million poods of grain to deal with the famine in the central regions of Ukraine. Stalin was opposed. “As I see it, Ukraine has been given more than its due,” he wrote to his right-hand man, Lazar Kaganovich. “There is no reason to give more grain and nowhere to

<sup>15</sup> “Lyst sekretaria Kyivs'koho obkomu partii M. Demchenka do S. Kosiora,” 6 April 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 115; “Zi shchodennyka partiinoho slidchoho Kyivs'koi oblasnoi kontrol'noi komisii D. Zavoloky,” *ibid.*, p. 1005.

<sup>16</sup> “Lyst upovnovazhenoho TsK KP(b)U A. Rychyts'koho do S. Kosiora,” 20 May 1932, in *Holodomor*, pp. 166–67; “Lyst V. Chubaria do V. Molotova ta Io. Stalina,” 10 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> “Postanova Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U,” 17 May 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 161; “Lyst H. Petrovskoho do V. Molotova ta Io. Stalina,” 10 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 198; “Dopovidna zapyska Kharkivs'koho obkomu partii TsK KP(b)U,” June 1932, in *Holodomor*, pp. 221–24.

<sup>18</sup> “Postanova TsK KP(b)U pro dodatkovu prodovol'chu dopomohu,” 21 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, 213–14.

get it from.”<sup>19</sup> Eventually, Ukraine got three hundred thousand poods of grain from all-Union reserves—one-fifth of the requested amount. That happened only because Chubar made a strong case that without such help, the harvest of sugar beets in Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts would be jeopardized.<sup>20</sup>

Why did the boreal-steppe areas of Ukraine suffer more from the famine of 1932 than the steppe areas to the south and the boreal areas to the north? If one trusts official assessments (in particular, Chubar’s letter to Stalin), those areas suffered from a poor harvest of certain crops in 1931, official efforts to make up those losses by increasing grain-procurement quotas and, last but not least, poor organization of labor on the newly established collective farms. It should be noted that the famine struck areas that did not normally lack food supplies. In an average year, the stored quantity of grain and potatoes in that part of Ukraine amounted to anywhere between 500 and 750 kilograms per person (Map Gallery, Ecology and Agriculture, no. 4). Both figures (of wheat production and storage of food supplies) were close to average for Ukraine.

### Procurement Quotas

The famine in the boreal-steppe area of Ukraine in the spring of 1932 could not but impair the capacity of the collective farms and individual peasants to conduct sowing for the next harvest. People who survived the famine did not have the seed stock, strength, or incentive to do what the authorities wanted them to do. Men unable to feed their families at home were going elsewhere in search of bread.

“There are almost no male collective farmers,” wrote the secretary of the Kyiv oblast party committee, M. Demchenko, about his visit to a village. “People say that they have gone to get food, heading for Belarus and Leningrad oblast.” Dmytro Zavoloka recorded the same situation in his diary. “It’s clear that after grain requisitions on that scale and such methods of work, the consequences have taken their toll,” he wrote in May 1932. “Large numbers of peasants, including a good part of those on the collective farms, have been left without grain. People have begun to flee en masse from their villages wherever their legs will carry them. Whole families are making their way to the farthest reaches of the republic just to avoid staying

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<sup>19</sup> “Vytiah is lysta Io. Stalina do L. Kahanovycha,” 15 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, 206.

<sup>20</sup> “Vytiah iz lysta L. Kahanovycha do Io. Stalina,” 16 June 1932, in *Holodomor*, pp. 207–8; On the policies and politics of famine relief, often rendered in the form of loans to be repaid with interest in the following year, see Tetiana Boriak, “Prodovol’cha dopomoha Kremlia iak instrument Holodomoru v Ukraïni,” in *Zlochyny totalitarnykh rezhymiv v Ukraïni: naukovyi ta osvittinii pohliad* (Kyiv, 2012), pp. 1–33.

in their own villages. They avoid work, abandon the land, kill the livestock, and let the farms go to waste.”<sup>21</sup>

There was little sowing in the regions most affected by the famine of 1932. By early May, only 18 percent of the planned sowing had been carried out in the Uman region of Kyiv oblast. In early June, Zavoloka recorded the results of sowing in Kyiv oblast as a whole: only 51 percent of the fields had been sown, and potatoes had been planted only on 56.7 percent of the land allocated for them. “The appropriate time has passed,” wrote Zavoloka. “Sowing after June 10 is hopeless for growing, and even more so for harvesting. This means that in Kyiv oblast alone, almost two million hectares, perhaps more, have been left unsown.” Zavoloka also wrote that with people going hungry, so were the animals. Between 40 and 50 percent of horses in the region did not survive the winter and spring of 1932. “The results of the spring sowing are more than catastrophic,” wrote this party functionary, who tried to reconcile his communist beliefs with party policies in the pages of his diary but ultimately found it impossible to do so.<sup>22</sup>

