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## **THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE: HOW SWEDISH SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS ADDRESS THE HOLODOMOR**

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This article explores how Swedish school history textbooks address the famine-genocide of 1932–1933 in Ukraine. By analyzing how this historical event is represented in educational materials, the article aims to determine the extent to which the Holodomor is acknowledged, contextualized, and explained within the broader narrative of Soviet interwar history presented to Swedish students. The source material consists of textbooks used in Swedish schools, ranging from lower secondary to upper secondary education. 20 textbooks were reviewed, and interviews were conducted with six teachers and one author. It underscores the practical importance of accurately representing the Holodomor within history education, particularly in terms of the consequences of insufficient education about past genocides and crimes against humanity. The article highlights challenges within the Swedish education system, including curricular limitations, limited resources, and the prioritization of events like the Holocaust and the Gulag over the Holodomor, shedding light on how these factors could influence students' understanding of historical events and the broader context of past atrocities.

The article reveals that, while the Holodomor is mentioned in some literature, it is only briefly addressed, with the Gulag instead becoming symbolic of communism's crimes against humanity. As one teacher suggested, there may be a geographical perspective at play, prompting more focus on events closer to home. A noticeable trend over time also emerges in school literature, with more recent publications being more likely to address the Holodomor using accurate terminology, while older works tend to avoid it. Additionally, there is a tendency to explain the Holodomor, when mentioned, as a result of poor economic planning (i.e., communism) rather than as a deliberate act driven by ethnic hatred toward Ukrainians within the framework of Russian imperialism. In fact, no Swedish schoolbooks clearly present the Holodomor as a genocide. Consequently, this report identifies three possible outcomes: 1) the Holodomor is not mentioned at all, 2) mass starvation is referenced but not as the Holodomor, or 3) the Holodomor is acknowledged but explained primarily as a result of forced collectivization in Soviet agriculture rather than an outcome of Russian imperialism or ethnic hatred aimed at eliminating Ukrainians as a people. Thus, a portrayal of the Holodomor as both an event in its own right *and* as genocide could not be demonstrated, nor was any such literature found.

*Key words:* History, Holodomor, Genocide Education, History Didactics, Soviet History, Ukraine, Sweden

The Holodomor, the man-made famine that claimed millions of lives in Soviet Ukraine during 1932–1933, remains one of the most tragic and underrepresented events in modern history. Despite its significance, the genocide is not well-known or widely taught outside of Ukraine, including in Sweden. This gap in awareness and education may come as a sad surprise to Ukrainians, but it also serves as a stark

reminder of the powerful influence of Russian imperialism, which has long sought to suppress or obscure such narratives. This article explores how Swedish school history textbooks address the Holodomor, investigating the extent to which this genocide is acknowledged and taught in Swedish classrooms, and what this reveals about historical memory and education. The article seeks to assess how this critical period of Ukrainian history, specifically the Holodomor, is covered in the textbook material used in Swedish classrooms and what the implications of these findings could be for how the Holodomor is presented and understood in a broader global context.

**Objective & Scope.** The objective of this article is to analyze how Swedish school history textbooks represent the Soviet era and the Holodomor, with a particular focus on the extent to which this genocide is acknowledged and taught. By examining the presence (or absence) of the Holodomor in educational materials, the study seeks to shed light on how historical memory is shaped and transmitted in Swedish classrooms. Furthermore, this investigation aims to explore the broader implications of these findings for understanding the intersection of education, historical awareness, and the lingering influence of political narratives such as Russian imperialism.

**Methodology.** This study is primarily based on a review of source material and interviews conducted with practicing teachers. The source material mainly consists of textbooks used in Swedish schools, ranging from lower secondary to upper secondary education. Textbooks for younger students were not included in this study since the curriculum does not cover the 20th century in Swedish schools until grade 7, when students are around 13 years old. The primary focus was also on mainly examining school literature that is still being sold and/or actively circulated among teachers in 2024.

In this study, 20 textbooks were reviewed, and interviews were conducted with six teachers and one textbook author. Four of the interviewed teachers are active in Swedish elementary schools (upper grades), and two work at the senior-high school level. For research ethics purposes, the teachers' names were anonymized. However, the textbook author wished to contribute to this report under his real name, which was fitting, given that his name appears in the study's results section where the literature he contributed to is discussed. I would wholeheartedly like to extend my sincere gratitude to the interviewees.

The questions posed to the teachers focused on the topics explored in this report, namely the Soviet interwar period and interwar history in general, as well as the phenomenon of genocide more broadly. The questions aimed to shed light on how much practicing teachers actually know about the event itself – have they heard of the Holodomor? If so, do they consider it worth addressing, meaning do they view it as important (with the understanding that many other topics also need to be covered during the courses)? Another important aspect covered was the issue that all history teachers struggle with, namely the pressure to cover an overwhelming amount of material in limited time. In the case of the history subject, there are far too few hours allocated in lower secondary education relative to the scope of material expected to

be covered. What should be included? The legally mandated time (as of 2022) is 75 hours over three years.

How much history should be included? The Swedish National Agency for Education, which oversees Swedish teaching standards, provides guidance on this by outlining key themes in the core content for the subject of history:

- Social transformations: the emergence of civilizations and industrial societies;
- Imperialism and world wars, approximately 1850–1950;
- Democratization and increasing globalization, from around 1900 to the present.

Thus, this article focuses on the events between 1850 and 1950, and it is clear that the competition for coverage within this period is fierce.

The questions also addressed the choice of literature. Why are certain textbooks used, and others not? If Holodomor was not included, what informed that decision?

The scope of this study is narrowly focused on whether the Holodomor is included in textbooks or not. The three categories used are as follows:

- Explicitly referenced;
- Implicitly referenced;
- Not mentioned at all in the textbook.

Furthermore, the article will examine whether the term *Holodomor* is explicitly referred to as a genocide. If the term is used, particular attention will be given to how it is framed – whether it is classified as a *genocide* or presented in another way. This distinction is crucial for understanding how this event is portrayed in Swedish educational materials. Therefore, the scope for this article can be said to be twofold.

This means that the article does not cover what topics were chosen in place of the Holodomor. Briefly, it can be noted that there is a strong tendency to focus on the Gulag instead. My own simple and brief analysis suggests that this is because the term “Gulag” is explicitly mentioned in the core content of the history syllabus in Sweden. A more in-depth analysis of this will not be provided here. This article is too limited in scope for such a discussion, and further research would be needed to explore why Gulag is singled out as the primary example of communism’s crimes against humanity in the Swedish curriculum.

**Background.** The teaching of history in schools plays a crucial role in shaping students’ understanding of the past and, consequently, their perspectives on present-day issues. In Sweden, like in many other countries, the way historical events are selected and presented in school curricula and textbooks influences not only what students learn, but also how they interpret global historical narratives. This section provides an exploration of the key themes relevant to the representation of history in Swedish education, with a particular focus on the teaching of genocides and the Holodomor.

