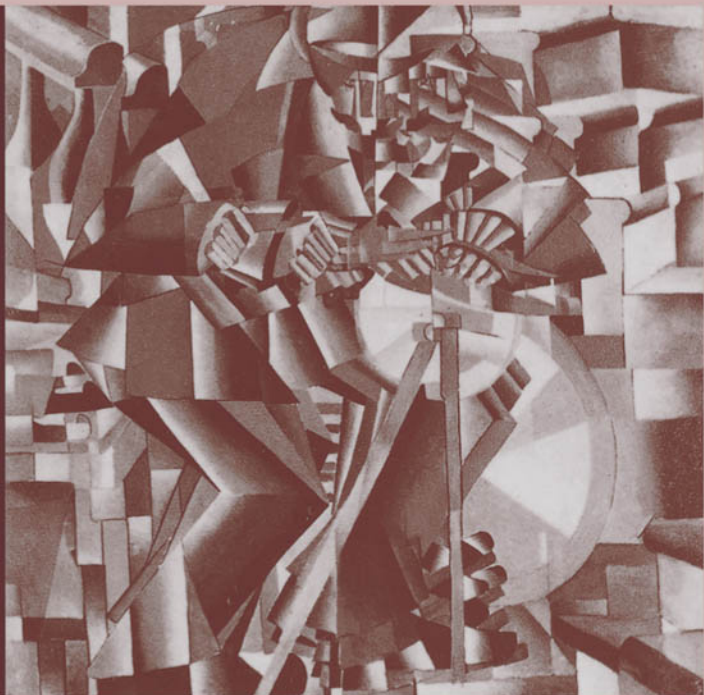


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PEASANT REBELS UNDER STALIN



Collectivization and the
Culture of Peasant Resistance

Peasant Rebels under Stalin

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Peasant Rebels Under Stalin

*Collectivization and the Culture
of Peasant Resistance*

Lynne Viola

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You have shot many people
You have driven many to jail
You have sent many into exile
To certain death in the taiga.

To you millions of curses
From old women, cripples, and mothers,
Who you have taken from the warm embraces
Of fathers and unhappy children.

A wife is on the verge of dying
With curses for you on her tongue.
Around her, her family is crying.
In tears are her four little ones.

The family closes her eyes.
Mother will not return from the grave.
We will never know Father's tenderness.
He is dying in the North Urals taiga.

Poor Father, our provider,
Was taken during grain collections.
They took all the grain from our family
And in her grief Mother passed on.

They took all the animals to the kolkhoz.
They sold off our family home.

Now our fate is to wander the earth
With our Grandmother, there are five . . .

Now the old woman wanders through villages
Gathering crumbs in her sack.
Through the storms of the winter she ventures
Cursing the regime of Stalin . . .

You have shot more people than the Tsar.
You have driven more to jail.
You have sent more into exile.
To certain death in the taiga.

—anonymous poem,
translated by Jane Ormrod

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Preface

The collectivization of agriculture was a watershed event in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the Communist party's premier effort at social engineering on a mass scale and marked the first of a series of bloody landmarks that would come to characterize and define Stalinism. Collectivization destroyed the peasant commune and left in its place a coercive enterprise, socialist in name only, that the Communist party would use to try to transform the peasantry into a cultural and economic colony. The collective farm was to be an instrument of control: it would enable the state to exact a tribute from the peasantry in the form of grain and other produce and extend political and administrative domination to the countryside. To accomplish its goal of colonization, the party aimed at nothing less than the eradication of peasant culture and independence. It launched a wholesale campaign against such peasant institutions as the *dvor* (household), *skhod* (peasant council), land society, mill (a gathering place for informal politics), market, and even church and traditional holidays in an effort to destroy sources of peasant cultural strength and autonomy. It ordered the closing of village churches and a campaign against religion. Village elites were silenced, priests were arrested, and members of the village intelligentsia who chose not to serve as agents of the state were hounded and harassed. And, under the label of "kulak," prosperous, outspoken, or simply able peasant farmers were subject to arrest and deportation in one of the twentieth century's most horrific episodes of mass repression. Peasants lost control of their means of production and economic destiny. Collectivization was an all-out attack against the peasantry, its culture, and way of life.

This book is, in many ways, a continuation of my earlier work on the mobilization and use of Soviet factory workers—the "25,000ers"—in collectivization (*The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization*, New York, 1987). That book was a study in the urban social base of Stalinism, a case study, as it were, in Stalinist populism and working-class support for the regime. It was also a study in collectivization and the revolution, broadly defined. The 25,000ers left for the countryside confident in the viability of socialism transplanted to the village. Their confidence quickly evaporated as they became immersed in

a hostile and largely alien world resistant to the workers, city, and socialism in its Stalinist guise. In a sense, the study captured the tremendous irony of the Russian Revolution as these workers—dubbed the cream of the “vanguard class”—became mired in the backwoods of peasant Russia. Their story can be read as a metaphor for an intellectually constructed working-class revolution, fueled by urban instability, power-hungry men, and dreamers, which ran aground, inevitably was bound to run aground, by the realities of Russia’s socioeconomic structure—that of an agrarian nation similar in most ways to what would later be called by the “first world,” “developing” countries—and its politico-cultural traditions.

This book continues the story by exploring the peasant reality that blocked the revolution, perhaps doomed the revolution from the start. My aim ultimately is to understand something of the politics of the revolution by exploring the politics of the peasantry during the climax of the revolutionary experience as it pertained to the countryside, for the main field of contention in revolutionary Russia was never limited to classes (which hardly existed in the Western European sense) but ultimately was a struggle between town and countryside, state and peasantry, one in which the outcome was always less clear than apparent. During collectivization, peasant politics were expressed through resistance. This book is a study of peasant resistance, broadly defined, that seeks to document not only the vast struggle waged by the peasantry during collectivization, but also the manifestation in the USSR of universal strategies of peasant resistance in what amounted to a virtual civil war between state and peasantry. In the end and when power and politics are the main criteria, the state surely emerged victorious from its confrontation with the peasantry, an inevitable outcome given the enormous repressive powers of the state and the localism of peasant revolt. But it was a Pyrrhic victory, for collectivization had the ultimate effect of unifying the overwhelming majority of the peasantry against the state and its policies. Long after the collectivization campaigns of the Stalin revolution, a peasantry, in some sense of the word, would remain, sometimes embittered and most of the time engaged in a continuing and undeclared war based on the constant and manifold employment of the devices of passive and everyday forms of resistance on the collective farm. The revolution would founder in the very countryside it sought to transform, reminding us once again that the October Revolution and the Stalinist industrial and military infrastructure of the USSR were, from the start, built on a peasant foundation inadequate to sustain a proletarian revolution and too weak to maintain its country’s super-power status into the late twentieth century.

Peasant Rebels under Stalin seeks to retrieve a lost chapter from the history of the USSR. This chapter is of immense significance because the peasant revolt against collectivization was the most violent and sustained resistance to the Soviet state after the Russian Civil War. This study presents the history of a peasantry on the brink of destruction. It is a study in peasant culture, politics, and community seen through the prism of

resistance. The history of this revolt is also a story of intrinsic human interest. This book is about the women and men who tried to preserve their families, communities, and beliefs from the depredations of Stalinism. Like my first book, this book is concerned with presenting voices from below, allowing, to the extent that it is ever possible, the actors to speak their parts. Not all peasants resisted, but many did and in countless ways. Although their acts were often heroic, this book is not about heroes, but rather about ordinary people driven to acts of heroic desperation by brutal state policies. If in the process of recording their stories we remember the deeds of the people of Nachalova or the women of Butovska, then we will have restored some of the lost voices of Soviet history.

Research for this book began in the mid-1980s, and was completed under the auspices of the Stalin-Era Research and Archive Project of the University of Toronto, funded by an MCRI grant from the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council. Grants from the NEH, the ACLS, the American Philosophical Society, the Social Science Research Council, the Bernadotte E. Schmitt Foundation, IREX, SSHRC, and the Connaught Foundation have made work on this project possible. An earlier version of chapter 6 was first published in *The Russian Review*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 1985). Copyright © 1986 by *The Russian Review*. All rights reserved. The *Journal of Modern History* granted permission for publication of segments of a previously published article that appeared in 1990.

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Toronto, Ontario
January 1996

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Peasant Rebels under Stalin

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Introduction

To all the rules of peasanthood Muravia stays true.

—Alexander Tvardovsky, "Land of Muravia"

Collectivization was a violent and bloody clash between two cultures at fatal variance with one another. It was a campaign of domination and destruction, which aimed at nothing less than the internal colonization of the peasantry. Stalinist state building required a "tribute" (grain and other agricultural produce) from the peasantry in order to fill the state's granaries for export and to feed the cities and the Red army—in short, to fulfill the endless demands of primitive socialist accumulation.¹ Collectivization would allow for the extraction of vital resources (grain, soldiers, labor), as well as enable the state to subjugate the peasantry through the imposition of vast and coercive administrative and political controls. To achieve its goals, the state sought the eradication of peasant culture and autonomy, the forced acculturation of the peasantry into the dominant culture. "Depeasantization," a Communist² corollary of industrialization, socialism, and the advent of the classless society, would be accelerated as the self-proclaimed forces of "modernity" battled the "darkness" and "backwardness" of the village. Although the Communist party publicly proclaimed collectivization to be the "socialist transformation" of the countryside, it was in reality a war of cultures, a virtual civil war between state and peasantry, town and countryside.

Peasants viewed collectivization as the end of the world and fiercely resisted the onslaught of repression. Weaving a dense web of rumor through the countryside, peasants created a counter-ideology that delegitimized and turned the Communist world upside down by labeling Soviet power the Antichrist and the collective farm his lair. They rebelled against what many called a second serfdom with a vast wave of peasant Luddism, destroying property and leveling wealth that could single out a peasant as a "kulak" or be swallowed up by the rapacious collective farm. Millions fled, taking the traditional route of outmigration to the towns or, in other cases, to the desolate steppe, where families sought refuge and young men joined the ranks of what the state labeled "kulak bandits." Many others looked for justice locally, speaking out boldly at collectivization meetings

and writing letters to the central authorities in the vain hope that Stalin, Kalinin, and the Central Committee of the Communist party might defend the peasant against the depredations of a local officialdom implementing central policy. When peaceful means failed, peasants turned to violence. Arson, assault, lynching, and murders of local officials and peasant activists dotted the rural terrain. Rebellion engulfed the countryside, resulting in some 13,000 riots with over two million participants in 1930. Peasant resistance was threatening and pervasive enough for a Commissariat of Agriculture instructor to believe "dark forces" to be at work in the countryside, and for I. M. Vareikis, first secretary of the Central Black Earth regional committee of the Communist party, to conclude that there "probably exists a defined counterrevolutionary SR [Socialist-Revolutionary party] center which is directing this business."³

The peasant revolt against collectivization was the most serious episode in popular resistance experienced by the Soviet state after the Russian Civil War. The story of this revolt constitutes one of the many "blank spots"⁴ in the history of the former Soviet Union. For decades, Soviet scholars carefully sidestepped the topic, using a fabricated and pseudo-Marxist class language to discuss what became in the truncated historical vision of the Soviet period "class struggle," "kulak insurrection," and "counterrevolutionary terror." Western scholars also avoided the subject, generally focusing on state policies and preferring to leave in place the traditional image of the passive and inert Russian peasant objectified and rendered historically motionless by the totalitarian monolith.⁵ More recently, Sheila Fitzpatrick has explored peasant resistance after collectivization, but dismisses peasant resistance during collectivization, concluding that peasants "bore it [collectivization] fatalistically."⁶ *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* is mainly, though not exclusively, the story of what happened in 1930, the key year in collectivization. It seeks to demonstrate that the scope and significance of the peasant revolt against collectivization was far greater and more varied than scholars have previously assumed, and that its content and forms grew out of a cultural context specific to peasantries as well as a national context specific to the USSR under Stalin. The book tells only a part of the story of the peasantry during collectivization, but a part that I believe conveys something of the experiences, values, and ways of the peasantry, presenting it as a distinct and meaningful cultural community. The study begins with an analysis of state-peasant relations from the 1917 Revolution to collectivization and then turns to the multilayered dimensions of peasant politics, examining the intricate network of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and actions that constitute a peasant culture of resistance.

When peasants engage in acts of resistance, they "speak out loud." That is, this normally silent historical constituency is heard and its actions are recorded, providing the historian with a glimpse of an otherwise often

inaccessible sector of society. Resistance serves as a prism, distilling aspects of peasant culture, politics, and community to the historian. The components of resistance—discourse, behavior, and action expressed through rumor, folklore, symbolic inversion, popular culture, passive resistance, violence, and rebellion—form bridges of understanding into the peasant world. As historians of other times and places have suggested, peasant consciousness reveals itself through these components of resistance, thereby allowing values, beliefs, and attitudes rooted in peasant culture to become visible.⁷

In the collectivization era, we see most clearly what might be described as a *culture* of resistance—that is, a specific style of peasant communication, demeanor, and interaction with elites that runs across time and nations and seeks alternately to manipulate, protest, and adapt itself to the prevailing order through subterfuge, rebellion, and other popular forms of resistance, passive and active, as peasants struggle to maintain their identities and lives within and against the dominant culture. The subordinate culture draws upon its own institutions, traditions, values, rituals, and ways to articulate and enunciate its resistance.