The Kharkiv government tried to deal with the situation by sending its plenipotentiaries, emergency food supplies, and seed stocks to the raions and villages that had been hardest hit. They also tried to reduce the sowing plan assigned to Ukraine by the Moscow government. They failed on all accounts. The plenipotentiaries could do little without food supplies, available assistance proved insufficient, and Moscow would not reduce the plan targets. On May 5 the Soviet deputy premier, Valerian Kuibyshev, demanded that the Ukrainian premier, Vlas Chubar, fulfill the centrally imposed plan and ensure the sowing of 11,331 thousand hectares instead of the 10,640 thousand hectares proposed by the Ukrainian authorities. While seed stocks for Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts were at the top of the agenda in Kharkiv, Moscow was concerned with sowing in the south. On May 29, Stalin personally intervened in the process of delivering seed stocks to Odesa oblast. “Take steps to ensure that the corn dispatched from Rostov is used as directed. We await your reply,” read Stalin’s telegram to Kosior and Chubar.<sup>23</sup>

The failure of the sowing campaign in Kyiv and other oblasts of the boreal-steppe region forced the Kharkiv authorities to ask Moscow to reduce the grain-procurement plan for the summer and autumn of 1932. They argued that 2.2 million hectares of land had been left unsown and that winter crops had perished on 0.8 million hectares. Moscow wanted Ukraine to deliver 356 million poods of grain that year. This constituted approximately 81 percent of the plan target assigned the previous year and 90 percent of the grain actually collected in 1931. As seen from Moscow, this probably seemed a reasonable reduction, but it took no account of the

<sup>21</sup> “Lyst sekretaria Kyivs'koho obkomu partii M. Demchenka do S. Kosiora,” 6 April 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 115; “Zi shchodennyka partiinoho slidchoho Kyivs'koï oblasnoï kontrol'noï komisii D. Zavoloky,” *ibid.*, p. 1005.

<sup>22</sup> “Zi shchodennyka partiinoho slidchoho Kyivs'koï oblasnoï kontrol'noï komisii D. Zavoloky,” in *Holodomor*, pp. 1006–8.

<sup>23</sup> “Postanova Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U,” 5 May 1932, in *Holodomor*, 149; “Lyst V. Kuibysheva do V. Chubaria,” 10 May 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 154–55; “Telehrama sekretaria TsK VKP(b) Io. Stalina do sekretaria TsK KP(b)U S. Kosiora i holovy RNK USRR V. Chubaria,” 29 May 1932, *ibid.*, p. 191.

consequences of the famine of 1932 and the disruption of the normal agricultural process by the forcible establishment of collective farms.<sup>24</sup>

Stalin's aides Viacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich, who visited Kharkiv in July, refused any further reductions. In the same month, the party authorities in Moscow imposed a further increase of 4–5 percent to the plan at the raion level in order to make up for potential losses caused by planning errors. It was up to the authorities in Kharkiv to distribute grain-procurement quotas among the Ukrainian regions. They decided to shield the areas most affected by the famine of 1932 and shift the burden of the plan more to the south.<sup>25</sup>

The major beneficiaries of the new scheme were Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts, as well as the small Moldavian Autonomous Republic in the south. Moldavia, which had been hit as hard as Kyiv oblast by the famine of the previous year, had its quota reduced to 46 percent of the grain turned over to the state in 1932. In Kyiv oblast, the new quota constituted 65 percent and, in Kharkiv oblast, 74 percent of the grain delivered the previous year. In Dnipropetrovsk, Vinnytsia, and Donetsk oblasts, the reductions amounted to anywhere between 5 and 12 percent, in keeping with the average for Ukraine as a whole. The major loser was Odesa oblast, whose quota was increased because of good prospects for a new harvest 34 percent greater than that of 1932.<sup>26</sup>

Given the shift of grain-procurement quotas toward the south, the Kharkiv authorities had to change their original plans for collective farms and individual peasants by increasing targets for the former and decreasing them for the latter. Southern Ukraine was much more collectivized than the boreal-steppe region, and the increase in procurement quotas for the south meant that collective farms would have to deliver more grain.<sup>27</sup>

The Ukrainian government kept lobbying throughout the summer for reduced quotas for areas affected by the famine of 1932. In August, when Stalin agreed to reduce the procurement target for Ukraine by 40 million poods (a reduction of approximately 11 percent), Kyiv oblast got a reduction of 11 million poods (close to 35 percent of its original plan), Vinnytsia oblast 9 million poods (23 percent), and Kharkiv oblast 8 million poods (11 percent). Dnipropetrovsk oblast's quota was reduced by 4 million poods (4.5 percent) and Odesa oblast's by 2 million poods (2.3 percent). The south was now expected to bear an even heavier burden. The exception to that general rule was the highly industrialized Donetsk oblast, where the plan target was

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<sup>24</sup> "Postanova RNK SRSR i TsK VKP(b) "Pro plan khlibozahotivel' z urozhaiu 1932 roku," 6 May 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 150.