The following subheadings will guide this discussion: a brief overview of the historical events surrounding the Holodomor, the factors influencing what teachers choose to emphasize in their lessons, the extent to which educators rely on textbooks, and an analysis of how genocides, particularly the Holodomor, are incorporated into the Swedish

history curriculum. Through these discussions, this article will shed light on how historical memory is constructed and transmitted in Swedish classrooms.

But first – what really *is* a genocide? The United Nations defines genocide in Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, describing it as an act carried out with the specific *intent* to annihilate a group of people, whether defined by their nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion<sup>1</sup>.

Two key points should be noted here. Firstly, Article II specifically emphasizes the importance of the word *intent*. Obviously, it is difficult to destroy an entire people by accident, but the argument hinges on intent – there must be a deliberate aim to wipe out a group of people. Secondly, it is equally crucial to understand that genocide is not about the number of people killed; it's about destroying *a people*, not just individuals. Genocide can be carried out slowly and systematically without firing a single bullet. For example, by this definition, it was genocidal when the Turkish government prohibited Kurdish parents from giving Kurdish names to their newborns, or when an oppressor denies the very existence of a group, as we see in the rhetoric today in places like Palestine and Ukraine, where some argue that the group they are fighting against does not exist as a distinct ethnicity. It was also by the same yardstick genocidal when the British government forbade Welsh children from speaking Gaelic in schools as recently as the 1950s.

However, killing a disproportionate number of people within a group – no matter how horrific the atrocities – does not in itself constitute genocide. The intent to eradicate that group must be proven, and this is not an easy task.

This issue is highly relevant today, in 2024, nearly three years into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and amidst the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine. The correct use of terminology is critical; if words are misused, they lose their meaning. This is true whether people misuse the term *fascist* without understanding its meaning or label their enemies as *terrorists* to gain moral superiority in a war. Ukraine itself has been guilty of this, referring to its actions following Russia's 2014 intervention as a "anti-terrorist operation" (ATO), though this rhetoric ceased after Russia's full-scale invasion.

In the ongoing wars of mid-2024, Ukrainians and Palestinians frequently accuse Israelis and Russians, respectively, of committing genocide. While this is not the time nor the place to evaluate the validity of such claims, it is noteworthy that there may be grounds for both sides' arguments – provided they focus on intent rather than sheer numbers. Focusing solely on the number of victims reveals a misunderstanding of what genocide truly means.

This brings us to the central question relevant to this article: Was the Holodomor a genocide?

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<sup>1</sup> "Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide", *United Nations Treaty Series* 78, 277. Available Online: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>

What is relatively easy to find common ground about is that the Holodomor was a famine that took place during 1932–1933, claiming millions of lives, primarily in what is now Ukraine.

The complexity of the issue begins to intensify at this point, as this is where consensus typically falters. From here, the events can be interpreted either as the result of economic mismanagement or harsh agricultural policies, or as a man-made famine designed to suppress Ukrainian nationalism and crush resistance to Soviet control by breaking the will of Ukrainians to continue that resistance.

As a scholar examining the available evidence, it seems clear to me that the Soviet government under Joseph Stalin enacted policies that *intentionally*<sup>2</sup> targeted Ukrainian peasants<sup>3</sup>, requisitioning more grain from Ukraine than from other regions, where discontent was less prevalent.

The Russian Communist regime *intentionally* obstructed Ukrainians from obtaining food and imposed movement restrictions to stop them from seeking help in regions where conditions were less dire<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, areas predominantly inhabited by Ukrainians were deliberately provided with fewer tractors and agricultural tools<sup>5</sup>. Snyder explains that despite privately acknowledging the famine in Ukraine, Stalin *intentionally* denied the Ukrainian party leadership's plea for food aid<sup>6</sup>. These actions obviously led to mass starvation and death, which I, along with many other scholars, recognize as constituting *genocide* aimed at eradicating Ukrainian identity.

The recognition of the Holodomor as genocide is contested by some Western intellectuals<sup>7</sup> – whom I would argue have been influenced by Russian propaganda – who downplay or deny the intentional nature of the famine. This narrative, often rooted in Soviet-era interpretations, frames the famine as a result of poor planning, mismanagement, or natural causes rather than a deliberate act targeting Ukrainians. Douglas Tottle even claims in his book *Fraud, Famine, and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard* that “the whole notion of the Famine was fabricated by Ukrainian nationalists”<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, on April 2, 2008, the Russian

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<sup>2</sup> Vide supra.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Qian, Natalya Naumenko, “The Political Economic Causes of the Soviet Great Famine, 1932–1933”, *CEPR & VideoVox Economics (Webinar). Political Economy. Centre for Economic Policy Research*. Available Online: <https://cepr.org/multimedia/cepr-political-economy-webinar-series-political-economic-causes-soviet-great-famine-1932>

<sup>4</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Qian, Natalya Naumenko, “The Political Economic Causes of the Soviet Great Famine, 1932–1933”.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 42.

<sup>7</sup> Mark B. Tauger, *The Environmental Economy of the Soviet Famine in Ukraine in 1933: A Critique of Several Papers by Natalya Naumenko*. (Vancouver: Econ Journal Watch, 2023); Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism, a new civilization?*. (London: Young Press, 1935); Douglas Tottle, *Fraud, Famine and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard*. (Toronto: Progress Books, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Tottle, *Fraud, Famine and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard*.

Duma passed a resolution emphasizing that the victims of the famine were “millions of citizens of the USSR representing different peoples and nationalities living largely in agricultural areas of the country”<sup>9</sup>.

This view has however been largely discredited by historians, journalists, and scholars<sup>10</sup> who have thoroughly researched the events. They maintain that the famine was not an unintended result of Soviet policies, but a calculated strategy of political repression aimed at subjugating the Ukrainian population and erasing its national identity.

Those who continue to dispute the designation of the Holodomor as genocide, whether knowingly or unknowingly, perpetuate a form of genocide denial by endorsing the Russian narrative. In contrast, substantial evidence – including the Soviet government’s actions to prevent aid, restrict movement, seize livestock, and prohibit Ukrainians from retaining surplus grain they had earned for meeting production targets<sup>11</sup> – points to an *intentional* effort to specifically weaken and suppress Ukraine. This is especially evident when considering the broader measures taken to force Ukraine into a process of Russification, which Stalin identified as a top priority as early as 1923. He then expresses his views clearly that *bourgeois nationalism* (local nationalism) being one of the greatest threats to the USSR’s future<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term *genocide*, considered the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be a key component of the genocidal campaign against Ukrainians, particularly when viewed in connection with the Holodomor famine<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, Ukrainian music and language were also labeled as nationalist and subsequently suppressed by the Stalinist regime before, during, and after the Holodomor<sup>14</sup>.

