

## Between Hitler and Stalin: Lessons from the History of Ukraine

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### Abstract:

The volume *Ukraine Verstehen: Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt*, published by the Centre for Liberal Modernity, is devoted to the investigation of the history of terror and violence in Ukraine in the 20th century. Over 20 experts articulate the complex memory about crimes of the Nazi and Soviet regimes committed on the territory of Ukraine and thematize the role of Memory Studies and Memory Politics in post-Soviet countries. The volume also illustrates how traumatic legacies are interrelated with the current situation in Ukraine.

### Zwischen Hitler und Stalin: die Lehren aus der ukrainischen Geschichte

#### German Abstract:

Der vom Zentrum Liberale Moderne veröffentlichte Sammelband *Ukraine Verstehen. Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt* widmet sich der Erforschung von Terror und Gewalt in der Ukraine des 20. Jahrhunderts. Über 20 Expert\_innen beschreiben die komplizierte Erinnerung an die Verbrechen der Nazi- und Sowjetregime und thematisieren die Rolle der Erinnerungsforschung und -politik im postsowjetischen Raum. Im Sammelband werden zudem die Zusammenhänge zwischen kulturellen Traumata und der aktuellen Lage in der Ukraine dargelegt.

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Beck, Marieluise (ed.). *Ukraine Verstehen. Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt*. Berlin: Zentrum Liberale Moderne, 2020. 146 pages.

The book *Ukraine Verstehen: Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt (Understanding Ukraine: the legacy of terror and violence)* was published at the end of 2020 by the Centre for Liberal Modernity (LibMod) with the support of the Lysiak-Rudnytsky Ukrainian Studies Programme of the Ukrainian Institute. The think tank LibMod was established in 2017 by the politicians Marieluise Beck and Ralf Fücks (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). One of its projects, *Ukraine Verstehen*, is aimed at broadening the knowledge about Ukraine in Germany.

In October 2019, the *Bundestag* rejected the petition about recognizing the Great Famine in Ukraine ('Holodomor' 1932-1933) as genocide carried out by the Soviet government. The main reason was the fact that the term 'genocide' appeared in international law only in 1948. Paradoxically, the author of the term 'genocide,' Raphael Lemkin, referred in his works to the events in Ukraine as the 'classic example' of genocide (see the chapter "Red Famine" by Anne Applebaum, p. 17). In this context the book *Ukraine Verstehen* explains (mainly to the German reader), as it is written in the blurb, that "those who learn about the painful and terrifying pages of Ukrainian history will better understand the country's current craving for freedom, independence and democracy" (all translations from German by the author). The first thousand copies of the book were provided free of charge and distributed to readers. The second edition, as well as a translation into the Ukrainian language, are planned for 2021.

The volume includes contributions by experts from Ukraine, Germany, USA, the Netherlands, France, Romania – which is a positive sign of the development of Ukrainian Studies worldwide. Among the authors are well known historians, journalists, and philosophers, like Serhii Plokhii, Timothy Snyder, and Anne Applebaum.

The book consists of three sections: “Stalinist Repressions,” “Occupation during the Second World War,” and “Memory and Responsibility”. The book is written in understandable language, the authors use clear arguments, facts, and numbers to describe and explain the main events from the history of Ukraine. Furthermore, the illustrations by Hannah Brückner aesthetically supplement the texts and give the reader an impression of the described events, places, and personalities.

The authors reflect on the Great Famine (‘Holodomor’), repressions of intellectuals (‘Executed Renaissance’), deportation of Crimean Tatars, German occupation, the Holocaust, Chernobyl, and how memories of these events are connected with modern days. Here, Timothy Snyder’s metaphor of ‘bloodlands’ (from the book *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York: Basic Books, 2010, 524 p.) is suitable to represent the enormous concentration of tragic events and traumatic memories which still haunt Ukraine in the present. Information about these events became available mostly after the fall of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the archives of the former KGB (Soviet Committee for State Security) and NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) were opened only in 2015 during the decommunisation campaign (see the chapter “A Successful Decommunisation?” by Sébastien Gobert).

The first section, “Stalinist Repressions,” contains the reworked text from a significant book by Anne Applebaum *Red Famine - Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (London: Penguin Books, 2017, 481 p.). Applebaum describes how memory about the Great Famine (‘Holodomor’ – ‘killing by starvation’) was repressed by the Soviet government and investigated by international scholars. Serhii Plokhii in his chapter refers to the recent film *Mr. Jones* (2019) by Agnieszka Holland that awoke interest in ‘Holodomor’ around the world. Moreover, the author illustrates how discussions around terms like ‘genocide’ lead to the trivialisation of trauma. However, Plokhii mentions that scholars and politicians generally agree that man-made catastrophes like famine and repressions must be seen, first of all, as crimes against humanity (see p. 23).

The second section, “Occupation during the Second World War,” is devoted to the role of the pact between Hitler and Stalin (by Jan Claas Behrends), to life under Nazi occupation (by Karel C. Berkhoff) and mass murders in Lviv, Kyiv, Odesa, Koriukivka (by Christoph Brumme, Klaus Wolschner, Ottmar Trausch). Moreover, Wilfred Ilge problematizes the role of Ukrainian nationalist organizations in the Holocaust and the Volhynia massacre. Along with historic facts, some

personal stories of terror survivors are represented in the volume. For example, the story of Volodymyr Kolchinsky (chapter by Nikolaus von Twickel), who escaped the massacre in Odesa (1941) in which around 25000 people of Jewish background were killed. As an interesting supplement, the reader can find a QR-code which leads to a video interview with Kolchinsky.

In the third section, “Memory and Responsibility,” the authors reflect on the aftermath of violence and terror. For example, Irina Scherbakowa and Nikolai Klimeniouk problematize the representation of repressed memories about the Holocaust in the public discourses of post-Soviet countries. Gelinada Grinchenko reflects on the destiny of female forced workers. Anna Weronika Wendland and Rebecca Harms describe the local and global implications of memory about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The volume ends with reflections about the recent history of Ukraine: Gerhard Simon, Eduard Klein, Kateryna Mishchenko, Sébastien Gobert, Sebastian Christ, and Yevhen Hlibovytsky reflect on the challenges after Maidan and on the image of Ukraine in Germany. In general, most contributors of the volume show how memory and memory politics are interrelated with the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

In a way, the book *Ukraine Verstehen* contributes to the act of remembrance and mourning victims of violence and terror. Writing about these events is an important step toward facing cultural traumas and working through them. However, it is worth mentioning that in the book there is less information about the victims of Stalin's terror. The reason could be the more developed culture of remembering the crimes of the Nazi regime on the one hand, and the still-developing culture of remembering the crimes of the Soviet regime on the other hand. Despite its compact size (146 pages), the book *Ukraine Verstehen* contains a lot of important, uncommon, and complex information about the history of Ukraine in the 20th and 21st centuries. Each author contributes to the general high quality of the volume. The book is worth reading for the experts (*Ukraine-Versteher*) as well as for those who want to learn more about the global (e. g. Second World War, Holocaust) and local (e. g. Great Famine, Executed Renaissance) history of violence and terror.