<sup>25</sup> "Lyst V. Molotova i L. Kahanovycha do Io. Stalina," 6 July 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 231; "Postanova TsK VKP(b) pro orhanizatsiiu khlibozahotivel' u 1932 rotsi," *ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>26</sup> "Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro plan khlibozahotivel' v Ukraïni z urozhaiu 1932 roku," 21 July 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 260.

<sup>27</sup> "Lyst TsK KP(b)U i RNK USRR do TsK VKP(b) is prokhanniam perehlianuty rozbyvku khlibozahotivel' po sektorakh dlia Ukraïny," in *Holodomor*, pp. 255–56.

reduced by 5 million poods or 14 percent of the original plan. That decision was made in consultation between the Moscow and Kharkiv authorities.<sup>28</sup>

But the Ukrainian government could not indefinitely keep Kyiv oblast at the top of their priority list. In October 1932, when failure to meet quota targets forced Molotov and then Stalin to reduce the procurement plan for Ukraine by another 70 million poods (close to 20 percent of the original plan), Kharkiv oblast was the first in line asking for a reduction of its quota by 26.9 million poods (37 percent of the original plan). Kyiv oblast asked for a cut of 5.7 million poods (18 percent) and Vinnytsia oblast for one of 3.5 million poods (9 percent). It appeared that Kyiv oblast was still very much in trouble, while Kharkiv oblast had become a new leading disaster area. The major difference from August was that the southern oblasts began to ask for substantial reductions as well. Dnipropetrovsk oblast wanted its quota cut by 16.4 million poods (19 percent) and Odesa oblast by 14 million poods (16.6 percent).

The Kharkiv authorities were doing their best to reduce the procurement burden of the regions most affected by the famine of 1932, all of them in the boreal-steppe region of Ukraine. Through their efforts they eventually succeeded in reducing the plan quotas—a measure that most affected the central oblasts of Ukraine. But it soon turned out that the regions affected by the famine of 1932 needed not reduced quotas of grain production, but famine relief.<sup>29</sup>

### Grain Requisitions

For the peasants in the boreal-steppe zones who survived the requisitions of 1931 and the famine of 1932, the new requisition campaign brought new suffering and claimed more lives. In her diary entry for September 30, 1932, Oleksandra Radchenko recorded the story of a peasant from the village of Piatnytske in Kharkiv oblast who was detained by the authorities. They demanded grain, holding him captive the whole day and releasing him only late at night. “They held me for grain procurement,” the peasant told Radchenko, who met him as he returned home after nightfall. “Give, they say, but what is there to give? There are four sacks left; I have to do my sowing; I have to feed my children through the winter.” The peasant was clearly distressed. “His voice shook; he might have burst into tears at any minute,” wrote Radchenko in her diary. “Oh, poor, poor, tormented people.”

The authorities were not only going after grain. They took everything, treating all food supplies as potential “fines in kind” for unfulfilled procurement quotas. “[An] old man who

<sup>28</sup> “Lyst L. Kahanovycha ta V. Kuibysheva do Io. Stalina ta V. Molotova,” 24 August 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 298; “Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro plan khlibozahotivel' v USRR,” 28 August 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 303–4.

<sup>29</sup> “Plan khlibozahotivel' po USRR na 1932 rik,” in *Holodomor*, p. 242; “Postanova Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U,” 30 October 1932, *ibid.*, p. 356.

works on a rabbit farm was ‘robbed by the authorities,’ as he reported,” recorded Radchenko in her entry for November 20, 1932. “That means they took all the cereal grains and fruit available. He has been dekulakized for two years and is almost indigent, just short of begging. He is 70 years old; the old woman is 65, and their crippled daughter lives in their apartment. And although they are destitute, everything they might have used to live on until February has been taken from them. The servant returned from leave...and cried out in despair, ‘What a horror this is. They are completely ruining individual farmers, taking everything away, going through trunks; cries and weeping everywhere. They shout, ‘Take the children, too,’ and there are five of them in the house.’”<sup>30</sup>

In the fall of 1932 Kharkiv and Kyiv oblasts led Ukrainian regions in fulfilling their quotas for turning over grain to government depositories. In early November 1932 the secretary of the Kharkiv Central Committee and also first secretary of Dnipropetrovsk oblast, Mendel Khataevich, asked his Kharkiv and Moscow bosses to allocate 10 percent of all merchandise to reward collective farms and individual peasants in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Donetsk oblasts.<sup>31</sup> The boreal-steppe oblasts maintained their leading position in the new year. By January 1, 1933, the collective farms of Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Vinnytsia oblasts were ahead of their southern neighbors in fulfilling their plans, showing results from 85 percent and up, with 100 percent fulfillment in Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts (Map Gallery, Government Policy: Procurement and Grain Loans, no. 1).<sup>32</sup>