Despite its significance, the Holodomor remains relatively unknown and is not widely taught outside Ukraine, including in Swedish schools. This gap in awareness may surprise Ukrainians but also underscores the enduring influence of Russian imperialism, which has sought to obscure or suppress narratives challenging Soviet and Russian actions.

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<sup>9</sup> Nicole Loroff, Jordan Vincent, Valentina Kuryliw, “Holodomor – Denial and silences”, *Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (Toronto: HREC Education)*. Available Online: <https://education.holodomor.ca/teaching-materials/holodomor-denial-silences/>

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*; Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine*; Nancy Qian, Natalya Naumenko, “The Political Economic Causes of the Soviet Great Famine, 1932–1933”.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, 42–46.

<sup>12</sup> Timo Vihavainen, “Nationalism and Internationalism: How Did the Bolsheviks Cope with National Sentiments?” in *The Fall of an Empire, the Birth of a Nation*, ed. by Chris Chulos, Timo Piirainen. (Helsinki: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 85.

<sup>13</sup> Roman Serbyn, “Raphael Lemkin, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Soviet genocide in Ukraine”. *Holodomor Research and Education Consortium*. Available Online: <https://education.holodomor.ca/teaching-materials/role-of-lemkin/>

<sup>14</sup> Зоя Шалівська, “Класово ворожа бандура: Пам’яті розстріляних кобзарів”, *Україна молода* 147 (8–9 грудня 2017). Available Online: <https://umoloda.kyiv.ua/number/3248/196/118497/>

To this day, the Swedish government has not officially recognized the Holodomor as *genocide*. This is a critical point to bear in mind when reading this report on how Swedish history textbooks address this issue.

Knowledge in schools is not a neutral concept. There is always a selection process at play – certain things are chosen as valuable knowledge, while others are excluded. These decisions are influenced by perspectives and power. The phrase “knowledge is power” highlights the significance of determining what knowledge is presented to children and young people in schools. Given this, it is crucial to continuously engage in the debate about what knowledge should be prioritized in education.

The content of a history course inevitably varies from one country to another, with the distinctions in material growing more pronounced the further one moves from the point of comparison. Studying the past requires its organization, typically through a narrative framework, and the deliberate selection of certain topics. As a result, the discipline of history is inseparable from the cultural context in which it is constructed<sup>15</sup>.

A key component of historical thinking is the ability to determine what is historically significant<sup>16</sup>. This skill entails not only identifying pivotal events or changes in the past but also understanding how personal and societal perceptions of history are formed, how historical narratives are perpetuated in both society and educational settings, and how choices are made about which histories to highlight<sup>17</sup>. As Lévesque (2008) argues, without the ability to identify historical significance, the study of history loses its purpose<sup>18</sup>.

Political decisions about the direction a country should take, either politically or in terms of identity, do not always determine educational content. A different perspective is offered by Professor Lee S. Shulman, who in 1986 highlighted that much of teaching is shaped by what teachers themselves know. He refers to this type of knowledge as *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK), which can be translated as subject-specific didactic knowledge. This also includes what is called *Content Knowledge*, referring to teachers’ expertise in their subject area<sup>19</sup>. Simply put, and particularly relevant to this article, teachers do not teach what they themselves do not know.

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<sup>15</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Berättande och förnuft: Historieteoretiska texter*. (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 2004); Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, interpretation, orientation*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005); Jörn Rüsen, *Evidence and Meaning: A theory of historical studies*, trans. by Diane Kerns, Katie Digan. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017); Robert J. Parkes, “Developing your approach to history teaching” in *Historical Thinking for History Teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness*, ed. by Tim Allender, Anna Clark, Robert Parkes. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2019), 72–88.

<sup>16</sup> Karin Bergman, “How younger students perceive and identify historical significance”, *History Education Research Journal* 17 (2), (2020): 164–178. Available Online: <https://doi.org/10.18546/HERJ.17.2.03>

<sup>17</sup> Peter Seixas, “Students’ understanding of historical significance”, *Theory and Research in Social Education* 22 (3), (1994): 281–304. Available Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1994.10505726>

<sup>18</sup> Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating students for the twenty-first century*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Lee S. Shulman, “Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth”, *Teaching Educational Researcher* 15 (2) (February 1986): 4–14.

Wineburg<sup>20</sup> similarly emphasizes that teaching requires a careful balance between students' needs, progression, pedagogy, and subject content. His research on history teachers demonstrates that educators consistently adapt subject matter to the specific needs of their student group and teaching context.

Nietzsche's statement, "I want, once and for all, not to know many things. – Wisdom sets limits even to knowledge", can be understood as expressing the tension between acquiring knowledge and the desire to learn more. In my own interpretation, Nietzsche seems to suggest that knowing too much can make us biased or rigid in our thinking, as we tend to filter new information through the lens of what we already believe. This can limit our openness to new ideas and alternative perspectives. For instance, teachers understand the importance of educating their classes about the Holocaust, as it is explicitly required by the curriculum. However, this focus can sometimes lead to other genocides being overlooked in education.

The question then arises: how do teachers in Swedish schools approach the teaching of the Holocaust and other genocides in general? We know they cover these topics, but we are less clear about how much attention is given to other genocides. Dr. Niklas Ammert has explored this issue extensively in his study, which he presents in *On What and How Shall You Tell? – Teaching about the Holocaust and Other Genocides*, where he interviews teachers about their choices, methods, and reasons for teaching about the Holocaust. The teachers' accounts from these interviews indicate that genocides, and particularly the Holocaust, are central and important topics in history education. For some of the Swedish teachers interviewed, the Holocaust is even *synonymous* with the concept of genocide. The Holocaust is widely recognized and has become the symbol of what genocide represents in European historical culture. But it goes even further: the Holocaust is the definitive reference point, and other genocides are measured against it. As a result, for many people, genocide *is* equated solely with the Holocaust and nothing else<sup>21</sup>.

In conclusion, it can be said that teachers might potentially avoid teaching about the Holodomor – if they do – due to many different reasons, be that that they do not know about it, that they are told not to bring it up, that they deliberately focus on other things<sup>22</sup>, etcetera. This article aims at finding out what the school literature mentions about the events in the Soviet Union around the time just preceding the World War II.

Schüllerqvist and Osbeck (2009) conducted studies on experienced history teachers, revealing a well-developed subject-specific didactic knowledge<sup>23</sup>. Knutas (2008) also references studies comparing the professional practices of experienced teachers with

<sup>20</sup> Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past (Critical Perspectives on The Past)*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 174–176.