Through resistance, the peasantry revealed itself to be separate and distinct, and antithetical to Soviet power during collectivization. The cohesion and solidarity demonstrated by peasant communities at this time was less the result of minimal socioeconomic differentiation, a notion posited in the Western literature,⁸ than the result of the state's violation of peasant interests as a whole. Peasants banded together in self-defense as a cultural community struggling for survival in the face of the state's frontal assault on the household economy, peasant customs, and ways of living. Peasant women emerged as natural leaders of revolt, an outcome both predictable and logical given that collectivization impacted most seriously on women's sphere of interest: the domestic economy of private plot and livestock, the care of children, and matters of family subsistence. Peasant political unity during collectivization derived from the violation of the very interests that held the peasantry together as an economic, social, and cultural entity based on small-scale agricultural production, family economies, and community living.⁹ The solidarity arising from the assault on peasant interests formed the foundations for the culture of resistance.

The unity exhibited by the Soviet peasantry during collectivization was neither an innate function of socioeconomics nor, indeed, even a necessarily typical feature of peasant communities. Collectivism and community were village ideals or norms, paramount in the value system of the peasantry, but not always or perhaps even generally reflective of reality. In ordinary times, peasant society was characterized by a high degree of segmentation and internal stratification. Within villages, peasants could be divided according to wealth, family networks, gender, generation, factions based on defined interests, and insider-outsider status. Norms of

collectivism, unity, and egalitarianism were important values and standards of judgment in the village ethos, as well as, and perhaps more significantly, cudgels of enforcement to be used by the village's patriarchal authority structure on disobedient, dissident, or sometimes simply *different* voices in the community.¹⁰

Peasant cohesion was situational and contextual. It was most often sustained in confrontations with "outsiders," signifying here agents of the town, officialdom, and dominant classes or groups.¹¹ An ordinarily conflict-ridden society divided by myriad cleavages was capable of unity and solidarity in action in the face of crisis. In such an instance, the interest of the peasantry as a single entity superseded the usual divisions and ruptures of the community.¹² And here again, the "politics" of collectivism and unity could be turned against those villagers who acted as agents of the state or who sided with the contested practices and policies of the "outsiders." During collectivization, the peasantry engaged in a virtual civil war with the state, yet within this civil war there was another, no less brutal civil war that pitted the village community against a minority of peasant officials and activists who went over to the side of Soviet power.¹³

The 1917 Revolution had the unintended consequence of reinforcing many aspects of peasant culture and, specifically, a number of important features underlying and strengthening community cohesion. Although human and material losses from years of war and the famine that followed in the wake of civil war took a tremendous toll on the peasantry, the revolution, in combination with this time of troubles, had the effect of revitalizing the peasant community. Peasants engaged in massive social leveling. The percentages of poor peasants fell from some 65% to around 25% by the mid-1920s, while the proportion of wealthy peasants declined from roughly 15% (depending upon calculation) to about 3% in the same time span.¹⁴ The middle peasant became the dominant figure in Soviet agriculture as a result of wartime losses, social revolution and redivision of wealth, and the return, often forced, of large numbers of peasants who had quit the commune to establish individual farmsteads in the prewar Stolypin agrarian reforms. Socioeconomic differentiation remained fairly stable through the 1920s, showing only very slight increases at the extremes. Leveling reinforced village homogeneity and cohesion while strengthening the position of the middle peasant who, according to Eric Wolf, represented the most "culturally conservative stratum" of the peasantry and the village force most resistant to change.¹⁵ The commune itself was bolstered as most of the Stolypin peasants returned to communal land tenure, which constituted approximately 95% of all forms of land tenure in the mid-1920s, thereby standardizing the peasant economy.¹⁶ And although peasant households splintered as the liberating effects of the revolution encouraged and enabled peasant sons to free themselves from the authority of the patriarchal household, most peasants, especially women and the weaker members of the community, clung all the more tena-

ciously to customary and conservative notions of household, family, marriage, and belief in order to survive the crises of the times. While the revolution no doubt dislodged and altered significant aspects of peasant lives, historians increasingly believe that the basic structures and institutions of the village demonstrated considerable continuity over the revolutionary divide, in many cases becoming stronger as a defensive bulwark against economic hardship and the destructive incursions of warring governments and armies, Red and White.¹⁷

The strengthening of homogeneity and the endurance of peasant culture should not imply that the peasantry was a static, unchanging rustic fixture. Profound processes of change had long been at work in the countryside, accelerating in particular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alternative patterns of socialization appeared as peasant-workers and soldiers returned on visits or permanently to their home villages. Urban patterns of taste and, to a lesser extent, consumption also began to make an appearance in rural Russia as personal contacts between town and countryside became more common. A market economy made inroads into the countryside, altering the economy of the peasant household as well as the internal social dynamics of the commune. Family size declined as extended families slowly began to give way to nuclear families, and marriages began to be based less exclusively on parents' choice. Peasant culture did not stagnate, but evolved over time, absorbing change and pragmatically adapting what was of use.¹⁸ Fundamental structures and institutions of peasant community persisted, demonstrating the durability and adaptability of the peasantry as a culture.

Similar patterns of change persisted into the Soviet period, coexisting, sometimes peacefully, sometimes not, with the prevailing patterns of peasant and community relations and dynamics. Although many interactions between village and town were seriously disrupted during the revolution and civil war,¹⁹ the town and state continued to have an enormous impact on the countryside. Tens of thousands of peasant-workers returned to the village during the civil war, bringing with them new ways and practices not always in line with those of the community. A vast number of peasants served in the army during the world war and civil war, and they, too, returned with new ideas, sometimes at odds with their neighbors. From some of these groups emerged the village's first Communists and Komsomols; the early collective farms and the splintering of households often derived from the aspirations and needs of these prodigal sons. The Communist party, in the meantime, although in practice generally neglectful of the countryside through most of the 1920s and preoccupied with industry and internal party politics, was, in theory, committed to remaking the peasantry, to eliminating it as an antiquated socioeconomic category in an accelerated depeasantization that would transform peasant into proletarian. The party, the Komsomol, peasant-workers home on leave, groups of poor peasants and Red army veterans, and rural correspondents (*sel'kory*) all became dimly lit beacons of Communist sensibil-

ity in the village. Efforts at socialization and indoctrination occurred in periodic antireligious campaigns, literacy campaigns, election campaigns, campaigns to recruit party and Komsomol members, campaigns to organize poor peasants or women, and so on, as the state attempted to build bridges into the countryside to bolster the *smychka* (worker-peasant alliance) of the 1920s. The state succeeded in establishing pockets of support in the village, which would serve not only as agents of change but also as new sources of cleavage and village disjunction as new political identities emerged and interacted, sometimes uncomfortably, within the peasant community.

Collectivization was to destroy most of these "cultural bridges," leaving what remained of the state's small contingent of supporters entrenched against a hostile community. Most of the natural cleavages and fault lines that criss-crossed the village in ordinary times receded into latency during collectivization as the community found itself united against a common, and, by this time, deadly foe. During collectivization, the peasantry acted as a class in much the way Teodor Shanin has defined class for peasantry: "that is, as a social entity with a community of economic interests, its identity shaped by conflict with other classes and expressed in typical patterns of cognition and political consciousness, however rudimentary, which made it capable of collective action reflecting its interests."²⁰ Whether it is described as a class or as a culture in Clifford Geertz's sense of a totality of experience and behavior, the "socially established structures of meaning" or "webs of significance" by which people act,²¹ the peasantry clearly demonstrated the extent to which it was distinct and separate from much of the rest of Soviet society.

Implicit in this view of the peasantry as a class or culture is some echo of Robert Redfield's notion of peasant society and culture as "a type or class loosely defined" with "something generic about it."²² In form and in content as well as in common cause and interest, a great deal about the peasantry's resistance to collectivization was "generic," demonstrating the durability and solidarity of the peasantry as a social and cultural category and its similarities to other peasants engaged in resistance at other times and in other places. The generic nature of the peasantry and its resistance, however, only goes so far in explicating peasant behavior in these years, for collectivization was largely unprecedented in intent, form, and scope, setting up at times a unique context to which peasant culture was forced to respond, challenge, and adapt. And, of course, the specifications of region, ethnicity, gender, class, and generation could also provide variations on a general theme while still showing loyalty to that theme. This work attempts to make general sense of regional differences in the content, forms, and dimensions of peasant resistance. It is, for example, clear what the general dynamics of various forms of protest were according to region in the Russian Republic and at times in other republics, and it is possible to make certain generalizations about resistance on the basis of a region's strength in grain production, but the possibility for more specific assess-

ments awaits the further opening of archives in the former Soviet Union, especially those associated with the secret police. Likewise, only the most cursory assessments of the impact of ethnicity on peasant protest appears in this study, partly because the focus tends to be mainly Russian and partly because ethnicity likely played a significant, sometimes key, role in peasant resistance, therefore requiring and meriting a specialized study of the topic. And although I endeavor to draw the reader's attention to the very significant gender dimensions of peasant protest, I am unable to delve very far into issues of class and generation. I take the risk of generalization because I believe that there are certain common features to peasant resistance during collectivization that warrant a general study and that, by and large, the peasantry's experience of collectivization overrode regional and other differences if only for a historically short, but significant, period of time. Not all peasants resisted—indeed, as I will make clear, a determined minority sided with the state—but most peasants did, and they were unified by a shared politics, set of grievances, and course of action.

During collectivization, peasant resistance became a form of peasant politics—the only genuinely oppositional politics available to peasants then—that reflected a collective consciousness of intent, action, and hoped-for resolution, as well as a clear and sometimes even prophetic sense of national politics and goals. The peasant cohesion and solidarity of the collectivization era were direct manifestations of peasant agency and political consciousness. The base determinants of peasant resistance derived from reasoned concerns centered largely on issues of justice and subsistence, and supplemented by the primary elemental responses of anger, desperation, and rage. Peasant ideas of justice were integral to popular protest.²³ Collectivization was a violation—a direct assault on—customary norms of village authority and government, ideals of collectivism and neighborhood, and, often, simple standards of human decency. Support for collectivization *within* the community was equally a violation of the village ideals of collectivism, thereby making retribution a key derivative of justice in motivating acts of peasant resistance. Collectivization was also, as importantly, a threat to peasant household and community survival. Subsistence was a primary determinant of the shape of peasant politics and relations to the state.²⁴ It surely was a chief concern and responsibility of the peasant women, who dominated so much of the peasantry's responses to collectivization, as was common elsewhere when peasant survival was at stake. The contents and causes of peasant resistance to collectivization then were, to a great extent, "generic," while still manifesting specificity in derivation, context, and response.

The forms of peasant resistance constituted an additional component of the popular culture of resistance. Like content and causation, peasant forms of resistance were shaped by a set of customary concerns and ways of being and acting that, although frequently appearing irrational and chaotic to outsiders, had their own logic and, in most cases, a long-established

history as approaches to challenging authority. Tradition itself became a resource for legitimacy and mobilization, as peasants sought justification for their interpretations of and responses to state policy.²⁵ Peasants made use of a customary array of resistance tactics: rumor, flight, dissimulation, and a variety of passive and active forms of resistance. Their choices were clearly and logically guided by the actions of the state and the issue of their resistance. Peasant forms of resistance were informed by pragmatism, flexibility, and adaptation, each a vital resource in opposing a powerful and repressive state. Peasants only turned to violence as a last resort, when desperation and retribution reached such a level as to provoke the peasantry into direct challenge. Often, violence came out of ordinarily nonviolent settings, such as meetings, demonstrations, and other interactions with Soviet power, when the violent actions of the authorities pushed peasants to answer with violence.²⁶ The forms of peasant resistance transpired, in large part, in ritualized, customary scenarios, acted out over and over again for their organizational merit and tactical utility in responding to power.

The antithetical nature of peasant culture and resistance most clearly expressed itself through metaphor and symbolic inversion, which constituted a form within a form or a vehicle for many specific types of protest. The discourse of peasant rebellion surfaced in the world of rumor, in which symbols of apocalypse and serfdom provided dominant motifs used to categorize the politics and behavior of the state and its agents. Apocalypse turned the Communist world on its head by associating the state with the Antichrist, while serfdom signified the ultimate Communist betrayal of revolutionary ideals. The massive destruction and sale of peasant property (*razbazarivanie*) served as another form of inversion, as the peasantry seemingly engaged in a wholesale attempt to overturn "class" in the village through social and economic leveling. Terror aimed at officials and activists and the chasing out of state authority was a literal inversion of political power. Dissimulation, another basic tool of resistance, constantly juggled power and weakness in attempts to hoodwink, disguise, and evade. Perhaps most important of all, the central role of women in peasant resistance demonstrated an inversion not only of power relations between the state and peasantry, but also a subversion of the traditional patriarchal order, indicating a complete denial of norms of obedience and submission. Reversals of power, inversions of image and role, and counter-ideology served up the justification, legitimation, and mobilization required to bolster peasant resistance in a stark symbolism of binary oppositions between state and peasantry, revealing once again a peasant culture of resistance.²⁷

The peasant culture of resistance neither evolved nor functioned in a vacuum. Peasant resistance may be viewed as a reactive form of protest to the state-building and cultural domination of the collectivization era, as it was largely, although not exclusively, an attempt to preserve the status quo.²⁸ However, peasant politics did more than *react*. Peasant resis-

tance was closely connected to national events and central policies. As a culture or class, the peasantry defined itself in opposition to and in conflict with other classes and, in this case, the state. Peasant resistance operated in concert with state repression. The study of peasant resistance is therefore as much a study of the peasant as it is a study of the state in its interactions with the peasantry. Peasant resistance alternately affected the radicalization or modification of state policy in the collectivization era. The dynamics of *razbazarivanie* and self-dekulakization, for example, were important features in the escalation of the tempos of collectivization and dekulakization as local authorities struggled to contain the mass destruction of livestock and to stem the tide of peasant flight by extending and increasing the levels of repression. Yet when peasant violence began to threaten both state stability and spring sowing in the early March of 1930, Stalin called a temporary retreat from the collectivization campaign. Passive resistance no doubt had the greatest, most sustained effect on state policy, forcing the state again and again to modify some of its more radical designs of transformation, especially after the 1932–33 famine. Throughout our period of study, peasant actions occurred not in isolation and not solely in reaction, but *in combination* with state policy, in a circularity of response and effect.²⁹ Peasant resistance, moreover, was a highly creative force, evolving and adapting its basic forms into ritualized scenarios and tactical tools in conjunction with day-to-day relations with authority.