The collective farms of the steppe oblasts and the newly created Chernihiv oblast in the Polisia region lagged behind in plan fulfillment by a margin of at least 10 percent. In the steppe regions, the failure to fulfill plan targets led eventually to their further reduction. In January 1933 their plan quotas were reduced by 12 million poods for Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa oblasts. For Kharkiv oblast, the quota was further reduced by 3.4 million poods; for Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts, it remained the same.<sup>33</sup>

There are a number of factors that might account for the “leadership” of the boreal-steppe oblasts in fulfilling plan targets. One such factor is that those oblasts benefited from major reductions to their procurement quotas. The final plan for Kyiv oblast reduced the quota by roughly half of the original amount of 31.2 million poods, while the original plan target itself constituted only 65 percent of the grain collected in 1931. The overall reduction was a whopping 68 percent. But the reduction of quotas is only one possible explanation of the “stellar” performance of Kyiv oblast in fulfilling its plan.

<sup>30</sup> “Z shchodennyka vchytel'ky O. Radchenko,” in *Holodomor*, pp. 1018–19.

<sup>31</sup> “Telehrama M. Khataievycha do S. Kosiora, V. Molotova, V. Chubaria,” 4 November 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 367.

<sup>32</sup> “Dyrektyva TsK VKP(b) obkomam, kraikomam ta TsK kompartii soiuznykh respublik,” 2 January 1933, in *Holodomor*, pp. 570–71.

<sup>33</sup> “Postanova TsK KP(b)U pro zmeshennia obsiahiv khlibozdachi,” 14 January 1933, in *Holodomor*, pp. 601–2.

Another is the ruthless efficiency of the local party machine in requisitioning grain from the peasantry. In the first months of 1933, when the party sent its people back to the villages in the boreal-steppe areas to collect grain for sowing, there was nothing to collect. If in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, which was lagging behind in the fulfillment of its procurement plan, party workers collected 40 percent of what was required, in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Vinnytsia oblasts that number was between 13.4 and 20.5 percent (Map Gallery, Government Policy, Procurement and Grain Loans, no. 1).<sup>34</sup>

The hypothesis that it was pressure from above, not just reduced quotas that accounted for the exceptional performance of the boreal-steppe areas in meeting plan targets finds corroboration in data on the black listed localities. In November 1932, the authorities introduced the policy, which called for cutting off supplies of merchandise to settlements that failed to fulfill their quotas. Kyiv oblast, which led in fulfillment of its grain quotas also led in terms of blacklisted villages. (Map Gallery, Government Policy: Blacklisted Localities, no. 1). Was that the result of the policies introduced by the Moscow government, the Kharkiv authorities, or their underlings in Kyiv?

Steven Wheatcroft has recently suggested that the abnormally high death rate in Kyiv oblast can be attributed to the actions of local officials, who imposed additional quotas on the peasantry in order to feed the cities of the oblast. Unlike the industrial centers in the east and south of the republic, the cities of Kyiv oblast received little or no food from the central depositories.<sup>35</sup> This hypothesis does not take into account the fact that not all areas of Kyiv oblast suffered equally, and that many raions of Kharkiv oblast suffered as much as the most affected areas of Kyiv oblast. In our analysis it is difficult to separate Kyiv oblast from the neighboring raions of Kharkiv and Vinnytsia oblasts.

The resistance to the government policies was the strongest in the boreal steppe areas of Ukraine. According to GPU (Main Political Directorate) data, in the first ten months of 1932 three hundred cases of peasant “terrorism,” a term used to denote violent resistance to the authorities, were registered in Kyiv oblast, 255 in Kharkiv oblast, and 197 in Vinnytsia oblast. Much larger oblasts in the south had rather modest totals: 58 cases in Donetsk oblast, 80 in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, and 170 in Odesa oblast. If one also counts the 80 cases registered on territories controlled by the border guard detachments, then the numbers for Vinnytsia and Kyiv oblasts, bordering Poland and Romania, should be increased even further. That tendency continued in the remaining months of 1932 and early 1933. Vinnytsia oblast had 98 cases of “terrorism,” Kharkiv oblast 84, Chernihiv oblast 87, and Kyiv oblast 63. During the same

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<sup>34</sup> “Telehrama M. Khataievycha do S. Kosiora, V. Molotova, V. Chubaria,” 4 November 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 367.