<sup>21</sup> Niklas Ammert, "Om vad och hur må ni berätta? – undervisning om Förintelsen och andra folk mord", *Forum för levande historia. Västerås: Edita*. Available Online: <https://www.levandehistoria.se/publikationer/om-vad-och-hur-ma-ni-beratta-2>

<sup>22</sup> Nota bene, other genocides.

<sup>23</sup> Bengt Schüllerqvist, Christina Osbeck, *Ämnesdidaktiska insikter och strategier – berättelser från gymnasielärare i samhällskunskap, geografi, historia och religionskunskap*. (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2009).



those of newly graduated teachers. The findings show that experienced teachers are less dependent on textbooks and more inclined to link lesson content to current events and personal experiences. They have developed strategies to navigate various classroom situations. In contrast, newly graduated teachers tend to rely more heavily on textbooks and tasks formulated by others, particularly when teaching content outside their previous subject areas. This suggests that experienced teachers develop a school-specific understanding of the subject, making them less reliant on textbooks<sup>24</sup>.

In such cases, this particular study may be of less relevance. Teachers with prior knowledge of the Holodomor and a connection to Ukraine naturally incorporate this topic into their teaching, even without prescribed materials. This has led teachers, in similar positions, to “create” their own materials in addition to the textbooks. This practice is not only legal in Sweden but also encouraged, as long as the required learning objectives are fulfilled. It is important to note that very few specific topics are mandated. Rather, the curriculum emphasizes broader themes such as empires and empire-building, slavery, colonialism, and genocide. In terms of genocide, it is explicitly stated that the Holocaust must be taught. However, this is the only genocide specifically mentioned in the curriculum. Otherwise, the guidance is quite general, making it both feasible and advantageous to include the Holodomor as an example in history education.

Further details on the curriculum are provided below.

History didactics research is a field that has developed increasingly in Sweden. It has evolved from being solely focused on schools to encompassing how history is conveyed in society at large. In this process, issues concerning the use of history and historical consciousness have also gained greater importance<sup>25</sup>. It is against this backdrop that the teaching of genocides, and the question of how and why they are presented in Swedish history education, must be understood.

Ammert (2011) means that World War II is what has shaped the historical culture we live in today. This is evident in Sweden but most prominently in Germany. As we approached the year 2000, a French book was released and later translated into German: *Le livre noir du communisme (The Black Book of Communism)*. The book effectively lifted a previous taboo on comparing different genocides<sup>26</sup>.

Perhaps it was for this reason that a decade later, the Swedish center-right government included in the curriculum the importance of also teaching about the crimes against humanity committed under communism. But what exactly does it say?

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<sup>24</sup> Edmund Knutas, *Mellan retorik och praktik: En ämnesdidaktisk och läroplansteoretisk studie av svenskämnen och fyra gymnasielärares svenskundervisning efter gymnasireformen 1994*. (Umeå: Umeå Universitet, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Margareta Casserik, “Vad styr? Om lärarens planering av historieundervisning” in *Historiedidaktiska perspektiv*, ed. by Hans-Olof Ericson, Per Göran Johansson, Hans Albin Larsson. (Jönköping: Jönköping University Press, 2005), 269.

<sup>26</sup> Niklas Ammert, “Om vad och hur må ni berätta? – undervisning om Förintelsen och andra folkmord”.

**2000 Curriculum:**

*The history of our time, with progress and peace efforts but also genocides, such as the Holocaust, revolutions, and wars, are part of what all students should have knowledge about.*

· Focus on modern history, progress, peace efforts, genocides such as the Holocaust, revolutions, and wars<sup>27</sup>.

**2011 Curriculum:**

*In grades 7–9, teachers should address the theme of Imperialism and World Wars, approximately 1850–1950: Both World Wars, their causes and consequences. Oppression, forced displacements, and genocides. The Holocaust and Gulag.*

· Focus on Imperialism and World Wars (circa 1850–1950), including the causes and consequences of the World Wars.

· Emphasis on oppression, forced displacements, genocides, the Holocaust, and Gulag<sup>28</sup>.

**2022 Curriculum:**

The only difference between Lgr11 and Lgr22 is the choice of wording in this sentence: “Both World Wars, their causes and *effects*,” where the word *consequences* in Lgr11 has been changed to *effects* in Lgr22<sup>29</sup>.

But that is not all, as this pertains only to the central content. There are also differences in the criteria used for assessment in the two most recent history syllabi. In these two curricula, the term *knowledge requirements* was used as a benchmark in the knowledge matrices accompanying each subject. It is important to note that in the 1994 curriculum (and its revised version from 2000), there were no *knowledge requirements*. Instead, the focus was on *goals* that students were expected to strive toward in each subject.

In the 2000 curriculum, the criteria for the goals that students work toward contain no specific mention of genocide or the Holocaust. However, this is present in both Lgr 11 and Lgr 22. Yet, as previously noted, there are differences between the two:

**Knowledge Matrix from the Curriculum in History (2011):**

*“The student demonstrates basic knowledge of events, actors, and processes of change during different historical periods, as well as knowledge of historical*

<sup>27</sup> “Lpo 94: Kursplan i historia för grundskolan 2000–2011”, *Skolverket*. Available Online: <https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/grundskolan/laroplan-och-kursplaner-for-grundskolan/tidigare-kursplaner-ar-2000-2011-for-grundskolan?url=907561864%2Fcompulsorycw%2Fjsp%2Fsubjectkursinfo.htm%3FsubjectCode%3DHI2000GR%26tos%3Dgr2000&sv.url=12.5dfce44715d35a5cdfa87a3> For the curriculum from the year 2000, it is typically referred to as Lpo 94, as it was originally adopted in 1994, revised in 2000, and remained in effect until 2011.

<sup>28</sup> “Lgr 11: Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011”, *Skolverket*. Available Online: [https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.2c5d5da618bcb913ee91b/1699967860924/jamforesedok\\_Historia.pdf](https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.2c5d5da618bcb913ee91b/1699967860924/jamforesedok_Historia.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> “Lgr 22: Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2022”, *Skolverket*. Available Online: [https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.2c5d5da618bcb913ee91b/1699967860924/jamforesedok\\_Historia.pdf](https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.2c5d5da618bcb913ee91b/1699967860924/jamforesedok_Historia.pdf)

*concepts. This includes showing knowledge of particularly central historical events, including the Holocaust*<sup>30</sup>.

**Knowledge Matrix from the Curriculum in History (2022):**

*“The student has basic knowledge of historical conditions, events, and figures during different historical periods. The student demonstrates this by providing simple and somewhat substantiated reasoning about the causes and consequences of societal changes and people’s living conditions and actions, as well as about the Holocaust and other genocides”*<sup>31</sup>.