The state is never absent from this study. The very nature of the sources, largely of official provenance, as well as the reality of Stalinism as a state-dominated sociopolitical structure, mean that the historian must view peasant politics through the filter of the state. However, as David Warren Sabean has pointed out in another context, “what is a fact about sources is not necessarily a weakness. Documents which perceive peasants through the eyes of rulers or their spokesmen begin with relationships of domination. . . . The issue is to examine the constitution of peasant notions within the dynamics of power and hierarchical relations.”³⁰ The study of peasant resistance is therefore minutely concerned with official discourse, the language and mentality of Stalinism that transformed peasants into enemies and distorted the reality of peasant politics. Words like *kulak*, counterrevolution, sabotage, treason, *razbazarivanie*, self-dekulakization, incorrect excesses, mass disturbances, *bab’i bunty*, and myriad other terms—all, in due course, discussed—complicate our work by partly obscuring peasant voices and by sometimes opening the way for charges of attributing merit and actuality where neither may exist, or at least not in their most obvious form, when we have no choice but to adopt them ourselves. Yet a semiotic approach to the use of this terminology can yield valuable understandings of dominant voices and the state. If the state then casts an encompassing shadow over the peasantry in this study, that is because the peasant culture of resistance depended upon the state for its existence, evolving within and against the grain of Stalinism, and

feeding on the dynamics of a civil war unleashed upon the peasantry by the state.

The degree and universality of peasant resistance—that is, the very existence of what I have chosen to call a peasant culture of resistance—demonstrates the relative autonomy of the peasantry within the “leviathan state” of Stalinism, revealing the endurance of defining characteristics of peasant culture, politics, and community during and even after the collectivization of Soviet agriculture. The tenacity and staying power of the peasantry, this view of collectivization as civil war, as a clash of cultures, challenges both the totalitarian model’s stress on the atomization of society and the more recent school of thought, pioneered by Moshe Lewin, that posits the existence of a “quicksand society” incapable of generating cohesive classes able to defend their interests and resist the state.³¹ This study does not intend to resurrect the old historiographical notion of a “we-they” split in Russian (and later Soviet) society by positing the existence of a peasant culture of resistance, but rather to suggest that the dichotomy of state and society (or at least of peasant society) was firmly fixed from below, representing a semantic weapon of resistance and a subaltern view of dominant powers rather than a sociopolitical reality. Soviet society therefore becomes something less of the aberration it is usually painted if the angle of vision is shifted to the peasantry’s place in society, its relation to the state, and the content and forms of its resistance. At the same time, the specificity of the collective and individual experiences of collectivization remain on a grander historical scheme of things, and it becomes clear that the overall impact of the great peasant revolt and its bloody repression played directly into the dialectics and the savagery of Stalinism, forming a major part of the background of 1937.

1

The Last and Most Decisive Battle: Collectivization as Civil War

Never before had the breath of destruction hung so directly above the territory of the October revolution as in the years of complete collectivization. Discontent, distrust, bitterness, were corroding the country. The disturbance of the currency, the mounting up of stable, "conventional," and free market prices, the transition from a simulacrum of *trade* between the state and the peasants to a grain, meat and milk *levy*, the life-and-death struggle with mass plunderings of the collective property and mass concealment of these plunderings, the purely military mobilization of the party for the struggle against kulak sabotage (after the "liquidation" of the kulaks as a class) together with this a return to food cards and hunger rations, and finally a restoration of the passport system—all these measures revived throughout the country the atmosphere of the seemingly so long ended civil war.

—Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*

Like the Jews that Moses led out of Egyptian slavery, the half-savage, stupid, ponderous people of the Russian villages . . . will die out, and a new tribe will take their place—literate, sensible, hearty people.

—Maxim Gorky, "On the Russian Peasantry"

When the Communist party formally introduced the policy of wholesale collectivization, it claimed that the nation was on the eve of a great transformation. With the aid of urban Communists and workers, the state would "construct" socialism in the countryside. Through collectivization, "victory on the grain front" (and therefore "industrialization front") would be achieved. The "socialist transformation of the peasantry" would "eliminate differences between town and countryside" and rural illiteracy would be eradicated. The propaganda of the day told only half the story. It said nothing of the assault on peasant culture and autonomy or the brutal means by which the great transformation would be accomplished. Public traces of that side of the story could be discerned in the widespread calls "to overcome rural backwardness" and "to defeat peasant darkness" and in the less common but chilling refrain, "Bolsheviks are not vegetari-

ans."¹ Much of what collectivization stood for and portended remained hidden from public discourse.

The official enunciations on collectivization represented what James Scott has labeled the "public transcript" of the dominant.² The public transcript on collectivization was a facade covering another, hidden transcript that revealed the great transformation to be a struggle over economic resources (chiefly grain) and culture. This is not to say that Communists necessarily distinguished between the two agendas, although some doubtless did. Nor is it to say that the Communist party did not often believe its own rhetoric: hypocrisy and delusion may be conveniently and mutually reinforcing. Stalinist official discourse (indeed, most state-enshrined ideologies) was in part a means of constructing logical and politically acceptable concepts for explaining and justifying often cruel realities. Ideology was handmaiden to the state. Disguised theoretical revisions, policy changes celebrated for their continuity, and a pseudo-dogma of excesses, mistakes, and deviations were brought in to maintain the balance between truth, belief (feigned or otherwise), and practice if reality clashed with ideology. When the curtain of the public transcript is opened to expose the party's hidden transcript, representing, according to Scott, "the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed,"³ a different side of collectivization is revealed.

Most peasants were neither convinced nor deceived by the state's public transcript. For them, collectivization was apocalypse, a war between the forces of evil and the forces of good. Soviet power, incarnate in the state, the town, and the urban cadres of collectivization, was Antichrist, with the collective farm as his lair. To peasants, collectivization was vastly more than a struggle for grain or the construction of that amorphous abstraction, socialism. They understood it as a battle over their culture and way of life, as pillage, injustice, and wrong. It was a struggle for power and control, an attempt to subjugate and colonize what through the course of Soviet history came increasingly to resemble an occupied people. Removed from the distorting lens of official propaganda, belief, and perception, collectivization was a clash of cultures, a civil war.

Primordial *muzhik* darkness

The history of state-peasant relations from the Russian Revolution of 1917 is the history of a continuing battle between two cultures. The Communists represented an urban, working-class (in the abstract),⁴ atheistic, technological, deterministic, and, in their minds, modern culture, while the peasantry represented (to Communists) the antithesis of themselves, the negation of all that was considered modern. Before they were Communists, even before they were Bolsheviks, Russian Marxists were implicitly antipeasant. In glorifying a god of progress which, it was thought, doomed the peasantry to social and economic extinction, they rejected the very idea of the peasantry as a separate culture, as more than a spawning

ground for workers.⁵ The elements of determinism and will,⁶ which featured so prominently in Russian Marxist and especially Bolshevik thinking and personality and that led to victory in October 1917, were projected onto the party, transforming it into a prime mover of history. History would be forged by the party, the self-proclaimed vanguard of politics, progress, and revolutionary truth. The brutalizing effects of years of war, revolution, and civil war, added to the starkly intolerant and utilitarian mentality characteristic of much of the prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia which hatched the Bolsheviks, wrought a party prepared and determined to wage what Lenin called "the last and most decisive battle."⁷ Narrowly, that battle concerned only the kulak—the capitalist farmer and official oppressor of poor and middle peasants, the allies of the working class. In reality, the battle was against all peasants and it would be waged in order to hurry history along its predetermined course, which would lead to the disappearance of this supposedly primitive, premodern social form.

Soviet power was based upon a "dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry."⁸ In 1917, when the Bolsheviks championed peasant revolutionary goals as their own, Lenin claimed that "there is *no* radical divergence of interests between the wage-workers and the working and exploited peasantry. Socialism is *fully* able to meet the interests of both."⁹ In fact, the dictatorship, and the "alliance" it derived from, combined mutually irreconcilable aims and would quickly break apart in conflict. It could not have been otherwise given the contradictory nature of the October Revolution, a "working-class" revolution in an agrarian nation in which the industrial proletariat accounted for little more than 3% of the population, while the peasantry constituted no less than 85%. The Bolsheviks' revolution was a working-class affair, town business orchestrated by the most extreme of the radical intelligentsia. Lev Kritsman, a leading Marxist scholar of the peasantry in the postrevolutionary years, asserted that there were actually two revolutions in 1917—an urban, socialist revolution and a rural, bourgeois or antifeudal revolution.¹⁰ The two revolutions represented different and ultimately antithetical goals. Following the forced expropriations and partitions of the nobility's lands, the peasantry desired no more than the right to be left alone: to prosper as farmers and to dispose of their produce as they saw fit.¹¹ Although some peasants may have shared the socialist aims of the towns, most were averse to principles of socialist collectivism. Communist class constructs could not easily be translated into terms that applied to the culture of peasants.

The validity of Kritsman's assessment was vividly apparent in the Russian Civil War, in which the town turned against the countryside, making violent forays into the villages to take grain and peasant sons for the Red army. The Communist party fought the war with the aid of the newly created revolutionary army and a powerful set of domestic policies sometimes subsumed under the heading of "war communism." The coun-

try had experienced a breakdown in the grain trade from the time of the First World War, as inflation skyrocketed and networks of supply and distribution disintegrated. By the time the Bolsheviks took power, the entire system of trade and supply was in shambles. The party would soon resort to the forced requisitioning of grain in order to feed the cities and the army.¹² In the initial phases of the civil war, the Communists sought to collect grain through the formation of committees of the village poor (*kombedy*). In theory, the *kombedy* were to unite the poor against the rich, to stir class war in the village. The poor peasants would aid the urban requisitioning detachments to find grain and, in return, receive a portion of the grain. In fact, the *kombedy* were a dismal failure. The peasantry resented the intervention of outsiders in their affairs. Most poor peasants saw the label of "poor" as an insult rather than as class enhancement. All peasants were united in their efforts to retain (at the very least) a fair share of the grain they had toiled to produce. As a consequence, most villages stubbornly defied the party's attempts at social division and resisted as a cohesive entity.¹³

Grain was the central and most divisive issue in the alliance of workers and poor peasants. Lenin recognized this fact as early as May 1918, when he declared that any "owners of grain who possess surplus grain" and do not turn it in, regardless of social status, "will be declared *enemies of the people*."¹⁴ Here, there was no mention of the traditional Leninist breakdown of peasantry into poor, middle, and kulak. It was not simply the kulak, that theoretically determined class enemy and counterrevolutionary, who was at fault. Instead, actions determined political status. In consequence, Lenin declared a "ruthless and terrorist struggle and war against peasant or other bourgeois elements who retain surplus grain for themselves."¹⁵ All peasants could be *enemies of the people* if they acted contrary to the policies of the party. Lenin was able to account for this seeming contradiction of class by reference to a "kulak mood [that] prevails among the peasants."¹⁶ Kulaks were demonic, subhuman. Lenin referred to them as "avaricious, bloated, and bestial," "the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters," "spiders," "leeches," and "vampires"; he declared a "ruthless war on the kulaks," and called for "death to them!"¹⁷

The *kombedy* were abandoned before the end of 1918 in most parts of the country. The failure of this class-based policy forced Lenin, at least formally, to shift his emphasis from the poor to the middle peasant, while he continued to view the kulak as the party's basic foe and to endorse forced grain requisitioning. In a speech made in March 1919, Lenin said, "The kulak is our implacable enemy. And here we can hope for nothing unless we crush him. The middle peasant is a different case, he is not our enemy." At the same time as he drew social distinctions among the peasantry, Lenin continued to view peasant political activity that was contrary to Soviet interests as *kulak*. He denied, for instance, that there had been *peasant* revolts against grain requisitioning, insisting instead that these were *kulak* revolts.¹⁸

The middle peasant, the largest group among the peasantry after the

revolution, was defined as a "wavering" stratum of the peasantry.¹⁹ It was, as a social being, part petty producer, part laborer. Its socioeconomic interests therefore did not easily fit into Communist class analysis. This problem was resolved by grafting onto the middle peasant a dual political nature to fit its dual socioeconomic nature. The middle peasant, depending on circumstance and interest, could join forces with the kulak and counterrevolution or take the side of the poor peasantry and the revolution. It was the task, therefore, of the party to help the middle peasantry recognize its own best interests. Peasants, like workers who were also unable to arrive at consciousness unaided, must be "developed": "Any peasant who is a little bit developed and has emerged from his primordial muzhik darkness," said Lenin, "will agree that there is no other way [but to turn over his grain to the Soviet state]." ²⁰ According to Lenin, "all class-conscious and sensible peasants . . . will agree that *all surplus grain without exception* must be turned over to the workers' state."²¹ The implications of these statements were that the peasant who was not class-conscious might not hand over his grain. In that case, the peasant's political actions redounded to his socioeconomic status once again: consciousness determined being.