<sup>35</sup> Uitkroft, “Pokazateli demograficheskogo krizisa v period goloda v SSSR,” pp. 89–90.

months, there were only 16 cases registered in Donetsk oblast, 26 in Odesa oblast, and 47 in Dnipropetrovsk oblast.<sup>36</sup>

### The Politics of Assistance

On January 30, 1933, Oleksandra Radchenko recorded the first death from hunger that she saw with her own eyes in the environs of the village called today Velyka Babka. “On the way to Zarozhne, by the road itself, we saw a dead old man, ragged and thin. There were no boots on him. Obviously, he fell and froze to death or died immediately, and somebody took the boots. On the way back, we saw the same old man again. Nobody needs him.” The famine soon decimated the population of Velyka Babka. In a mere three days, between April 24 and 26, twenty-two people died of hunger in that village.<sup>37</sup>

The first official reports on the spread of the new famine began to arrive in Kharkiv in early February 1933. Most of them pertained to the boreal-steppe oblasts, especially Kyiv and Vinnytsia. But the first grain that Ukraine was allowed to take in order to cope with widespread starvation and growing famine did not go to Kyiv and Vinnytsia but to Odesa and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts. Kyiv and the boreal-steppe areas were overlooked by the center, which controlled grain depositories and supplies and, as the crisis mounted, decided who would live or die, depending on location. Moscow needed peasants to live, or least die at a slower rate, in areas that produced most grain—a policy that benefited southern Ukraine.

On February 7, 1933, the Politburo in Moscow decreed that Odesa and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts could use two hundred thousand poods of rye each to deal with the food shortages. On February 17, the party authorities in Kharkiv decreed that additional supplies of grain and flour be sent to the industrial Donetsk oblast. The same “south first” policy continued in the second half of February. On February 18, the Moscow Politburo decreed the release of a million poods of grain to Dnipropetrovsk oblast, 0.8 million to Odesa oblast, and 0.3 million to Kharkiv oblast.<sup>38</sup>

When it comes to Dnipropetrovsk oblast, the resolution corresponded to GPU statistics for March 1933, which indicated that 1,700 people had died of hunger there—more than in all other oblasts of Ukraine combined. In Kyiv oblast, according to GPU statistics, only 417 people

<sup>36</sup> “Analiz tsyfrovyykh danykh pro operatyvnu robotu orhaniv DPU USRR,” 8 December 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 465; “Vytiah zi zvituu DPU USRR pro borot'bu z teroryzmom,” January 1933, *ibid.*, p. 631.

<sup>37</sup> “Z shchodennyka vchytel'ky O. Radchenko,” in *Holodomor*, pp. 1022, 1024–25.

<sup>38</sup> “Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro vidpusk zerna Dnipropetrovs'kii oblasti,” 7 February 1933, in *Holodomor*, p. 663; “Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro vidpusk zerna Odes'kii oblasti,” 7 February, 1933, *ibid.*; “Postanova TsK KP(b)U pro stan khlibopostachannia Donbasu,” 17 February 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 689–90; “Vidomosti TsK KP(b)U pro vydilennia prodovol'choi dopomohy,” on or after 27 March 1933, *ibid.*, p. 795.



had died by that time. While clearly inaccurate, GPU statistics can explain Moscow's particular attention to Dnipropetrovsk oblast, but they cannot do so in the cases of Odesa and Kharkiv oblasts. According to the same GPU reports, 37 people died of hunger in Kharkiv oblast and 11 in Odesa oblast.<sup>39</sup>

As the Union government focused its attention on the south, it was left to the Kharkiv authorities to take care of the rest of the republic. But the resources at the disposal of the Ukrainian government were minuscule compared to those available in the center. By mid-March party authorities in Kharkiv were overwhelmed with reports of skyrocketing mortality in Kyiv oblast. "We have hunger and its consequences in 32–34 raions. In 16 raions we have 123 registered cases of cannibalism and eating of corpses (including 64 cases of cannibalism)," read one of the reports received by the Kharkiv Central Committee. "...On the streets of Kyiv, the following numbers of corpses were picked up: January, 400; February, 518; in the first ten days of March, 249. In the most recent days, an average of 100 children [per day] have been left [in the city] by their parents." In February 1933, the Kharkiv authorities gave Kyiv oblast 60,000 poods of grain, followed by 80,000 in early March.<sup>40</sup>

On March 17, 1933, the Central Committee in Kharkiv issued a special resolution on means of combating the famine crisis in Kyiv oblast. An appeal was made to Moscow. This time the Moscow authorities reacted and allowed six million poods of grain to be taken from the central depositories to deal with the crisis. This famine relief measure had its effect. According to Oleh Wolowyna's research, the relative excess death factor (the number of excess deaths in an area or population, divided by relative total population) for Kyiv oblast fell between mid-March and mid-May 1933 by roughly 30 points, from 80 to 53. But the impact was temporary. In May the relative excess death factor began to rise again, exceeded the March peak by mid-June 1933, and reached 85 points.<sup>41</sup>

In assessing the impact of government assistance, often offered in the form of loans with interest, on the situation on the ground in the early spring of 1933, it is important to keep in mind that the rural population of Kyiv oblast was almost twice as large as that of Dnipropetrovsk oblast. There were close to 5 million people living in rural areas of Kyiv oblast, and 2.8 million in Dnipropetrovsk oblast.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> "Dovidka DPU USRR," 12 March 1933, in *Holodomor*, p. 756.