While the 2011 curriculum focuses exclusively on the Holocaust as a central historical event, the 2022 curriculum broadens the scope by explicitly including other genocides alongside the Holocaust. This shift reflects a more comprehensive approach, emphasizing the importance of recognizing multiple genocides in history education rather than focusing solely on the Holocaust. It is clear that a change has occurred, but the question remains: Is this shift reflected in school textbooks?

The results section is organized so that the reviewed literature is divided according to whether it addresses the Holodomor or omits it entirely. This is followed by an analysis of discussions with teachers, concluding with the textbook author’s general reflections. The results will then be discussed, summarized, and analyzed in the final concluding section of this report.

This section examines the books that explicitly mention the Holodomor by name. For literature to be considered as making a direct reference to this event, it must include both the event’s name and date. It is therefore important to denote that it is not enough to talk *about* the event or to only mention that there was a period of starvation. While some books discuss the Holodomor in more detail than others, the primary focus here is not on the level of detail. Rather, the volume, scope, and phrasing of these references are of particular interest. Accordingly, quotations from these texts will be included to illustrate how the event is portrayed. These excerpts will then serve as a foundation for the concluding discussion down below.

The three books mentioning the Holodomor specifically by name are:

**Harknäs, J., & Hildingson, K. L. (2022). *Historia 9*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.**

*Holodomor – The Great Famine*: The farmers on Soviet collective farms were forced to deliver large quantities of grain to urban areas, leaving them with insufficient resources, which led to widespread starvation. The most severely affected area was present-day Ukraine, where an estimated three million or more died of starvation from 1932 to 1933. This famine is sometimes described as genocide and is then referred to as *Holodomor*, a Ukrainian term meaning “hunger” and “plague”<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> “Lgr 11: Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011”.

<sup>31</sup> “Lgr 22: Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2022”.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Harknäs, Kaj Hildingson. *Historia 9*. (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2022), 21.

**Nilsson, E. (2021). *Utkik Historia 7-9*. Malmö: Gleerups.**

*Holodomor – The Great Famine*: The collectivization effort, intended to boost food production, instead led to severe famine across the Soviet Union. Millions of people died from starvation in both rural and urban areas. In Ukraine, the memory of this disaster is described with the term *Holodomor*, meaning “to kill by starvation”<sup>33</sup>.

**Harrisson, D., & K. (2016). *Bilden av historien*. Stockholm: Liber.**

*Forced Collectivization and Famine*: The forced collectivization of agriculture was a failure, leading to a decline in production and widespread famine. In Ukraine alone, an estimated three to ten million people died of starvation between 1932 and 1933, an event known in history as the Holodomor. Despite this failure, the investment in heavy industry was successful, in part because Stalin ensured that industrial cities received resources that the rural areas were deprived of<sup>34</sup>.

**Implicitly referenced**

In section *Implicitly referenced*, I aim to present the books that fall within the gray area between addressing the Holodomor and not mentioning it at all. This category includes books that highlight the fact that millions of people died in Ukraine in the early 1930s but do not use the correct terminology to refer to the event. The following seven books fall into this category:

**Hammarén, L. (2014). *Vägar till nuet – och framtiden?* Stockholm: DML förlag.**

*Impact of Forced Collectivization*: The forced collectivization of agriculture led to mass starvation. Every measure was taken to prevent mass migration to the cities, and with no aid allowed to enter, the result was that 3 to 5 million people starved to death in this “terror famine,” most of whom were in Ukraine. Stalin himself referred to this as a “war by starvation”<sup>35</sup>.

**Alm, L.-G. (2007). *Milstolpar Historia A*. Värnamo: Natur & Kultur.**

*Resistance and Famine*: Resentful farmers preferred to slaughter their animals rather than hand them over to the communists, and in some areas, they even burned their crops. However, state demands for delivery were relentless. Once all quotas were met, there was barely any food left for the farmers themselves. In Ukraine, this led to a famine catastrophe between 1932 and 1933 that claimed several million lives<sup>36</sup>.

**Ivansson, E., & Tordai, M. (2020). *SOS Historia 7–9*. Stockholm: Liber.**

*The Catastrophe in Ukraine*: Ukraine, a fertile agricultural region in the southern Soviet Union, suffered greatly under the state’s brutal policies toward farmers. Collective farms were commanded to deliver immense quantities of grain, meat, and potatoes to the state, leaving farmers without food. Despite reports from Ukrainian communist leaders about the starvation, the state refused to lower its demands and prohibited any relief efforts. During 1932–1933, six million Ukrainians died from

<sup>33</sup> Erik Nilsson, *Utkik Historia 7–9*. (Malmö: Gleerups, 2021), 256.

<sup>34</sup> Dick Harrisson, Katarina Harrisson. *Bilden av historien*. (Stockholm: Liber, 2016), 400.

<sup>35</sup> Lars Hammarén, *Vägar till nuet - och framtiden?* (Stockholm: DML förlag., 2014), 110.

<sup>36</sup> Lars-Göran Alm, *Milstolpar Historia A*. (Värnamo: Natur & Kultur, 2007), 311.

starvation. Stalin sold their crops abroad to finance machinery and technology for the Soviet Union<sup>37</sup>.

*Eyewitness Account:* The author Vasilij Grossman recounts: “There were people who dismembered and ate corpses. Some even killed their own children and ate them. I saw such a woman. She had been captured and brought to the district center. Her face was human, but her eyes were those of a wolf”<sup>38</sup>.

*Urban Famine and Propaganda:* In the cities, food shortages were also severe. Communist propaganda blamed the famine on farmers, accusing them of hoarding grain to raise prices or being too lazy to harvest. Stalin’s war against the peasantry ultimately crushed all rural resistance<sup>39</sup>.

**Skovmand, S. (2003). *Bonniers Världshistoria*. Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag.**

*1932 Famine and Forced Deliveries:* The famine year of 1932 hit Ukraine particularly hard, as the otherwise fertile region faced a poor harvest. Due to forced deliveries, farmers had little left to eat, and state demands were so high that millions perished from starvation. At that time, Soviet society was so closed off that the horrific situation in Ukraine remained hidden not only from the outside world but also from most Russians. The fear of Stalin was so great that no one dared to propose reducing the delivery quotas for the starving farmers, as doing so would have implied a slowdown in the pace of industrialization<sup>40</sup>.

**Nyström, H., L., & Ö. (2018). *Perspektiv på historien Plus*. Malmö: Gleerups.**

*Forced Collectivization and Opposition:* The forced collectivization of land sparked widespread opposition, particularly in Ukraine’s fertile agricultural regions. The regime sought to fracture farmers’ resistance by targeting wealthier farmers, or “kulaks”, under the slogan “eliminate the kulaks as a class”. Mass arrests and deportations followed, affecting not only wealthier farmers. Many farmers preferred to slaughter their livestock rather than surrender them to the collective, resulting in a halving of cattle and swine populations from 1929 to 1933. Despite the disastrous conditions in agriculture, the government doubled grain exports to finance industrial expansion. This led to a famine between 1932 and 1933, estimated to have claimed six million lives<sup>41</sup>.