Through his subjective definition of class and the concept of the middle peasant as waverer, Lenin created a route by which Bolshevik class categories could in fact bridge culture. This sense of class was an abstraction, a party construction, but it allowed Communists to behave, on a theoretical level, in conformance with their ideas. This theoretical contortion was a seeping of the hidden into the public transcript. It enabled the party to attempt, at a public level and when possible, to win the middle peasant to its side, while providing it with a ready rationalization to treat the middle peasant—that is, the majority of the peasantry—as an enemy if it opposed the party's policies. Here was one of the theoretical underpinnings of Stalin's later war with the peasantry. In the meantime, for Lenin, the ultimate way out of these dilemmas, the final solution to the peasant problem, lay in the peasantry's extinction: "In order to abolish classes it is necessary . . . to abolish the difference between factory worker and peasant, to make *workers of them all*." Unlike Stalin, however, even the Lenin of the civil war era was compelled to add that this remaking of the peasantry would take "a long time."²²

The full implications of the cultural rift with the peasantry and the disastrous policies of the civil war became clear in late 1920 and early 1921, when the party found itself isolated from peasants *and* workers, and the Soviet state seemed to totter on the brink of destruction. In the cities, there was widespread working class unrest. In the countryside, peasant revolts were reaching ominous dimensions in Tambov, Siberia, and Ukraine. The final, symbolic blow to the regime came in early 1921, when the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base, long a stronghold of Bolshevik support, rose up against the Communists. Lenin was forced to call a retreat and abandon the policies of the civil war era.

At the Tenth Congress of the Communist party in March 1921, Lenin

introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). NEP was a retreat, and above all a concession to the peasantry. It eliminated the hated grain requisitions, replacing them first with a tax in kind and later a money tax; it legalized private trade and traders, and denationalized all but the most important industries, banks, and foreign trade. NEP eventually took the form of a kind of mixed economy, a market socialism. At the Tenth Congress, Lenin admitted that "the interests of these two classes [workers and peasants] differ."²³ He also warned that "so long as there is no revolution in other countries, only agreement with the peasantry can save the socialist revolution in Russia."²⁴ Lenin had learned an important lesson from the civil war. The party required the support of the peasantry—the majority of the population—to stay in power. The failure of "international revolution" to come to the aid of what even Lenin admitted to be "backward" Russia meant that some other theoretical prop was necessary to support the reality of a proletarian revolution in a peasant country. This prop was the *smychka*, or worker-peasant alliance. Soviet power would be able to hold out until the outbreak of international revolution, according to Lenin, only under the condition that the *smychka* be preserved while socialism was "constructed" in Russia, that is, while the country industrialized. To the end of his life, Lenin would insist that the maintenance of the *smychka* was imperative to the survival of the Soviet state.

In 1922, Lenin told the Eleventh Congress of the Communist party that "we must prove that we can help him [the peasant], and that in this period, when the small peasant is in a state of appalling ruin, impoverishment, and starvation, the Communists are really helping him. Either we prove that, or he will send us to the devil. That is absolutely inevitable."²⁵ Lenin assumed a moderate stance on the peasantry after the civil war not for the sake of the peasantry, but in order to ensure the survival of Soviet power. He remained committed to socialism, in both town and countryside, and to the transformation of peasant Russia. He had become convinced, however, that the only way to change the peasant was gradually and through persuasion: "it will take generations to remold the small farmer and recast his mentality and habits."²⁶ In his last articles, Lenin argued that a cultural revolution—above all, universal literacy—was prerequisite to the peasants' transformation. Further, he maintained that the agricultural cooperative, which would cater to the material interests of the peasant while teaching collectivism, would provide a base for the development of socialism in the countryside.²⁷

Lenin wrote in 1923 that NEP was intended to last for an entire historical epoch: one to two decades at best.²⁸ He left the party an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, he advocated a gradual evolution toward socialism in the countryside. On the other hand, he maintained that the countryside, left to its own devices, would not spontaneously enter the path of socialism; that the conscious agents of history, in the form of the party and the working class, would have to take the initiative in building socialism in the countryside. Similarly to the ambiguities of Lenin's "What Is

to Be Done?“, Lenin’s NEP legacy provided no answer to the problem of what to do if the peasant resisted change, resisted socialism. Further, there was a basic fault line in Lenin’s class logic about the peasantry. In insisting that peasant activity contrary to Communist policies could be defined as kulak while at the same time maintaining that his approach to the peasantry was based on scientific Marxist class analysis, Lenin provided his successors with the conceptualizations that would be used in collectivization when Stalin launched a war against *all* peasants. This combination of the subjectivity of Bolshevik class categories and the iron determinism of theory, however willful in fact, created a potent and deadly mix that would allow the party to cast itself in the role of agent of historical destiny, empowered by a pseudo-science that could transform any opposition into the socioeconomically determined voice of class enemies, kulaks, and counterrevolutionaries slated for destruction by the “advanced forces” of history. Although Lenin’s last writings urged the party to approach the peasantry with caution—and there is no reason not to take his words seriously—his legacy was fraught with contradictions and would provide the basic theoretical underpinnings for collectivization.

Planting socialism

Most Communists viewed NEP as a retreat. Although often portrayed as a “golden age” of the peasantry, NEP was destined to be no more than at most a retrospective golden age, visible only from the ramparts of the collective farms of the 1930s. During the 1920s, peasants continued to suffer the depredations of the centralizing, modernizing, and only temporarily and partially restrained state. Although peasants lived with relatively less interference from the state than ever before in their history, the state continued to exact tribute from peasants, making frequent and sometimes violent forays into the countryside to take taxes, grain, and, according to peasant complaints, the morals and faith of peasant youth. Rural officials, especially in the early 1920s, often maintained their civil war-style of hostile interaction with the peasantry despite the reigning spirit of class harmony. Lenin’s cooperative plan was posthumously enshrined as the solution to the peasant problem. Little was done, however, to support peasants who became interested in forming cooperatives. Moreover, cooperative ventures faced the threat of the kulak label if they became too successful. The party’s ally, the poor peasant, was also left with little more than ideological sustenance during these years. NEP was, most of all, according to Moshe Lewin, a policy of “drift.”²⁹ The party was too consumed with factional fighting and the struggle for power after Lenin’s death to pay serious practical attention to agriculture. The peasantry only entered the party’s field of vision as each of the successive left oppositions raised the specter of the kulak bogey, claiming that rural capitalism was on the rise thanks to the overextension of NEP. Since rural social stratification was so slight in the 1920s, following the ex-

tensive social leveling of the revolution and civil war, it is safe to assume that the real issues were power and the continued existence of peasant Russia.

The party's chief economic priority during NEP was the industrialization of the nation, something that to many Communists was tantamount to the *construction* of socialism. In 1920, Lenin said that "*Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.*"³⁰ Over the course of the 1920s, Communism would be equated with the rapid and large-scale industrialization of the country: the concept of building socialism would come to mean simply building, and the bigger and more modern the better. Industrialization, however, had to wait until the war-shattered economy was reconstructed. During NEP, the expansion of the grain trade was intended to provide the necessary revenues to finance the state's industrial development while at the same time granting a level of peasant prosperity requisite to the creation of an internal market of consumers of goods from the industrial sector. To ensure a net profit for industry, it was necessary to turn the terms of trade against the peasantry, charging higher prices for industrial goods and lower prices for agricultural produce. In 1923–24, this "scissors" in pricing led to a crisis of overproduction in industry and peasant unwillingness to sell grain. Consequently, the party was forced to lower industrial prices by inaugurating a series of reforms in industry. The consequent closing of the scissors was thought to hinder industrial growth, and, in fact, by 1927, the country entered into a manufactured goods shortage that would seriously impede trade between town and countryside.

The dilemma the party confronted was not new to Russian economic development. The alternatives appeared completely dichotomous: either the party could allow the peasantry to enrich itself, create a prosperous agriculture, and through balanced growth and social stability the needed revenues for industrialization would gradually accrue, or it could "squeeze" the peasantry through heavy taxation, maintain low agricultural prices and expand grain exports, and through a rapid accumulation of capital industrialization would be quickly achieved, after which revenues could be redirected to agriculture. In either case, the peasantry was perceived mainly as an economic resource, a troublesome one at that, and in effect, little more than an internal colony. In the mid-1920s, E. A. Preobrazhensky, a spokesman for the Left Opposition, urged that the terms of trade be turned against the peasantry, that a "tribute" be exacted in order to speed up capital accumulation and industrialization. With neither irony nor shame, he dubbed this process "primitive socialist accumulation," echoing and subverting Marx's detested "primitive capitalist accumulation" in the interest of Soviet power. Nikolai Bukharin, the party's leading theoretician and, in many ways, Lenin's heir to a moderate peasant policy, warned that primitive socialist accumulation would threaten the *smychka*, leading to massive peasant discontent and withdrawal from the market, as had occurred during the civil war. Bukharin worried that

the very stability of the state would be at risk if the interests of the peasantry were so abused.³¹

The party's economic dilemmas were overshadowed and to a great extent determined by noneconomic factors. As in years past, it was war or the threat of war that decided the balance between the two approaches, and it was questions of politics and power that shaped decisions and policies. At the end of the 1920s, the brilliant theoretical contortionism of Preobrazhensky and Bukharin were eclipsed by the practical reality that NEP had entered into a dire crisis. In 1927, a war scare broke out, giving rise to popular fears of military intervention and elite manipulations of policy in the direction of an emergency order.³² The nation came to resemble a siege state, a country at war with itself and the outside world. The mentality thus created represented the first of many layers of a political culture sometimes known as Stalinism. In the context of war scare, rapid industrialization became imperative: the nation's defenses had to be secured.

In spite of a good harvest, grain marketings dropped markedly in 1927. The reasons for this decline are complex. In part, peasants responded to the war scare in the same way town dwellers had: they hoarded. Hoarding, however, only compounded a problem that was much more fundamental. Consumption levels among peasants had risen during the 1920s, as peasants made the choice to eat more and sell less. They did this partly because they could, perhaps for the first time in their history; partly because they were taxed less than before the revolution; and partly because the sale of grain brought them little in return. By 1927, a "goods famine" had removed much of the incentive for peasants to market their grain. Further, following several years of good harvests after the scissors crisis, the party had lowered grain prices in 1926 to spur industrial development, therefore removing yet another incentive for peasants to sell their grain. The result was a disastrous shortfall in the state's grain procurement.

In the towns, food prices skyrocketed, lines formed everywhere, and rationing returned. Memories of the urban famine of the civil war haunted town dwellers and added to the panic of the war scare. The Stalinist contingent in the party interpreted the peasantry's actions as a "kulak grain strike," or a conscious and intentional sabotage of industrialization and, in consequence, the nation's defenses. Most Western analysts are confident that the immediate problem of grain marketings could have been resolved by a simple, administrative increase in grain prices.³³ By then, however, the problem was least of all an economic one. The grain procurement crisis, fueled by the combustible materials of the war scare, ignited a civil war-like mood and mentality among rank-and-file urban Communists and many industrial workers hell-bent on radical, maximalist solutions. Although there were a host of ancillary problems, threats, and enemies, the main issue, the chief obstacle to the party's sudden and all-out "great turn," became the peasantry.

In 1928, the party implemented what it euphemistically called "extraordinary measures" in grain procurement. Thousands of Communists and factory workers from the towns poured into the countryside to take grain and to override local officials, who by now were, if not in favor of NEP, at least used to it. They closed markets, set up roadblocks to ferret out private traders, and made widespread use of Article 107 of the criminal code against speculation and hoarding. Both "speculation" and "hoarding" were interpreted in the broadest terms possible as grain procurement brigades endeavored to seize any and all reserves of grain. Peasants viewed the extraordinary measures as a return to the forced grain requisitioning of the civil war. Repression and violence became everyday features of rural life as the grain procurement campaign shattered NEP's uneasy truce with the peasantry. Stalin assumed the role of chief advocate of extraordinary measures during his trip to Siberia in early 1928. There he lashed out against local Communists, who, he claimed, were not seriously worried about the hunger threatening the towns and Red army and were afraid to make use of Article 107.³⁴ This new hard line was vigorously opposed by the emerging Right Opposition led by Bukharin and Rykov. They argued that extraordinary measures were leading to the dreaded breakdown of the *smychka* and threatened the very survival of Soviet power. In what appears to have been a temporary compromise with the Right, Stalin backed down from the extraordinary measures after the April 1928 plenum of the party's Central Committee, but returned to them again in early 1929, when the flow of grain from the countryside once again stalled.

While the Right Opposition inveighed against the possibility of the loss of peasant support in the *smychka*, Stalin stubbornly maintained that the leading role of the working class in the *smychka* was paramount.³⁵ As early as 1926, he told a gathering of Leningrad Communists that "we do not defend just any kind of union of workers and peasants. We stand for that union, in which the leading role belongs to the working class."³⁶ To Stalin, *razmychka* (the break-up of the *smychka*) meant, above all, the disruption of the flow of grain to the towns. The consequent disorganization in food supply and grain exports threatened both industrialization and working-class support for the party, both of which in turn would jeopardize the nation's defenses.³⁷ Raising grain prices would harm the working class and lead to a *smychka* with the rich and a *razmychka* with the workers and rural poor.³⁸ Stalin defined the aims of the *smychka* as "strengthening the position of the working class," "guaranteeing the leading role of the working class within the union," and "the destruction of classes and class society."³⁹ Elsewhere, he claimed that the goal of the *smychka* was "to merge the peasantry with the working class," to remake the peasantry and its psychology, and "to prepare thereby the conditions for the destruction of classes."⁴⁰ In a later speech, he argued that the *smychka* was only useful when aimed against capitalist elements and exploited as a tool to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁴¹ For

Stalin, the peasantry played the role of ally only when and to the extent that it served the interests of the dictatorship of the *proletariat*. When the country entered the grain crisis of the late 1920s, it became clear to Stalin that the peasantry was no longer a suitable partner in the *smychka* and that a final solution to the accursed peasant problem was necessary.