<sup>40</sup> "Zapyska Narkomzemu USRR TsK KP(b)U," 14 March 1933, in *Holodomor*, p. 765.

<sup>41</sup> "Postanova Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U pro zakhody, spriamovani na podolannia holodu v Kyivs'kii oblasti," 17 March 1933, in *Holodomor*, 775–78; Oleh Wolowyna, "Seasonal Distribution of 1932–34 Famine Losses in Ukraine," paper prepared for an international conference, "Holod v Ukraïni u pershii polovyni XX stolittia: prychny i naslidky" (Kyiv, November 20–21, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> In early 1933 the rural population of Ukraine numbered 23.9 million. Of that number, Kyiv oblast accounted for 4.95 million, Kharkiv 4.76 million, Vinnytsia 4.10 million, Dnipropetrovsk 2.82 million, Chernihiv 2.54 million, Odesa 2.29 million, Donetsk 1.98 million, and the Moldavian Autonomous Republic 0.52 million.

The Kyiv crisis of March 1933 did not change the Union government's policy of offering assistance first and foremost to the main grain-producing oblasts in the south. On May 28, 1933, the Moscow Politburo adopted a resolution allowing the release of 0.3 million poods of grain each to Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa oblasts. Donetsk oblast got 0.1 million, the others nothing at all. It was only after a special appeal of the Ukrainian leadership to Stalin that Moscow agreed to give a fraction of the assistance it had provided to the steppe oblasts to those located in the boreal-steppe zone. Moscow allowed the provision of 200,000 poods of rye to alleviate famine in Kharkiv oblast, 130,000 poods each in Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts, and 30,000 poods in Chernihiv oblast. For Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts, Moscow cut the amount requested by the Kharkiv authorities by 15,000 poods (Map Gallery, Government Policies: Procurement and Grain Loans, no. 1).

This could not but have a direct impact on the worsening situation on the ground. In the following month, the relative excess death factor reached its peak in the boreal-steppe oblasts, approaching 90 in Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts, reaching 100 in Kharkiv oblast, and exceeding the 100 mark in Chernihiv—the oblast that received less assistance than any other in Ukraine. The difference between boreal-steppe oblasts and those in the steppe zone could not have been more profound. The relative excess death factor in Odesa oblast at that time was 50, while Dnipropetrovsk oblast had a factor of 30 and Donetsk oblast a factor of 15.<sup>43</sup>

The central government's policies favoring the steppe oblasts continued in the aftermath of the famine. In 1933 the Moscow authorities decreed the resettlement of the famine-ravaged areas of Ukraine by peasant families from Russia and Belarus. They wanted 6,679 households to go to Dnipropetrovsk oblast; 6,750 to Odesa; 4,800 to Kharkiv; and 3,527 to Donetsk. The southern oblasts of Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa got the most attention from the center. The same pattern applied to horses shipped to Ukraine from other parts of the Soviet Union. Dnipropetrovsk oblast got 5,719 head of livestock, Odesa 6,812, and Kharkiv 2,329. Moscow's neglect of the non-grain-producing areas of Ukraine during the spring and early summer of 1933 was among the factors that contributed to the higher than average death rate in the forest-steppe regions of the republic.<sup>44</sup>

### Beyond the Forest-Steppe Divide

The dividing line between the boreal and steppe areas of Ukraine played an important role in defining the Moscow authorities' approach to planning their agricultural policies in Ukraine. As

<sup>43</sup> "Lyst S. Kosiora ta V. Chubaria do Io. Stalina," 29 May 1933, in *Holodomor*, p. 852; "Postanova Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) pro prodovol'chu pozyku Ukraïni," 30 May 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 857–8; Wolowyna, "Seasonal Distribution of 1932–34 Famine Losses in Ukraine."

<sup>44</sup> "Svodnaia vedomost' ob otpravlenii èshelonov s pereselentsami na Ukrainu," 28 December 1933, in *Holodomor*, p. 993.

argued above, those policies contributed to the significantly higher death rate in the two boreal-steppe oblasts of Ukraine, Kyiv and Kharkiv. What that line does not explain is the difference in the death rate between those two oblasts and the boreal regions of Ukraine, which included the area north of Kyiv oblast and the entire Chernihiv oblast, where the death rate was significantly lower than in the boreal-steppe areas. In Chernihiv oblast in 1933, the death rate was 75.8 per thousand of population, compared with 183.5 deaths per thousand of population in Kyiv oblast (Map Gallery, Demography, Famine Losses, Map no. 3).