**Nyström, H., L., & Ö. (2023). *Perspektiv på historien 1b*. Malmö: Gleerups.**

*Resistance and Famine:* The collectivization of land met with bitter resistance, especially in the fertile agricultural districts of Ukraine. Many farmers preferred to slaughter their animals rather than turn them over to the collective, leading to a halving of cattle and swine between 1929 and 1933. Despite the catastrophic conditions in agriculture, the government doubled grain exports to fund the imports needed for

<sup>37</sup> Elisabeth Ivansson, Mattias Tordai, *SOS Historia 7–9*. (Stockholm: Liber. 2020), 309–310.

<sup>38</sup> Elisabeth Ivansson, Mattias Tordai, *SOS Historia 7–9*, 310.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Ivansson, Mattias Tordai, *SOS Historia 7–9*, 310.

<sup>40</sup> Sven Skovmand, *Bonniers Världshistoria*. (Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag, 2003), 388.

<sup>41</sup> Örjan Nyström, Hans Nyström, Lars Nyström, *Perspektiv på historien Plus*. (Malmö: Gleerups, 2018), 399.

industrial expansion. This resulted in a famine from 1932 to 1933 that is estimated to have claimed six million lives<sup>42</sup>.

**Olofsson, S. (2010). *Nedslag i historien*. Malmö: Gleerups.**

*Estimations of Famine Death Toll:* Historian Robert Conquest estimates the death toll from the famine at seven million people, although other historians cite lower figures. Some scholars argue that the catastrophe's severity exceeded the regime's initial expectations, while others believe it was intentional.

Conquest posits that the severe famine in Ukraine was a deliberate strategy by the Soviet regime to suppress Ukrainian nationalism and quash resistance from the peasant population against collectivization. From this perspective, collectivization is viewed as an intentional policy of extermination directed at defiant farmers. Historian Isaac Deutscher characterizes the famine as an entirely man-made disaster, imposed by urban authorities upon rural populations<sup>43</sup>.

Sam Olofsson continues in the same book with a section dedicated to source-based exercises for students to engage with during class sessions. In this section, he includes a statistical summary detailing grain production (spannmålsproduktion), exports (export av spannmål), livestock ownership ("boskap" and "får och getter"), and the quantity of grain extracted by the Soviet state from Ukraine (statliga utskrivningar av spannmål) between 1928 and 1935. This data enables students to clearly observe the shifts occurring over these critical years. Olofsson's intent is for students to identify these changes, providing teachers with a foundation for engaging and reflective classroom discussions centered on this visual data.

SOVJETUNIONENS EKONOMISKA HISTORIA		1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Spannmålsproduktion (Miljoner ton)		73	72	83	69	70	68	68	75
Statliga utskrivningar av spannmål (Miljoner ton)		11	16	22	23	18	23		
Export av spannmål (Miljoner ton)		0,03	0,18	4,76	5,06	1,73	1,69		
Boskap (Miljoner)		70	67	52	48	40	38	42	49
Svin (Miljoner)		26	20	14	14	12	12	17	23
Får och getter (Miljoner)		147	147	109	78	52	50	52	61

Image source: Olofsson, S. (2010). *Nedslag i historien*. Malmö: Gleerups, p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Nyström, Lars Nyström, Örjan Nyström, *Perspektiv på historien 1b*. (Malmö: Gleerups, 2023), 307.

<sup>43</sup> Sam Olofsson, *Nedslag i historien*. (Malmö: Gleerups, 2010), 74.

*Literature where Holodomor is completely absent.* This section presents school literature that entirely omits any mention of the term Holodomor, as well as the fact that millions of people starved to death specifically in Ukraine in 1931–1932. It should be noted that these books often focus instead on Soviet forced collectivization, the Gulag, and the political persecutions known as the Great Purge. Here, the emphasis is solely on crimes that can be clearly attributed to communism as an ideology. This approach directly reflects the content and requirements of the Swedish curricula from 2011 and 2022. The ten books that fall into this category are:

- Bruér, M. (2022) *Historia 7–9*. Västra Frölunda: Tukan läromedel  
Tengnäs, G. (2019) *Enkel Historia 7–9*. Falkenberg: Tengnäs Läromedel  
Sandberg, R. (2011) *EPOS Historia 1a1*. Stockholm: Liber  
Almgren, B. (2012) *Alla tiders historia 2–3*. Malmö: Gleerups.  
Hammarén, L. (2019) *Historia 1A1*. Falköping: Capensis  
Almgren, B. (2013) *PRIO Historia Grundbok 9*. Helsingfors: Sanoma  
Ericsson, N. & Hansson, M. (2013) *Samband Historia Plus*. Stockholm: Sanoma  
Nyström, H., L., & Ö. (2014) *Perspektiv på historien – 50 poäng*. Malmö: Gleerups  
Nyström, H., L., & Ö. (2016) *Perspektiv på historien. Historiebruk och historievetenskap 2–3*. Malmö: Gleerups  
Ganeri, A. (2004) *Världens Historia. Från stenåldern till 2000-talet*. Viken: Replik in Sweden AB.

*Interviews with Teachers and Textbook Authors.* To gain a better foundational understanding of how textbook materials are used and the choices teachers in Swedish schools make regarding these materials and this issue, this report also includes interviews with teachers who discussed the subject matter, book selection, and topics related to this historical period, along with general formulations in the curricula.

The teachers were generally well-informed about the event itself, with one exception: a relatively newly qualified teacher in Västerås who had primarily taught at the middle school level but was now teaching at the upper elementary level. She expressed that she didn't know much about the event or the concept of genocide in general and was eager to learn more. A teacher at an elementary school in Jönköping, Sweden, stated that he was familiar with the Holodomor but that his knowledge of it was less extensive than his understanding of the Holocaust, which he noted was, of course, understandable. He explained that he uses *Utkik Historia 7–9* by Nilsson (2021), where the Holodomor is barely mentioned. He believed that if it were covered more thoroughly in the textbook, he might address it more in the future and expressed confidence that school history textbooks in Sweden would likely include it more extensively in time.

Another elementary school teacher based in Malmö mentioned that he was aware of the Holodomor but does not cover it in his classes. He explained that he teaches history thematically and dedicates an entire month to genocide as a theme, focusing

particularly on the Holocaust. Additionally, he covers the Armenian genocide, as well as genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica in Bosnia. He also includes the Gulag, without reflecting on the fact that the Gulag does not meet the UN criteria for genocide. The teacher cited time constraints as a reason for not covering the Holodomor, stating that he is satisfied if he manages to cover all the other topics he aims to address in this unit. He added that the study material he uses with his students, *Almgren's PRIO Historia Grundbok 9* from 2013, does not mention the event, which he felt contributed to its exclusion.