Increasingly from 1927 and onward, Stalin proposed that the only solution to the grain problem was the creation of collective farms. He argued that a tribute (*dan'*) was required from the peasantry to pay for industrialization and to feed the towns and army, and that the best way to collect that tribute—and to ensure that it reached its maximum level—was through the collective farm. The tribute, however, would not come only from the kulak. At the April 1929 plenum of the Central Committee, as Stalin was discussing his notion of a tribute, a voice from the audience interjected that such a tribute should not be from the middle peasant. Stalin shot back, "Do you think that the middle peasant is closer to the party than the working class? Well, you are a sham [*lipovyi*] Marxist."⁴² Stalin's Marxism pitted town against countryside and worker against peasant.

Stalin nevertheless continued to speak the Marxist-Leninist language of class when discussing the peasantry. He argued, for instance, that the kulak stratum was growing in size, that class struggle was worsening in the countryside, and that the peasantry was divided into poor peasants, middle peasants, and kulaks. And, officially, it was the kulak who was "wrecking" and "intriguing" against Soviet economic policy. Yet he insisted that it was a "mistake" to think that just any form of *smychka* would do. He supported only that *smychka* "which guaranteed the victory of socialism." Linking NEP and the *smychka*, Stalin said that "when it [NEP] ceases to serve the cause of socialism, we will throw it to the devil. Lenin said that NEP [was] introduced seriously and for a long time. But he never said that NEP [was] introduced forever."⁴³

Stalin also claimed that it was wrong to assume that the countryside would follow the town "spontaneously" to socialism. He argued that the "socialist town must lead the petit-bourgeois peasant countryside . . . transforming the countryside to a new socialist foundation." The transformation, according to Stalin, would come about by *planting* [from the verb *nasazhdat'*] new, large-scale socialized farms in the countryside.⁴⁴ Later, he would speak of how the party had "turned [*povernuli*] the middle peasant onto the path of socialism."⁴⁵ And while the kulak would not be allowed into the new socialized farms—he would be "eliminated"—socio-political contradictions would remain in the collectives, including individualism and "kulak survivals [*perezhitki*]." "Elements of the class struggle"⁴⁶ would continue in the collective farm, *even without the kulak*.

Although he paid lip service to Marxist-Leninist notions of class and rural class struggle, Stalin clearly viewed the main elements in the struggle as workers and peasants, town and countryside. Like Lenin, he believed that kulak status could be determined by political behavior, and

that the abolition of classes would occur ultimately only when the peasantry ceased to exist. For both leaders, the *smychka* was meant to ensure the ultimate destruction of classes. Unlike Lenin, Stalin's theoretical approach suffered less frequently from sophistries or ambiguities. The official and hidden transcripts of the party came together much more clearly in Stalin's writings and speeches. In a sense, Stalin was closer to reality than Lenin and the other party leaders. Where they faltered, he fully succeeded in bridging culture with class. He was able to do so because he saw the peasantry as one entity, *as a class*, indivisible by Marxist social categories. Stalin expanded Lenin's theory of the wavering middle peasant to encompass the entire peasantry, defining and treating the latter more simply as petty producer. This approach meant that the peasantry could side politically either with the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat or with the counterrevolution and the kulak. During collectivization, the peasantry would demonstrate a unity of interest and purpose in its resistance that would vastly enhance Stalin's rural revolution by allowing the state to reconstruct the social face of the peasantry, in effect to "kulakize" the countryside, through its association of opposition with kulak socioeconomic status. For Stalin, culture became class, and therefore assumed the role of chief adversary. None of Lenin's occasional caution would deter him. Rather, he would enter the war with the peasantry recalling only Lenin's teachings of the "last and most decisive battle" and his utterances about "primordial *muzhik* darkness," "leeches," "vampires," and a "ruthless war on the kulaks."

The great turn

On 7 November 1929, the twelfth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin proclaimed in his article "Year of the Great Turn" that the middle peasant had begun to flock to the collective farms.⁴⁷ Collectivization had in fact increased dramatically by this time, surpassing the relatively modest rates projected for the socialized sector of agriculture after the Fifteenth Party Congress of December 1927 first placed collectivization on the immediate agenda.⁴⁸ At the Sixteenth Party Conference in April 1929, in its First Five-Year Plan on agriculture, the Central Committee had projected the collectivization of 9.6% of the peasant population in the 1932–33 economic year, and 13.6% (or approximately 3.7 million households) in 1933–34. These projections were revised upward in the late summer and fall of 1929, when first *Gosplan* (the state planning commission) called for the collectivization of 2.5 million peasant households in the course of 1929–30, and then *Kolkhoztsentr* (the central agency leading collective farm administration), with subsequent confirmation from *Sovnarkom* (Council of People's Commissars), resolved that 3.1 million peasant households would be incorporated into collective farms by the end of 1929–30.⁴⁹

In actuality, by 1 June 1928, 1.7% of peasant households were in

collective farms; and between 1 June and 1 October 1929 alone percentages rose from 3.9 to 7.5. The increase was especially marked in major grain-producing regions. The Lower Volga and North Caucasus surpassed all other regions, with percentages of collectivized peasant households reaching 18.1 and 19.1, respectively, in October.⁵⁰ The high rates achieved in the regional collectivization campaigns lay behind Stalin's statement that the middle peasantry was entering collective farms. By arguing that the middle peasant was turning voluntarily to socialized agriculture, Stalin was claiming that the *majority* of the peasantry was *ready* for collectivization. In reality, it was mainly poor peasants who were joining collectives. And, although there was apparently some genuine enthusiasm "from below," the regional campaigns had already begun to resort to coercion to achieve their high percentages.⁵¹

Even at this stage, collectivization was largely imposed "from above." Orchestrated and led by the regional party organizations, with implicit or explicit sanction from Moscow, *raion* (district level) officials and urban Communists and workers brought collectivization to the countryside. Grain requisitioning brigades, already obsessed with attaining high percentages, were transferred *en masse* to collectivization.⁵² A volatile anti-peasant mood in the cities, especially among rank-and-file Communists and industrial workers and based on bread shortages, continuing news of "kulak sabotage," and long simmering urban-rural antipathies, infected these cadres and other, newer recruits from urban centers.⁵³ This combination of official endorsement, regional initiative and direction, and unrestrained action on the part of lower level cadres intertwined to create a radical momentum, an ever-accelerating collectivization tempo. The "success" of the regional campaigns then provided the necessary impetus for Moscow to push collectivization rates up even further, in what became a deadly and continual tug of war between center and periphery to keep pace with each other as reality exceeded plan and plans were continually revised to register and push forward collectivization tempos.

The November 1929 party plenum formally ratified wholesale collectivization, leaving the specifics of policy implementation to a Politburo commission that would meet the next month. The plenum was largely an affair of consensus and acclamation, resolving to push vigorously forward. Although some party leaders expressed their concern over the use of force and lack of preparation in the summer-fall campaign—most notably Siberian regional first party secretary S. I. Syrtsov; Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaja, who spoke of the disappearance of "persuasion" in the countryside; and Ukrainian delegation members S. V. Kosior and G. I. Petrovskii—most regional party secretaries expressed their enthusiasm for the policy, downplaying problems and promising collectivization within one to one-and-a-half years. G. N. Kaminskii, the head of *Kolkhoztsestr*, and V. M. Molotov, Stalin's right-hand man, along with a chorus of supporters repeatedly pushed the plenum to extremes, calling for the completion of collectivization in 1930 and, at one point, by the spring of 1930. Stalin

responded to calls for more preparation and planning with, "Do you think everything can be organized ahead of time?" and discussion of "difficulties" was dismissed as "opportunism."⁵⁴

While the pace of collectivization continued to accelerate, Agriculture Commissar I. A. Iakovlev led the December Politburo commission and its eight subcommittees in the preparation of plans and legislation on collective farm construction. The commission called for the completion of collectivization in major grain regions in one to two years; in other grain regions, in two to three years; and in the most important grain deficit regions, in three to four years. The commission also resolved that an intermediate form of collective farm, the *artel*, which featured the socialization of land, labor, draft animals, and basic inventory, would be the standard, and that private ownership of domestic livestock needed for consumption would be maintained. Any movement to extend socialization of peasant properties beyond the *artel* would depend on the peasantry's experience and "the growth of its confidence in the stability, benefits, and advantages" of collective farming. The kulak faced expropriation of his means of production (which would then be transferred to the collective farms) and resettlement or exile. The subcommittee on the kulak reported that "it would be hopeless to try to decide the 'kulak problem' by exiling the *entire* mass of the kulak population to remote territories." Instead, it recommended a differentiated approach to the "elimination of the kulak as a class." The most dangerous kulaks were to be arrested or exiled. A second group of less dangerous kulaks also were to be exiled, while a third category would serve as a disenfranchised labor force in the collective farms until they could prove themselves "worthy" of membership. Finally, the commission warned against any attempt either to restrain collectivization or to collectivize "by decree."⁵⁵

The Politburo commission published its legislation on 5 January 1930. The legislation stipulated that the Lower Volga, Middle Volga, and North Caucasus were to complete collectivization by fall 1930, or spring 1931 at the latest; all remaining grain regions were to complete collectivization by fall 1931, or spring 1932 at the latest, thus accelerating yet again the pace of the campaign. No mention was made of remaining areas. The legislation also specified that the *artel* would be the main form of collective farm, leaving out any particulars from the commission's work. Stalin had personally intervened on this issue, ordering the editing out of "details" on the *artel* that should, he argued, more appropriately be left to the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Agriculture. The kulak would be "eliminated as a class," as Stalin had already noted in his 27 December 1929 speech at the Conference of Marxist Agronomists, and excluded from entry into the collective farms. Stalin and other maximalists in the leadership were likely responsible for radicalizing further an already radical set of guidelines by revising the work of the December commission, keeping the legislation vague, and including only very weak warnings against violence.⁵⁶ Stalin, among others, apparently still be-

lied in minimal planning, leaving the precise shape of collectivization to the "revolutionary initiative" of the masses, meaning in fact his lower level cadres in the field. And by the time this legislation was published, collectivization percentages in the USSR had leaped from 7.5 in October 1929 to 18.1 on 1 January 1930, with even higher rates in major grain regions (Lower Volga, 56–70%; Middle Volga, 41.7%; North Caucasus, 48.1%). Throughout the month of January 1930, reality continued to outpace planning. By 1 February 1930, 31.7% of all households in the USSR were in collective farms, with rates still higher in individual regions (Moscow, 37.1%; Central Black Earth Region, 51%; Urals, 52.1%; Middle Volga, 51.8%; Lower Volga, 61.1%; North Caucasus, 62.7%).⁵⁷

The elimination of the kulak as a class, or dekulakization, had also spread far and wide through the country as regional party organizations enacted their own legislation and issued their own directives in advance and in anticipation of Moscow. A Politburo commission, chaired by Molotov, met from 15 to 26 January 1930 in an effort to draw up central legislation on dekulakization. Like collectivization, dekulakization had by now gone far beyond the initial plans of the December Politburo commission, in what had become a melee of violence and plunder. The Molotov commission not only had to respond to the increased pace of the campaign, but attempt to exert central control over it as a way to avoid complete anarchy while continuing to maintain the most radical momentum.⁵⁸ Following the policy recommendations of December, the commission divided kulaks into three categories. The most dangerous category, some 60,000 heads of households, faced execution or internment in concentration camps, while their families had their properties and all but the most essential items expropriated and were sent into exile in remote parts of the country. An additional 150,000 families, deemed to be somewhat less dangerous but still a threat, also faced expropriation and exile to remote regions. The main points of exile for these two categories were the Northern Region (scheduled to receive 70,000 families), Siberia (50,000 families), Urals (20–25,000 families), and Kazakhstan (20–25,000 families). The final category of well over a half million families were to be subjected to partial expropriation of properties and resettlement within their native districts. The term "kulak" was defined broadly and included not only kulaks (an ambiguous term to start with) but (using the parlance of the day) active white guards, former bandits, former white officers, repatriated peasants, active members of church councils and sects, priests, and anyone "currently manifesting c[ounter]-r[evolutionary] activities." Overall numbers of dekulakized peasants were not to exceed 3% to 5% of the population. The OGPU (Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie, or the political police) was charged with the implementation of arrests and deportations. The operation was to be completed in four months, and 50% by 15 April. *Raion* soviets, in combination with *sel'sovets* (rural soviets), poor peasants, and collective farmers, were responsible for drawing up lists of kulaks and carrying out expropriations. Warnings

to avoid "substituting naked dekulakization for collectivization" and not to dekulakize peasants with relatives in industry or the military were included in the commission's directives and issued in late January and early February.⁵⁹

Collectivization and dekulakization had long since jumped the rails of central control. Brigades of collectivizers with plenipotentiary powers toured the countryside, stopping briefly in villages where, often with gun in hand, they forced peasants, under threat of dekulakization, to sign up to join the collective farm. Intimidation, harassment, and even torture were used to exact signatures. Collectivization rates continued to rise through February, reaching 57.2% by 1 March, and the hideously unreal regional percentages of 74.2% in Moscow Region, 83.3% in the Central Black Earth Region, 75.6% in Urals, 60.3% in Middle Volga, 70.1% in Lower Volga, and 79.4% in North Caucasus.⁶⁰ The high percentages belied the fact that most collective farms at this time were "paper collectives," attained in the "race for percentages" held among regional and district party organizations. Collectivization often amounted to little more than a collective farm charter and chairman, the socialization of livestock (which might remain in former owners' possession until appropriate collective space was provided), and the terror of dekulakization.