The map of losses by raion in 1933 (Map Gallery, Demography: Famine Losses, no. 3) leaves no doubt that while the sources we consulted give no indication that the line between the boreal and boreal-steppe areas mattered in the formulation of government policy, it clearly affected the inhabitants' chances of survival. Here we are dealing with a situation in which environment could have a direct impact, without the intermediacy of the political factor. One possible explanation of that fact could be the inhabitants' ability to feed and maintain domestic animals in the wooded areas at the time of the famine, as well as their ability to survive on forest products that could not be confiscated by the authorities. Further research is needed to test these hypotheses.

The boreal-steppe divide also does not suffice to explain the lower death rate in Vinnytsia oblast as compared with Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts, which lay within the boundaries of the same ecological zone. The raion data indicates that some raions of Vinnytsia oblast suffered the same level of excess deaths as the boreal-steppe raions of Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts, but all those raions were in the central and eastern parts of the oblast. The western and southwestern parts, which happened to be closest to the Soviet-Polish and Soviet-Romanian border, suffered significantly less.

An answer to this puzzle has been suggested by recent research on the history of the Soviet border areas, which indicates that Moscow paid special attention to them, supplying them with larger quantities of consumer products than other regions of the Soviet Union. Back in 1930 whole villages in the border areas had attempted to cross the Soviet-Polish border and take refuge from the horror of collectivization in neighboring Poland. Further research into government policies and strategies of survival in the border regions of Ukraine would be required, but there is little doubt that the death rate in those areas was lower than in the central and eastern parts of Vinnytsia oblast—a factor that influenced the overall death rate in the oblast during the famine.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Andrey Shlyakhter's chapter on "Borderness and Famine: Why Did Fewer People Starve to Death in Soviet Ukraine's Western Border Districts during the *Holodomor*, 1932–33?" in his University of Chicago dissertation (forthcoming), "Smugglers and Soviets: Contraband Trade, the Soviet Struggle against It, and the Making of the Soviet Border Strip, 1917–1939." On the peasant uprisings in the border areas and Ukrainian peasants fleeing across the border to Poland in 1930, see Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet*

Last but not least, the boreal-steppe divide does not explain differences in the death rate between the three steppe oblasts—Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa. Donetsk oblast suffered least, Odesa oblast most. The high level of industrialization of Donetsk oblast as compared with Odesa oblast can partly explain this phenomenon: starving peasants could find employment and survive in the major industrial centers that had centralized food supplies. Moreover, one should not discount the Moscow authorities' differential treatment of individual oblasts with regard to famine relief.

This factor becomes especially apparent if one compares Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa oblasts—the two main grain-producing areas of Ukraine. Through the spring of 1933, Dnipropetrovsk oblast emerged as the main recipient of Moscow's assistance in the south, obtaining one million poods in February. Odesa oblast received 0.8 million poods of grain. Between mid-March and mid-July, the excess death factor in Dnipropetrovsk oblast was significantly lower than in Odesa oblast. In mid-May, for example, it reached 33 points, while that of Odesa oblast stood at 60. The greater quantity of government assistance undoubtedly influenced this major discrepancy between the two oblasts, which were quite similar in size of population, level of collectivization, and grain-producing capacity.<sup>46</sup>

In explaining the differences in the amount of aid received from the center, it is hard to overlook the role played by individual party officials in the history of the famine. Mendel Khataevich, who was appointed first secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk party committee in January 1933, maintained his position as secretary of the Central Committee in Kharkiv and had direct access not only to Kosior and Chubar but also to Stalin's right-hand man in Moscow, Lazar Kaganovich. The personalities of oblast and raion party leaders mattered during the Great Famine, and in the spring and summer of 1933 the position taken by a senior party official, his ability to reduce plan targets and receive government assistance could make the difference between life and death for hundreds of thousands of starving people in the Ukrainian countryside.

Let us now turn to the factors that apparently did not matter in the history of the Great Famine. A comparison of the maps of excess death rates with those of Ukraine's ethnic composition suggests that while place of residence, defined in terms of ecological zones and border vs. central location, influenced chances of survival, ethnicity did not. There is, however, one caveat pertaining to this general thesis. The maps indicate that the boreal-steppe regions hardest hit by the famine also happened to be those with the highest percentage of Ukrainians among the rural population. But we have no documentary confirmation that these areas were specifically targeted by the government or left without assistance because of their ethnic composition. Also severely affected were northeastern Kharkiv oblast and concentrations of Jews

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*Heartland* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 96-101; Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 92-95.