Time pressure is an issue all teachers reported as a challenge. A high school teacher, also from Malmö, noted feeling stressed about covering everything he considered important for students. He assumes that students already have a solid foundation in earlier historical periods, such as antiquity and the Middle Ages, from elementary school, and therefore begins his high school courses with the French Revolution, progressing forward to provide historical explanations for ongoing conflicts today. In the “genocide” unit, the Holodomor competes with other genocides for coverage, which is understandably difficult, making it unfortunate that the Gulag is discussed instead of the Holodomor. Another high school teacher in Stockholm, however, actively defends focusing on the Gulag, arguing that “it lasted for so long.”

The final teacher interviewed was an experienced elementary school teacher in Västerås who worked at a different school than the more recently graduated teacher in the same city. This teacher suggested that a principle of proximity might influence the choice to cover the Gulag, given that the Gulag camps were geographically closer to Scandinavia, whereas Ukraine is, by comparison, much farther away. As we can see on the page for *Gulag Online* below, this comment is geographically accurate.



### Map of Gulag camp administrations and stories from Central Europe

The Gulag.Online museum now also offers a map of Gulag camp administrations which was created on the basis of the Система исправительно-трудовых лагерей в СССР (System of Forced Labour Camps in the USSR) database. This was put together using archival material from our colleagues at the International Memorial organisation in Moscow. All information on individual camp administrations has been taken from that database.



*Image source:*  
*Gulag Online (2024),*  
*Map of Gulag camp administrations*  
*and stories from Central Europe.*  
*Available Online: <https://gulag.online/articles/mapa-taborovykh-sprav-gulagu-a-pribehu-ze-stredni-evropy?locale=en>*



Textbook author Lars Hammarén, known for *Vägar till nuet – och framtiden?* (2014) and *Historia 1a1* (2019), agrees with teachers that time constraints are an issue. “We were instructed to cut down the book’s page count,” Hammarén explains. “The editor made all the decisions and was cautious about standing out, so we focused on the Holocaust.” It should also be noted that Hammarén was not the sole author of this book. Regarding his independently authored 2014 book, we discussed his choice of wording when addressing the event, and he commented that the source situation concerning the Holodomor is not entirely clear, with opinions divided. Hammarén also explained that he considers the term “terror famine,” which he uses, to be well-suited to the event, as it reflects his view that “it was at least partly an intentional act of starvation.”

*Conclusions and Final Remarks.* Not long ago, it was impossible to release new best sellers within the fantasy genre without the selling point on the back cover that the book is written in “the spirit of JRR Tolkien’s *Lord of the Ring*”. When Robert Jordan’s magnum opus series *The Wheel of Time* was firstly promoted it was done so in that it rivalled the depth and magnitude of Tolkien’s masterpiece. However, the Guardian called it “an inflated copy of JRR Tolkien”<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, both praise and criticism would be based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. All other literature produced in that genre was —and maybe always will be— measured by that very standard.

Similarly, it appears that in Sweden (likely influenced by a broader tendency in the West, though varying significantly across different countries) there is a certain ‘Holocaustization’ of the terminology itself. The phrase “Holocaustization of the terminology of genocide” refers here to the phenomenon where the Holocaust, due to its widespread recognition and significant place in historical discourse, becomes the primary or exclusive frame of reference for understanding and discussing genocide in general. In this process, the Holocaust is often treated as the definitive or archetypal example of genocide, and other genocides may be compared to or measured against it. We see this in the reasoning of the publisher that employed textbook author Hammarén, who clearly stated that only the Holocaust should be covered, citing time constraints as the primary reason. This can lead to the risk of overshadowing or minimizing other genocides by framing them primarily in terms of their similarity or difference to the Holocaust, rather than considering them on their own historical and cultural terms. It can also influence how genocide is taught, discussed, and remembered, with the Holocaust serving as the primary model. This is also evident on an even smaller scale, with extermination sites – especially Auschwitz itself – serving as a pure representation and simplification of the Holocaust in its entirety. The American

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<sup>44</sup> Damien Walter, “The wheel of time deserves to win the Hugo, but not for the reasons you think”, *The Guardian*. (January 17, 2014). Available Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/jan/17/wheel-of-time-hugo-award-tolkien-robert-jordan>

historian Timothy Snyder has spoken of an “Auschwitz paradox”, meaning that “Auschwitz has become a summary term for the Holocaust as a whole”<sup>45</sup>.

It could be argued that there exists a similar paradox, a “Holocaust Paradox”, which simplifies all genocides. The very notion that a genocide could be executed through starvation – an attempt to exterminate a people without gas chambers or bullets—complicates public recognition. This, combined with Russian propaganda (according to the author of this article), is a primary reason why the Ukrainian Holodomor struggles to gain public support in Sweden for achieving “genocide” status. Even if one considers Russian propaganda the primary factor for this lack of official recognition (which it likely is), it does not explain everything. This is particularly evident when considering that the Armenian genocide, *Medz Yeghern*, has achieved genocide status in Sweden despite quite strong Turkish propaganda and opposition<sup>46</sup>.

Another factor could be the presence of a diaspora. Until quite recently (namely, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022), Sweden did not have a significant Ukrainian diaspora. Ukrainians who left earlier (mostly following the fall of the Berlin Wall) typically emigrated not to Europe but to Canada and the United States. In contrast, since the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 1990s, a substantial Armenian diaspora has been present in Sweden. This may very well be another valid explanation.

This research shows that the Holodomor is mentioned in some of the literature, though only briefly. The Gulag instead became a symbol representing all of communism’s crimes against humanity. It may be, as one of the teachers suggested, that there is a geographical angle to this, leading us to focus more on what is closest to home. However, I strongly doubt that this is the case. One indication that this might not be so is the noticeable trend over time in school literature, with the most recent publications being more likely to address the Holodomor using the correct terminology, while slightly older works are less likely to do so. I therefore believe that this shift is largely due to our growing awareness of Russian imperialism, its goals, rhetoric, and the crimes it has committed in the past. There are exceptions to this rule however, such as Bruér (2022), which does not mention the event at all. On the other hand, a very clear change can be seen in the books by the Nyström brothers in their series *Perspektiv på historien*, where the newer editions highlight the Holodomor (though not by name) while the older editions do not. The Nyström brothers also mention this in the preface to both their 2018 and 2023 books, noting that when they wrote their first book in 2001, “the fall of communism was still fresh in everyone’s mind, and knowledge of what had occurred under the Soviet regime was less than the knowledge we have today.” This too provides an important explanation.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> In response to Sweden’s parliamentary decision to recognize the Ottoman Empire’s actions against Armenians as genocide, Turkey’s parliament passed a resolution labeling Sweden’s historical treatment of the Sami people as genocide. This move was unexpected, even among the Sami community in Sweden.