Dekulakization was no fiction. Although deportations often did not begin until later, peasants labeled as kulaks found themselves evicted from their homes or forced to exchange homes with poor peasants; fleeced of their belongings, often including household items, trinkets, and clothes; and shamed, insulted, and injured before the community in what in one Pskov *raion* was labeled the "week of the trunk."⁶¹ Dekulakization was sometimes carried out "conspiratorially," in the dead of night, as cadres banged on doors and windows, terrorizing families who were forced out onto the street, half-dressed.⁶² Often, everything was taken from these families, including children's underwear and earrings from women's ears. In Sosnovskii *raion*, Kozlovskii *okrug*, Central Black Earth Region, an *okrug* level official told cadres to "dekulakize in such a way that only the ceiling beams and walls are left."⁶³

The countryside was engulfed in what peasants called a Bartholomew's Night massacre.⁶⁴ As state repression increased, peasant violence increased, and as peasant violence increased, state violence increased, leading to a seemingly never-ending crescendo of arrests, pillage, beatings, and rage. The crescendo came to an abrupt halt, however, when, on 2 March 1930, Stalin published "Dizziness from Success," blaming the outrages on the lower level cadres who were indeed dizzy from success, but failing to admit any central responsibility.⁶⁵ Soon collectivization percentages began to tumble, as peasants appropriated Stalin's name in their struggle against the cadres of collectivization. Peasants quit the collective farms in droves, driving down percentages of collectivized households in the USSR from 57.2% in March to 38.6% in April, 28% in May, and further downward until hitting a low of 21.5% in September. The decline in regional rates was equally drastic. Between 1 March and 1 May, per-

centages of collectivized households fell in Moscow Region from 74.2% to 7.5%; in the Central Black Earth Region, from 83.3% to 18.2%; in the Urals, from 75.6% to 31.9%; in the Lower Volga, from 70.1% to 41.4%; in the Middle Volga, from 60.3% to 30.1%; and in the North Caucasus, from 79.4% to 63.2%.⁶⁶

Collectivization resumed the following fall at a slightly less breakneck speed. The major grain-producing regions attained wholesale collectivization by the end of the First Five-Year Plan in 1932; other regions climbed more gradually toward that goal, generally reaching it by the end of the 1930s. In the meantime, more than one million peasant families (perhaps five to six million people) were subjected to some form of dekulakization during the years of wholesale collectivization. Of these, some 381,026 families (a total population of at least 1,803,392) were exiled outside their own regions in 1930 and 1931, the two key years of deportation.⁶⁷ The deportations were perhaps one of the most horrendous episodes in a decade marked by horror. Preparations for the deportation—transport, housing, food, clothes, medicine—appear to have been conducted *simultaneously* with the deportations. The results were catastrophic. Epidemics raged in the *spetsposelenie* (“special settlements”), striking down the very young and the old. According to a July 1931 report, more than 20,000 people had died by May 1931 in the Northern Region alone.⁶⁸ Statistics compiled by V. N. Zemskov indicate that 281,367 deportees would die in their places of exile between 1932 and 1934.⁶⁹ The “kulak” was to disappear from the Russian countryside forever, while the peasantry that remained was transformed into something akin to a subject population.

Stalinist metaphysics

Collectivization transformed the countryside into an internal colony from which tribute—in the form of grain, taxes, labor, and soldiers—could be extracted to finance the industrialization, modernization, and defense of the country. The Soviet peasant colony, like most colonies, had a “native culture” that was a repository of identity, independence, and resistance, and, as such, an impediment to full colonization. Collectivization was as much an onslaught on that culture as it was a struggle over resources. The cultural clash of collectivization began as a clash between town and countryside and developed into an effort to create a new *Soviet* culture in the village. The party’s goal was to eliminate differences between town and countryside, worker and peasant—in effect, to destroy the peasantry as a culture. This war of occupation was reflected and waged in the discourse of collectivization and Stalinist cultural revolution.

The cultural chasm between town and countryside cut both ways; it was not purely an urban construct. For centuries, the countryside had served as a source of extraction for the Muscovite and later Russian governments; until as late as the first half of the nineteenth century, the state’s relations with the peasantry were limited mainly to tax collection and army recruitment. The prerevolutionary Russian historian Kliuchev-

sky's oft-repeated phrase that "the state swelled and the people grew lean" rang true for much of the peasantry and was rooted in peasant political and historical consciousness. The 1917 Revolution did not alter this basic reality. On the contrary, the Russian Civil War expanded the cultural gulf. The brute destruction and violent depredations of both Red and White armies and the breakdown in urban-rural communications led to further cultural rift as well as economic regression in the countryside.⁷⁰

The armistice of NEP did little to alleviate peasant enmity. During most of the 1920s, the town receded from the village, limiting its interventions in rural life to tax collections, soviet elections, and occasional and sometimes ill-begotten attempts at land reform (*zemleustroistvo*). The town was suspect and, for some villagers, glaringly alien. An ethnographer visiting the Novgorod area in the mid-1920s recalled that the peasants' initial reaction to the arrival of his research team was fear; the peasants took them for tax assessors. Suspicion was so intense that when some of the ethnographers began to draw sketches of the village, rumors flew that "foreign spies are coming, they are drawing maps." As the team traveled from village to village, the peasants of the region knew their every move.⁷¹ Many peasants believed that the town—rather than the kulak—was the real exploiter. A Moscow-area investigator noted that he often heard peasants complain that the workers lived better while the peasants worked harder, paid more taxes, and suffered unfairly due to the price scissors.⁷² The same sentiments were echoed repeatedly in the pages of the newspaper, *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* (*The Peasant Newspaper*), when peasants were invited to send letters to an "all-union peasant meeting" to mark the tenth anniversary of the revolution.⁷³ At the same time, during the war scare of 1927, official observers noted a widespread "antitown" mood in the countryside, with peasants expressing such sentiments as "We agree to support Sov[iet]power if it establishes identical rights for workers and peasants"; and "We peasants will not go to war, let the workers fight."⁷⁴ With the imposition of "extraordinary measures" in grain procurements in the late 1920s, peasant anger lent new force to these opinions. Throughout the countryside, peasants cried: "Throw out the Communists!" "Get rid of the workers coming from Moscow—don't interfere in our village affairs!" "Peasants live poorly because the workers and officials sit on them!" and "The city workers live on us; they take all we have."⁷⁵ Once collectivization began, peasants would treat the town and party in apocalyptic terms, declaring them to be tools of Antichrist, and hence offering up the ultimate expression of cultural schism.⁷⁶

The town was generally less forthright, cloaking its sentiments in class language or paternalistic hues. There were exceptions. Maxim Gorky, later favored literary son of the revolution and Stalin, captured in 1922 the prejudices of the town and party in a frank, stark language free of sophistry or apology. Gorky viewed the drama and outcome of the Russian Revolution in terms of a conflict between town and countryside.

The town represented enlightenment and progress, while the village stood for "dark ignorance," savagery, and "a poisonous quality which devastates a man, and empties him of desire."⁷⁷ The peasantry was a parasite, able and willing to hold the town hostage. During the civil war, "the countryside clearly understood that the town depended on it, while until this moment it had only felt its own dependence on the town."⁷⁸ As a consequence, perhaps even in dumb revenge, "[i]n 1919 the nicest countryman quietly took the townsman's shoes, his clothes, and generally fleeced him, bartering grain and potatoes for anything necessary or unnecessary for the countryside."⁷⁹ Gorky believed that the countryside was triumphantly gloating: "he who has the grain in his hand holds authority and power."⁸⁰ He summed up his attitude to the peasantry by ascribing to it the cruelties of the revolution (just as another generation would blame the peasantry for the atrocities of Stalinism):

I explain the cruel manifestations of the revolution in terms of the exceptional cruelty of the Russian people. . . . I cannot consider those who took on themselves the hard, Herculean labour of cleansing the Augean stables of Russian life as "tormentors of the people," to me they are rather its victims. I say this on the basis of the firmly-held conviction that the whole of the Russian intelligentsia, which for almost a whole century has manfully attempted to set on its feet the ponderous Russian people, lying lazily, negligently and lucklessly on its soil—the whole intelligentsia is a historical victim of a people vegetating on a fabulously rich land on which it managed to live astonishingly poorly. The Russian peasant, whose common sense has now been awakened by the revolution, might say of his intelligentsia: stupid as the sun, it, too, works for no reward.⁸¹

Gorky presented a mirror image of the peasantry's own hostilities to the towns, a transference of all the blame and guilt generated by the revolution away from the intelligentsia and onto the peasantry. His sentiments, many of which were shared widely in the party and in the town, were a projection onto the peasantry of culpability for all that the town detested: for Russian backwardness, for the failures and ineptitude of the Communist party's, indeed the entire radical intelligentsia's, dream of a radiant future. It was this point of view, this cast of mind, that formed the basis for a way of thinking in the Communist party that would allow and enable the party to declare war on the countryside and rob the peasantry of its humanity.

Few were as straightforward as Gorky in betraying the true nature of the contest between town and countryside. Although evidence of that contest would be everywhere once collectivization began, the language of class and paternalism obfuscated that reality even in Stalin's identification of class with culture. The essence of the conflict lay hidden in deeply held prejudices, perceptions, and stereotypes about the peasantry that, when added together, did much to determine the ultimate shape of collectivization.

In the eyes of many town dwellers and members of the intelligentsia, the peasantry was an abstraction. Long before the revolution, the peasantry was transformed into a generalization, a stereotype, a vehicle to carry the dreams or nightmares of educated Russians. The Communists continued this tradition after 1917, adding thick coats of ideology in the process. The civil war, however, depleted from the generalizations any of the positive, idealist, or more ambiguous assessments that the Populist thinkers of the nineteenth century had held so dear.⁸² With the civil war, the peasantry became an enemy, an alien and adversary class. It was an obstacle, a hindrance to the town, the working class, socialism, and modernity. Hostility toward peasants was deeply embedded in the party's popular culture. In the years leading up to collectivization, and even more once collectivization began, the peasantry would be shorn of its humanity, reduced to a subhuman status that would enable and encourage the atrocities of the times.

The infantilization of the peasantry, a holdover from centuries past, began this process and served as the foundation of the Communist reconstruction of the peasantry. Before and after the revolution, peasant men were *muzhiki*, peasant women *baby*, terms which when used among peasants were familiar and friendly but when used by outsiders assumed a derogatory, pejorative aspect. *Muzhiki* and *baby* were most often dark, uncultured, ignorant, and ignoble; more seldom (after 1917) were they childlike innocents. In either case, the process of infantilization deprived them of agency and responsibility. They were in need of the civilizing guidance and leadership of the town. Stalin believed this when he argued that collective farms must be "planted" in the countryside by the more advanced forces of the town and party.⁸³ *Muzhiki* and *baby*, moreover, were classless. Devoid of political content, they lacked the necessary consciousness to form class according to Communist constructs—they were perhaps "aclass" or "preclass." As collectivization spread, these terms became increasingly elastic: the *muzhiki* contracted as the *baby* expanded. The party sought to hold male peasants responsible for political opposition: *muzhiki* often became kulaks. The *baby*, in the meantime, created such a stir in the countryside that it was in the interest of the party to remove political or class implications from *baby* protest or else face the risk of revealing publicly that the entire peasantry, not just the kulak, was up in arms and led, moreover, by women.⁸⁴ Finally, *muzhiki* and *baby* represented the face of Russian backwardness, an enemy of Soviet power. Initially, this association merely brought down upon the peasantry the missionary cultural imperialism of the towns. Once the collective farm system was established, peasant "backwardness," if revealed in the form of accidental breakage of machinery or other forms of negligence to collective farm property, became *counterrevolutionary*—which, in a Communist sense, it was—and a peasant could be fined, deported, or imprisoned for, unofficially, backwardness—officially, counterrevolution.⁸⁵

Marxist-Leninist (and later -Stalinist) class categories were easily

grafted onto infantile depictions of the peasantry, retaining—perhaps gaining—elasticity as political designations. Class stereotypes crystallized in the course of the 1920s, especially for urban Communists ignorant or simply disdainful of village life. Civil war hostility and Leninist theoretical gyrations held the stereotypes together. The poor peasant was the ally of the working class, partner in the dictatorship. The middle peasant “wavered,” sometimes to the side of the revolution, sometimes to the side of counterrevolution. The kulak was the class enemy, “avaricious, bloated, and bestial.”⁸⁶ In his novel *Bruski*, the Soviet writer Panferov captured the material face of social stereotypes in describing a NEP-style party official, a “city boy” come to the village:

He always imagined a village as a large, dark lump divided into three sectors: the poor peasants, the middle peasants, and the rich peasants, the kulaks. The kulak had a large head and wore leather boots; the middle peasant had ordinary boots and wore a jacket; and the poor peasant ran about in bast shoes.⁸⁷

Even the late Soviet General Petro Grigorenko, who became a dissident in the post-Stalin order before being forced into exile in the United States, recalled his conviction that “the world had seemed simple to me. The worker was the ideal, the repository of the highest morality. The kulak was a beast, an evil-doer, a criminal.”⁸⁸ Grigorenko expressed well the Manichaean view of the world that animated much of Communist theorizing and brutalized the realization of its goals, enabling the party to demonize and therefore dehumanize social groups and entire classes deemed adversaries by its ideology.