<sup>46</sup> Wolowyna, "Seasonal Distribution."

and Poles outside the border regions of Vinnytsia oblast. Furthermore, the map of urban losses indicates that small towns in Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts with significant Jewish populations were among the localities worst hit by the famine: this data is confirmed by official correspondence.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, one should address the impact on death rates of the official policy of denying supplies to villages and agricultural enterprises that failed to fulfill their grain-procurement quotas, otherwise known as blacklisted communities. Even though clusters of blacklisted villages can be found on the map within or close to areas with the highest rates of excess deaths, current data does not allow one to conclude or even suggest that blacklisting actually led to higher death rates. Kyiv oblast indeed led in terms of blacklisted villages, but Dnipropetrovsk oblast was in first place when it came to blacklisted collective farms. Among other things, this disparity reflected different levels of collectivization in the steppe and boreal-steppe regions of Ukraine (Map Gallery, Government Policy: Blacklisted Localities, no. 1).

There can be a number of explanations for the absence of direct link between the policies of blacklisting and the death rate. Lack of comprehensive data is one of them. The authorities' inability to enforce blacklisting of communities located near those that were not blacklisted—a “problem” addressed in official reports for December 1932—may be another.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusions and Hypotheses

While GIS mapping of the Great Famine is only in its initial stages, and this essay is one of the first attempts to interpret the new data and the maps on which it has been plotted, we can already formulate some preliminary conclusions. Given the early stage of research, most of the conclusions are hypothetical and should be regarded more as an agenda for research than as a definitive word on the subject. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that GIS mapping is not only a way of presenting research results but also a way of posing new questions for research.

For clarity's sake, I am presenting the preliminary results of the research discussed in this essay in point form.

1. The geography of losses suffered by the population of Ukraine in the course of the Great Famine of 1932–33 sets it apart from the earlier famines of the 1920s, which occurred in the southern parts of the republic. During the Great Famine, the death rate was highest in central Ukraine.

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<sup>47</sup> “Vytiah iz dopovidnoi zapysky Vinnyts'koho obkomu partii TsK KP(b)U,” 18 March 1933, in *Holodomor*, pp. 779–83.

<sup>48</sup> “Dovidka Narkomzemu USRR,” 2 December 1932, in *Holodomor*, p. 439.

2. An explanation of the distinct geography of the Great Famine should be sought in the differential treatment of Ukrainian regions by the Soviet government in Moscow. While Joseph Stalin and the members of his inner circle treated Ukraine as an entity with regard to grain procurement, they also distinguished the main grain-producing areas in the steppe zone of southern Ukraine from the boreal zones of central and northern Ukraine, which grew less grain or none at all.
3. The steppe regions of Ukraine were more highly collectivized and supplied with tractors and other agricultural machinery on a priority basis. They were also the first to receive famine relief assistance and were the main beneficiaries of resettlement policy after the famine. The boreal-steppe regions of Ukraine, which included Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Vinnytsia oblasts, had a lower level of collectivization and mechanization of agriculture.
4. The central government's policy of forcing peasants to join collective farms by imposing higher procurement quotas on noncollectivized peasants further disadvantaged the central and northern areas of Ukraine, which had a lower level of collectivized households than the steppe regions to the south.
5. The famine began in the winter and early spring of 1932 in central Ukraine, particularly in the beet-producing areas of Kyiv oblast. According to one version of events, local officials in those areas, forced by the central and republican governments to fulfill unrealistically high procurement quotas, took more grain than specified in plan quotas in order to make up for losses in the harvest of produce other than grain.
6. The famine of 1933 most severely affected those areas that had never fully recovered from the famine of the previous year. The famine of 1932, which affected Kyiv, Vinnytsia, and Kharkiv oblasts, weakened and demoralized the peasantry, which was unable or unwilling to stay on the collective farms or conduct the sowing campaign on its own. This resulted in the poor harvest of 1932 and the new and much more severe famine of 1933.
7. At the height of the famine of 1933, the central government in Moscow and the republican authorities in Kharkiv took different approaches to famine relief. The Kharkiv government's priority was to provide support for the boreal-steppe regions of Ukraine, which were hardest hit by the famine, while Moscow's efforts were focused on the main grain-producing areas in the south.
8. Given that Moscow had more resources and overall control of the distribution of aid and grain loans, its focus on the principal grain-producing regions of Ukraine led to neglect of the needs of the starving population in the boreal-steppe areas. The central government

was prepared to lower quotas for the boreal-steppe areas on a number of occasions, but it was reluctant to provide those regions of Ukraine with food assistance, given their low standing in the pecking order of grain-producing regions.

9. The severity of the famine in the rural areas of Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts translated into an exceptionally high death rate among the urban population of those oblasts. Most of the urban dwellers who died in 1932–33 lived in small towns that had no centralized food supply and suffered the same fate as the countryside.
10. While Kyiv and Kharkiv oblasts were hardest hit by the Great Famine, the losses in other parts of Ukraine were also in the millions, totaling 3.9 million deaths according to the latest estimates. This death toll set the Great Famine apart from the earlier famines not only in terms of geography but also in the absolute number of victims.