There is also a noticeable tendency to explain the Holodomor, when it is mentioned, as a consequence of poor economic planning (i.e., communism) rather than as a deliberate strategy rooted in ethnic hatred toward Ukrainians due to Russian imperialism. In fact, no Swedish literature fully presents it in this way. Olofsson (2010) comes closest by describing the man-made famine as an intentional measure to suppress Ukrainian nationalism. However, even here, the focus remains on Ukraine's political movement to break free from the Soviet Union rather than on the notion of a deliberate attempt to erase Ukrainian identity and assimilate it into a new Soviet identity.

Another point of tension lies between the Swedish school system's 2011 goal of addressing the crimes of communism and the Ukrainian objective of raising awareness about the Holodomor as being driven either entirely or partly by Russian ethnic hatred toward the Ukrainian people, as well as by Russian/Soviet imperialism aimed at crushing Ukrainian nationalism. These two explanations for the Holodomor are not always reconcilable. Therefore, three possible outcomes can be identified that this report may reveal in Swedish history textbooks for Swedish students: 1) the Holodomor is not mentioned at all, 2) mass starvation is referenced but not as the Holodomor, or 3) the Holodomor is acknowledged but is primarily explained as a result of forced collectivization in Soviet agriculture rather than as an outcome of Russian imperialism or ethnic hatred with the intent to eliminate Ukrainians as a people or, at the very least, to suppress their desire for freedom and independence. Consequently, a presentation of the Holodomor as both an event of its own *and* as genocide could not be demonstrated, nor could any such literature be found.

Even more crucial is the observation that while the literature may address the Holodomor, no educational material in Sweden refers to the event as genocide. The closest we get is Harknäs & Hildingson (2022), who inform students that the event is sometimes referred to by some as genocide. But that is as far as it goes. Sweden's current stance of not recognizing the Holodomor as genocide therefore clearly influences how the Holodomor is portrayed in Swedish educational literature. This is quite evident and is also the last important conclusion in this report.

Genocide denial is frequently cited as having profound consequences for both the affected victim and perpetrator. I would not go so far as to say that Sweden partakes in denial of the Holodomor, but by hesitating to officially recognize it as genocide, Sweden as a nation indirectly aids Russia in fostering uncertainty about what actually happened. This uncertainty is also reflected in the source literature used for this report. How many people really died? Were they primarily Ukrainians? Was it due to communism, Russian imperialist racism, or unfortunate weather conditions that affected the harvests? Or maybe a mix of everything put together? Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, president of the International Forum Bosnia, spoke back in 2019 eloquently about how muddying the waters is an integral part of efforts to sustain denial, and that the denial of genocide is itself an essential component of the genocidal process<sup>47</sup>. The

<sup>47</sup> "Denial of the Srebrenica genocide is a major problem for several reasons", *Institute for the Research of Genocide Canada*. (2019). Available Online: <http://instituteforgenocide.org/denial-of-the-srebrenica-genocide-is-a-major-problem-for-several-reasons/>

widespread uncertainty about the meaning of the term “genocide” and its exact definition adds another layer to the problem. In the background chapter, I specifically noted that *intent* lies at the core of the definition, making it one of the primary factors in determining whether an event qualifies as genocide. Hammarén, for instance, acknowledges intent by describing it as “partly an intentional act of starvation”, yet he chooses not to label it as genocide in his book, referring to it instead as a “terror famine”.

It is, of course, in Russia’s interest (just as it was in the interest of the Soviet Union) to obscure the reasons, intentions, and ultimate outcome of this tragic event, as they are unwilling to admit their own guilt. Just as it was convenient for the Soviet communist regime to blame the famine on poor harvests and the incompetence of Ukrainian farmers, it is equally convenient for the current Russian regime to attribute all past crimes against humanity to communism. Arguments such as “it affected everyone – even Russians” and “it was merely a matter of failed economic policies that Russia now also rejects” fit neatly into this narrative. In an ironic paradox, the Swedish center-right government’s declared intention to educate about the crimes of communism thus obscures the ability to highlight and understand (and consequently to educate about) the crimes against humanity committed in the Soviet Union that had *other* underlying explanations and causes.

By refusing to acknowledge genocides, a barrier forms that complicates diplomatic and cultural relationships between these groups or their respective nations. This part of the denial puzzle deprives survivors and descendants of the opportunity for closure, skews political decision-making, and perpetuates mistrust. It also suppresses victims’ expressions of cultural identity and fuels potential cycles of retaliation, while hindering the broader democratic development of societies involved.

Lastly, I would argue that the repercussions of disregarding the acknowledgment of genocides also extend to third-party countries – in this context, Sweden – by impeding its efforts to teach future generations an accurate historical account of these tragic events. Without this education, the well-known pledge of “never again” becomes empty, risking the repetition of such tragical historical events like the Holodomor.

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## **ЗАБУТИЙ ГЕНОЦИД: ЯК ШВЕДСЬКІ ШКІЛЬНІ ПІДРУЧНИКИ ІСТОРІЇ РОЗПОВІДАЮТЬ ПРО ГОЛОДОМОР**

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У статті досліджується як у шведських шкільних підручниках історії відображена історія голоду-геноциду 1932–1933 рр. в Україні. Аналізуючи те, як ця історична подія представлена в навчальних матеріалах, стаття має на меті визначити якою мірою Голодомор визнається, контекстуалізується та пояснюється у рамках ширшого наративу радянської міжвоєнної історії, що представлений шведським учням. Робота підготовлена на основі 20 підручників, які використовуються в шведських школах, а також інтерв'ю із шістьма вчителями та одним автором навчальної літератури. Зібраний матеріал засвідчує практичну важливість точного представлення Голодомору в історичній освіті, особливо з точки зору наслідків недостатньої поінформованості про минулі геноциди та злочини проти людяності. Стаття висвітлює проблеми в шведській освітній системі, зокрема обмеження навчальних програм та пріоритетність викладу у них у порівнянні із Голодомором таких подій як Голокост та історія ГУЛАГу.

Стаття показує, що хоча про Голодомор йдеться у частині шкільних підручників, він згадується лише коротко, а символом злочинів комунізму проти людяності натомість стає ГУЛАГ. Помітною є тенденція пояснювати Голодомор наслідками поганого економічного планування (тобто помилок комуністичного режиму), а не навмисною політикою, викликаною етнічною ненавистю до українців у рамках російського імперіалізму. У жодному шведському підручнику Голодомор чітко не представлений як геноцид.

*Ключові слова:* Голодомор, геноцид, дидактика історії, радянська історія, Україна, Швеція