Although class stereotypes became unalterable dogma in theory, they were the most malleable of concepts in practice, especially for poorly educated cadres in the field. Social determinism was utilized in reverse. Class stereotypes were subsumed by political stereotypes and the latter were then ascribed to class and the designation of social category. If a poor or middle peasant failed to behave according to the socially determined rules of class, he or she could easily lose standing. Already in the mid-1920s—as if echoing Lenin’s civil war contradictions—urban *shefstvo* (patronage) workers new to the village often equated peasant hostility or opposition with kulak status.⁸⁹ Peasants who criticized officials, urban or otherwise, became kulaks.⁹⁰ During collectivization, poor and middle peasants were either for the collective farm or they were kulaks.⁹¹

Poor and middle peasants were not always “kulakized” for opposition. Class stereotypes, political and social, could be sidestepped for reasons of state. Too much opposition, too wide a stretching of the official class story, could not always be explained away by reference to kulaks and kulak politics. Instead, if need be and more often for women than for men, official diagnoses could revert to the infantilization of peasants. Peasants acted like kulaks, engaged in kulak politics, or took part in demonstrations of antisoviet behavior because they did not know any better. They were dark, ignorant, or simply hysterical, irrational *baby*, easily

duped by the nefarious kulak. Infantilization could explain away sociopolitical failings or the inadequacy of doctrine by depriving poor and middle peasants of agency and responsibility.

The sometime inability of the middle peasant to act in politically correct terms was implicit in the social definition. The middle peasant need not be a kulak to misbehave. Fortunately, Lenin had provided a theoretical way out for this category of peasant: they wavered.⁹² K. Ia. Bauman, first secretary of the Moscow regional committee of the party, was accused of elevating Lenin's theory on the wavering middle peasant into an enshrined dogma during collectivization. After the March 1930 retreat, the Moscow regional leadership supposedly refused to accept any blame for the atrocities of collectivization in the region, viewing the violence as inevitable due to the wavering nature of the middle peasant.⁹³ For Stalin, this theory stretched the official story and credibility too far, providing a rationalization for excesses as well as a rationalization for peasant oppositional behavior at a time when he was applying (temporarily) the brakes to collectivization. The theory detracted from the danger and culpability of the kulak and implied (correctly) that the majority of the peasantry was in open revolt. Nonetheless, the theory remained a convenient tool for explaining away pockets of peasant resistance.

The party was also able to rationalize the protest of poor and middle peasants through the creation of an entirely new political category not to be found in the canons of Marxism. This category of peasant was utterly devoid of socioeconomic content, and represented a political consciousness unrelated to being. Peasants in this category, especially once collectivization began, were *podkulachniki*, a word often translated as kulak hirelings or agents and meaning literally "under the kulak," or under the influence of the kulak. The *podkulachnik* might be the relative of a kulak, a former employee of a kulak loyal to his old master, a duped poor or middle peasant unaware of the promise of Communism, or an inexplicably antisoviet peasant defying social determinism.⁹⁴ The category *podkulachnik* represented a kind of transmigration of the kulak soul. Transmigration, moreover, could occur either between living peasants or from one generation to the next, for kulak ancestry was frequently grounds for identifying a peasant as a kulak during collectivization.⁹⁵ The antisoviet politics of a *podkulachnik* were "kulak," animated by a "kulak essence." The *podkulachnik* label was useful, for it enabled Soviet power to hold poor and middle peasants responsible for kulak actions when occasion demanded, thus providing peasants with a semiagency (for they still were literally "under the [influence of the] kulak") that they generally lacked. In the classification of *podkulachniki*, the party discovered the ultimate rationalization and disguise for a peasant resistance that in reality united all peasants as—in the broadest sense—a class against the state. By distilling a kulak essence into the socially amorphous *podkulachnik*, the party also furthered the cause of the social metaphysics of Stalinism, which depicted

a world in which evil and demons relentlessly confronted the Communist party, the vanguard of the radiant future.

The kulak, ethereal or corporeal, loomed large in the Communist categorization of the peasantry. The figure of the kulak was the most perfectly formed of all of the class stereotypes of the peasantry. It slid into demonology, carrying the process of the dehumanization of the peasantry to its furthest reaches. The definition of the kulak was amorphous and slippery. The peasants' sense of a kulak generally had little to do with wealth or politics. Instead, a peasant became a kulak if he violated the moral economy of the village or its ideals of collectivism.⁹⁶ The party, meanwhile, attempted to define the kulak, at least officially, according to a wide variety of economic criteria, ranging from the hiring of labor to the ownership of different kinds of agricultural enterprises to the accrual of income not based on labor.⁹⁷ In practice, kulak status always remained in the eye of the beholder; kulaks were either seemingly too wealthy or antisoviet, broadly and arbitrarily defined. In the popular urban stereotype, the kulak was male, usually corpulent (like the stereotypes of capitalists and imperialists), and likely to be attired in a polka-dot shirt, well-made breeches, leather boots, and a vest.⁹⁸ His hut was spacious and covered with a metal roof. He made extensive use of hired labor, was wealthy, and exerted great influence in village affairs. On the more negative side, he was an exploiter, a manipulator, and a parasite. During collectivization, he was frequently likened to a beast (*zver'*). He was a terrorist, an arsonist. He hid behind corners, taking shots at Soviet officials with his sawed-off shotgun. He was the source of antisoviet rumors. He often worked through others, above all "backward" women and sometimes even "unconscious" poor peasants, to destabilize the new collective farms.⁹⁹ He "penetrated" the collective farm to wreak havoc from within. The kulak was held to be virtually incorrigible. These kinds of stereotypes entered into urban popular culture as accepted definitions of the kulak.

The ritualized definitions of the kulak were more in the realm of demonology than class analysis. It therefore became relatively easy for the kulak to lose his class moorings and become a kulak "by nature." A kulak remained a kulak even after dekulakization. Semantic contradictions aside, this caste-like constancy meant that the kulak's socioeconomic status was irrelevant. A peasant could also attain kulak status by virtue of ancestry: was his father, grandfather, or great-grandfather a kulak?¹⁰⁰ His immediate family, in the meantime, was by implication kulak as well, for the family too suffered the fate of expropriation and often deportation during the elimination of the kulak as a class. Kulaks who managed to join collective farms in the early phases of collectivization also remained kulak, despite the radical transformation in their socioeconomic status.

This perversion of social determinism meant that kulaks were, by nature, always dangerous and bound to be the enemy. The kulak, like the poor and middle peasant, was denied agency. His actions were counterrev-

olutionary by necessity. As such, he was less an informed political opponent than a terrorist or bandit, terms designed to reduce political activity to mere criminal behavior. The kulak was socially destined to be evil. This combination of false determinism and class stereotype akin to demonization made for a lethal compound, virtually ensuring that the kulak would not be viewed as human and hence enabling his tormentors to cast aside any possible doubts about his elimination.

The greater tragedy was that the kulak could be any peasant. Social determinism cut both ways. Although being may have determined consciousness for the kulak narrowly construed, consciousness—that is, anti-soviet attitudes or behavior—determined being for all other peasants. One contemporary noted: “When we say ‘kulak’ we have in mind a carrier of a defined political tendency which is most often expressed by *podkulachniki*.”¹⁰¹ The kulak was the “carrier” of this tendency; poor and middle peasants expressed and carried out the tendency. Here sophistries come full circle and class-bound definitions crumble into meaninglessness. Every peasant could be a kulak; every peasant could be the enemy; and all peasants could be the “most brutal, callous and savage exploiters,” “leeches,” and “vampires.”¹⁰² Stalinist social metaphysics come full circle back to the Leninist discourse of civil war.

The popular dehumanization of the kulak, of the peasant, enabled the cadres of collectivization, mostly urban, to behave without restraint in this last and most decisive battle with the enemy. Ukrainian-born American journalist Maurice Hindus captured well the spirit of the times when he described an activist’s letter on collectivization:

In Nadya’s letter there was not a word on the subject [peasant reaction to collectivization]. There was no allusion to the peasant’s inner turmoil, as though that were only an incidental trifle. Impassioned revolutionary that she was, she could not and would not be concerned with the hurt of the individual. Not that it had passed her unobserved, but it failed to stir her sympathy. She seemed no more concerned with the peasant’s perplexity than is a surgeon with the pain of a patient over whose body he is wielding a scalpel. Her mind and heart were fixed on the glories of tomorrow as she visualized them, not on the sorrows of today. The agony of the process was lost to her in the triumph of achievement.¹⁰³

The brutality of the encounter could not have occurred without the transformation of kulak into beast. Certainly there were other factors that contributed to the intensity of the conflict as well,¹⁰⁴ but reducing the enemy to a subhuman status has become a prerequisite of twentieth-century war. In *Virgin Soil Upturned*, the Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov caught the essence of this phenomenon in the bloodthirsty Communist official Nagulnov. In response to a local official’s sympathy for the plight of the kulaks, Nagulnov raged:

“Swine! . . . Is this how you serve the Revolution? Sorry for them? Why, I’d . . . give me thousands of old men, children, women. . . . And tell me

they've got to be done away with. . . . For the sake of the Revolution . . . I'd do it with a machine-gun . . . every one of 'em!"¹⁰⁵

A real-life Communist official, a member of a Moscow *okrug* party committee, proclaimed that in response to terror, "we will exile the kulak by the thousands and when necessary—shoot the kulak breed [*otrod'e*]." ¹⁰⁶ Another official, responding to the question of what to do with the kulaks, replied, "[we] will make soap out of kulaks," and a *sel'kor*, who had had his throat cut by a peasant, stated, "Our class enemy must be wiped off the face of the earth."¹⁰⁷ The forced deportations and expropriations of hundreds of thousands of defenseless peasant families were chalked up as revolutionary necessity. The terrible sufferings experienced by people packed like cattle in box cars on their way into exile or sick and dying from the disease that ran rampant in the special settlements were considered revolutionary necessity. The practice of collectivization fully demonstrated the unspoken premises and theoretical implications of the Stalinist "public transcript," revealing the latter to be no more than the tip of an iceberg of a Communist popular culture of antipeasant prejudice, suspicion, and hatred.

Even the language of the encounter was loaded with significance, revealing the contradictions between the official and unofficial faces of the socialist transformation of the countryside. Collectivization would exact a "tribute" from the peasantry, an exaction that had nothing in common with socialism or the class struggle but could only be understood as a tax levied on a subject population. The kulak was to be "eliminated" (from the verb *likvidirovat'*), a term that officially meant the eradication of the socioeconomic roots of the class but that during the civil war had implied to shoot.¹⁰⁸ Terms such as "extraordinary measures" and "voluntary collectivization" were euphemisms designed to cloak reality. In the same way, atrocities became mistakes, deviations, or excesses committed by cadres who were "dizzy from success" rather than by criminals or savages. The term "excess" was often prefaced by the adjective "incorrect," thus revealing clearly, and perhaps unintentionally, the official and unofficial understandings of the tasks of collectivization. The concept of "revolutionary legality" supposedly underlined the whole process. Based on an elaborate theory, revolutionary legality was most often little more than a battering ram to be used against recalcitrant peasants. The Central Black Earth regional first party secretary Vareikis, summed up revolutionary legality by saying, "law?—it will come with time."¹⁰⁹ A Central Black Earth regional party committee directive instructed local cadres that "it would be criminal bureaucratism if we were to wait for the new laws [on dekulakization]. The basic law for each of us—is the policy of our party."¹¹⁰ Official euphemisms of collectivization aimed at disguising the reality of the encounter between state and peasantry that was so starkly exposed in unofficial discourse. Euphemization cloaked, but also offered legitimation of, Communist policies and practices. It provided a necessary

belief system for those who would participate in the new order, although it is not and never will be clear what the exact mix of belief, cynicism, and outright evil was among the cadres, high and low, of Stalin's revolution.

Based on fear and hate, Stalinist imagery and discourse dehumanized the peasantry. Deprived of agency as a result of an obscenely distorted social determinism or their infantilization, peasants had no control over their actions and were therefore reduced accordingly in their humanity, predestined to be eternal children, prosoviet automatons, or enemies. They were intrinsically robbed of choice and free will in official ideology and much of urban, popular discourse, and this, in a sense, made it easier to rob them of choice and free will in fact. Stalinist images of the peasantry were also vast projections of collective hatreds, a vital and requisite ingredient in the dehumanization of an enemy.¹¹¹ The peasant came to be regarded as alien in its own country. All that the town and state most detested was projected onto the peasantry. It was to blame for Russian backwardness, food shortages, and counterrevolution. The great divide of the Stalin revolution was not of class in a strictly Bolshevik sense, but of culture, not of workers and bourgeoisie, but of town and countryside. The divide certainly antedated the Communists, but was rent further apart by the consuming hatreds unleashed by the civil war, the cultural imperialism and modernizing ethos of the party's conception of building socialism, and the darkness and ignorance ascribed and transferred by town to countryside, by commissar to *muzhik*. This degradation of the peasantry spawned a political culture that cast peasants in the role of enemies, as subhuman, and cleared the way for the party's offensive on the peasantry.

The war on tradition

Collectivization was a clash of cultures acted out on the brutal battlefields of collectivization, yet it found its clearest and truest expression in the *underside* of the conflict, which took the form of a wholesale assault on the cultural traditions and institutions of the village. The assault had begun in the first days of the revolution, but only became a critical part of the more general strategy of subjugation when Stalin launched collectivization. Peasant culture—tradition, institutions, and ways of life—represented peasant autonomy. These islands of autonomy threatened the state's plan of domination, for they enabled the peasantry to maintain what Scott has described as "social space"

in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be voiced. The specific forms (for example, linguistic disguises, ritual codes, taverns, fairs, the "hush arbors" of slave religion) this social space takes or the specific content of its dissent (for example, hopes of a returning prophet, ritual aggression via witchcraft, celebration of bandit heroes and resistance martyrs) are as unique as the particular culture and history of the actors in question require.¹¹²

At some level, whether through conscious realization or blind antipathy to the peasantry and its ways, the state understood that peasant culture, intrinsically or potentially, contained within itself the elements of a culture of resistance. For Soviet power, peasant culture became yet another enemy to be eliminated.

The campaign against religion and the church is the best known and most obvious facet of the assault on peasant culture. Throughout the 1920s, Communist and especially Komsomol activists had taken part in efforts to eradicate religion in the countryside, largely through the activities of the League of the Militant Godless. During collectivization, these efforts assumed the dimensions of an all-out war on village religious institutions and symbols. From the second half of 1929, party cadres closed down churches, arrested priests, and removed church bells. On 30 January 1930, in its decree on dekulakization, the Politburo assumed leadership of this campaign, ordering the Orgburo to issue a directive on church closings and including priests among those to be dekulakized.¹¹³ Religious holidays were forbidden, and many peasants were forced to give up their icons, sometimes for mass burnings.¹¹⁴ In the Shelkovskii *sel'sovet* in Lukhnovskii *raion*, Sukhinchevskii *okrug*, in the Western Region, cadres lined up icons for execution by shooting, each with an inscription that the represented saint had been sentenced to death for "resisting collective farm construction."¹¹⁵ In the Urals, several *okrug* level organs called on their counterparts in other *okrugs* to enter into a socialist competition to see who could close the most churches.¹¹⁶

These repressive activities aimed not only to instill atheism in the village, but to deprive peasants of key cultural institutions. Many contemporary reports from the 1920s concluded that Orthodox belief in the countryside had declined precipitously with the revolution, surviving mainly among women and elderly men.¹¹⁷ The village church, however, remained a potent cultural symbol in the village. The church belonged to the community, serving as an icon of the village's history, traditions, and major life events from birth to marriage to death. The church bell also had great significance. Like the church, the bell was a thing of beauty, intrinsically important to the pride of the village. Yet it was more than that. The bell was a symbol of village solidarity. It was the tocsin that brought peasants together in the event of emergency. It was, as Yve-Marie Berce termed it, a kind of "emblem:"¹¹⁸ in the case of collectivization revolts, its peals represented "political acts" designed to rouse and mobilize peasant opposition.

The profound importance of the village church and bell became strikingly apparent during collectivization. Entire villages rose up in rebellion over the closing of a church or the removal of a bell. The church also frequently served as the physical locus of revolt. Priests delivered sermons against collectivization in the church. The apocalyptic sentiment so widespread at this time emanated, if not directly from the church, then from

the world it inhabited. And the actual physical site of the church could be a rallying point for peasant riots and demonstrations against Soviet power. For many peasants, the creation of the new collective farm order and the assault on belief were one and the same thing. As a peasant from the Western Region put it, "Look, Matrena, yesterday your husband joined the collective farm and today they took our icons, what is this communism, what is this collectivization?"¹¹⁹ The closing of a church or the removal of a bell were acts designed to weaken peasant culture and resistance as well as to remind the village of its subject status.

The campaign against the church was eventually, at least formally, moderated in March 1930 by Stalin's temporary retreat. Troubled by international outcry¹²⁰ and peasant rebellion, Soviet power would, for a time, take a somewhat more restrained approach to the church. Peasant protest against church closures had served to unify and mobilize village communities against the state. A report from Tambov in spring 1930 made this point clear by noting that it was one thing to deal with the kulak, but another thing to deal with church and priest who are supported by all peasants. According to the report, the attack on the church was not helping collectivization.¹²¹ In some areas, peasant protest actually led to the reopening of churches. In Sukhinicheskii *raion*, in the Western Region, for example, ten of sixteen closed churches were reopened after March 1930.¹²² The church nevertheless remained a culturally antithetical symbol to the Communists. It was a repository of peasant culture and tradition, and hence of autonomy. The village church was the antipode of Communist atheism, of Communist culture, and as such it was slated for destruction. By the end of 1930, as many as 80% of village churches may have been closed.¹²³

The church was not the only cultural institution targeted for destruction. As one of the 25,000 workers (the "25,000ers") sent to participate in collectivization put it, "We must ensure a war on old traditions."¹²⁴ Old traditions included "social spaces" intrinsic to peasant ways of life. The market was one such social space. The closure of agricultural markets began with the imposition of extraordinary measures in grain procurement. The closures served not only to facilitate the creation of a centralized command economy in agriculture and to deprive the peasantry of economic independence, but also to take away a major cultural thoroughfare for contacts with other peasants and urban society and the reproduction of peasant culture that took place at markets with the celebration of holidays and peasant arts, crafts, and popular entertainment. The abolition of the peasant land society (or commune) on 30 July 1930 in districts of wholesale collectivization and the transfer of many village responsibilities to the *sel'sovets* and new collective farm boards constituted yet another dimension in the subjugation of the peasantry.¹²⁵ With the end of the land society, and the consequent curtailment of the *skhod* (or peasant council), the state removed from peasants the right to even a limited self-government, depriving them of administrative and fiscal autonomy and

even the right to independent political expression. The closing of mills and shops was also a part of the war on tradition. Not only did the closing of these peasant-run establishments increase village dependence on the state, it sealed off an important gathering place for sociability, discussion, and political expression, hence removing yet another site of peasant autonomy. The expropriation of the property of and the elimination of many village craftsmen and artisans as kulaks or "NEPmen" had a similar effect on the community, forcing peasants into greater dependence on the state and into becoming consumers of urban, machine-made products, while seriously harming the reproduction of peasant material culture.¹²⁶ All of these measures were intrinsic to the Stalinist socialization of the peasant economy. Yet they were equally vital to the Stalinist cultural revolution in the countryside and absolutely prerequisite to the establishment of Communist controls over the peasantry.

The removal of village elite and authority figures constituted a final dimension in the cultural destruction of the peasantry. The campaign to eliminate the kulak as a class went well beyond the repression of kulaks. Peasant leaders (kulak or otherwise)—responsible voices in the community, usually heads of households—were often arrested for giving voice to the protest against collective farms. In the nineteenth-century countryside, "if authorities found the behavior of a community to be seditious, it was the entrusted persons [mainly elders] who were first called to account."¹²⁷ In the collectivization era, the "entrusted persons" could be called to account in the event of a seditious act or as a preemptive measure. The OGPU directive of 2 February 1930 on dekulakization ordered the mass exile of "the richest kulaks, former landlords, semilandlords [*popomeshchiki*], local kulak authorities [*mestnye kulatskie avtoritety*] and the whole kulak cadre," along with clergy and sectarians.¹²⁸ If the adjective "kulak," which in any case is largely ambiguous and hence meaningless, is deleted, only the designation "local authorities" remains. And there was a wholesale assault on local village authorities. Priests, members of the rural intelligentsia, former elders, and even descendants of once-powerful peasant families were all caught up in the repression. Also targeted were millers, traders, shop owners, and craftsmen—members of a village economic elite who maintained some autonomy from the village (sometimes even incurring its wrath) and were quite possibly able and willing to voice their objections to collectivization. *Otkhodniki* (seasonal, migrant workers) were frequently subjected to repression as well, perhaps because they, too, through their work outside the village, mistakenly believed that they had a freer hand and voice to dialogue with Soviet power.¹²⁹ Even midwives (*babki*) and local healers, often highly respected individuals in the community, could be prey to assault, although generally more through cultural opprobrium than repression.¹³⁰

The generalized, repeated, and extended repression of local elites served to remove likely sources of traditional authority and outspoken opposition from the village. Not only, and perhaps not even most im-

portantly, was the village robbed of its most successful and ambitious farmers; it was also deprived of its leadership, voices that could and often did represent the village against the state. These voices were soon silenced through arrest or fear. Soviet power replaced them with leaders from the towns, who would dominate collective farms and rural politics until the end of the First Five-Year Plan.

The creation of a new culture accompanied the attempt to destroy the old one. Soviet power sought to plant a Communist culture from the town in the village. New gods were to replace old gods. Stalin became the peasants' tsar-*batiushka* (little father tsar), and Mikhail Kalinin, designated the all-union peasant elder, became the peasants' secular representative in Moscow. Lenin completed the pantheon, and the images of all three occasionally adorned the corners of peasant huts left bare when the icons came down. In this new religion, concepts of good and evil became relative and were replaced by revolution and counterrevolution. The machine became an object of worship, the tractor a shrine to the new gods. In an irony lost on neither state nor peasant, church bells were melted down for the industrial drive in a kind of Communist alchemy, a transmutation of symbols of peasant culture into manifestations of the new, mechanized Soviet culture.¹³¹ Churches were turned into socialist clubs and reading huts or, less decorously, warehouses or granaries. The new religion was Communism, and literacy, through the introduction of mandatory primary education and crash courses for adults, was the first step on the path to salvation. New holidays were created to celebrate the new religion. They were grafted onto Russian Orthodox holidays that in their turn had once upon a time been grafted onto peasant, "pagan" holidays. *Pokrov* (the festival of the Protection of the Virgin), celebrated on October 14, became the Day of Collectivization in 1929 and 1930.¹³² Trinity was turned into Arbor Day, the Day of Elijah became the Day of Electrification, and Easter was to be celebrated as the Day of the First Furrow.¹³³ (How long these holidays were celebrated and by whom and how seriously remains an open question.)

Secular innovations heralding the new culture joined the more spiritual emblems of the new order. The collective farm replaced the land society, in some cases even coinciding with its former territory, while the collective farm assembly replaced the *skhod*. Tractors were supposed to supersede the horse, but production proved to fall short of need. In some parts of the countryside, factory workers who assumed the posts of the new collective farm chairmen attempted to introduce the eight-hour day, shift work, piecework, wages, labor discipline, and even factory whistles in an effort to "transfer the proletarian experience to the collective farms."¹³⁴ Carnival was filled with new cultural symbols largely alien to tradition. Komsomols used carnival to parody their enemies—the kulak, the priest, and the gendarme.¹³⁵ Teachers and students in one Siberian village used a truncated form of carnival to humiliate fellow villagers who had not fulfilled the grain requisition quota on the eve of collectivization.

They paraded through the village with banners, stopping at homes of delinquent peasants, where they chanted, "Here lives an enemy of Soviet power," and nailed signs to the gates exposing the inhabitants for all the village to see in what was likely an appropriated form of *charivari*.¹³⁶ New schools, new teaching, and a new religion to replace the old one were imposed on peasant youth. Peasant families were told that the *babki* and healers were old-fashioned and pernicious. They were instructed on proper hygiene and house cleaning. In the Ivanovo Industrial Region, the regional collective farm association (*kolkhozsoiuz*) Rules on General Order in the Collective Farm included a clause requiring collective farmers to maintain clean huts.¹³⁷ Elsewhere, local commissions were established to inspect sanitary conditions in collective farmers' homes.¹³⁸ Sometimes centrally imposed or encouraged, sometimes locally innovated, the new order sought to eliminate the differences between town and countryside and to rid *muzhik* Russia of backwardness, illiteracy, and filth.

The new culture was articulated in a new language, the language of Communism and the towns. An avalanche of acronyms and abbreviations came down upon the villages: *kolkhoz* (collective farm), *sovkhos* (state farm), MTS (machine-tractor station), *trudoden'* (labor day payment), and other terms that would supplement the revolutionary vocabulary launched in 1917 and still not fully assimilated by most peasants.¹³⁹ The names of villages, although not lost, were overshadowed by the new names that Soviet power pinned on the collective farms like badges of cultural domination. A shift in this direction was already apparent before collectivization, as towns and villages across the nation assumed the names of Communist leaders or Soviet titles. A. M. Larina, widow of Bukharin and daughter of Yuri Larin, recalled her father suggesting to a *sel'sovet* chairman that surely a "prettier" name for a village called Mare's Puddle (*Kobyli'a luzha*) could be found. The next time the Larins passed that way, they discovered the villagers had renamed their settlement Soviet Puddle (*Sovetskaia luzha*).¹⁴⁰ By the time of collectivization, new names rarely betrayed this kind of irony, although one wonders about a collective farm named "Six Years Without Lenin."¹⁴¹ Most names used for collective farms were straightforward urban or Communist christenings. Collective farms were named after factories (Putilov, AMO, Serp i Molot) and leaders (Lenin, Stalin, and Marx being the most frequent), or received more lyrical designations, such as "Path to Socialism," "The Red Ploughman," or "Red Dawn."¹⁴²

A new political art—poster art—reflected the ideals of the new culture. According to Victoria E. Bonnell, "Political art projected a rural world in which the *krest'ianka baba*, together with traditional peasant customs and attitudes, no longer had any place."¹⁴³ *Muzhiki* and *baby* practically disappeared from political representations in the first half of the 1930s. Instead, it was the "youthful and enthusiastic *kolkhoznitsa* [collective farm woman] building socialism" who epitomized the new order.¹⁴⁴ The "dawn of Communism" (to borrow a fairly typical collective

farm name) in the countryside was trumpeted everywhere and along with it the death of the old peasant order.

Collectivization and the attempt to eliminate the differences between town and countryside, remaking *muzhiki* and *baby* into collective farmers and eradicating kulaks, led to the creation of a hollow culture imposed from above. Signs of sovietization and the new order were everywhere, but they remained superficial constructs grafted by force onto a culture that would not be so easily eliminated. The Communist acculturation of the countryside was economically barren, offering few of the rewards or privileges (admittedly scarce) that came with it in the towns. The new culture was an urban import, an imperialist tool forced upon a subject people whose native culture would survive, although truncated and forced underground, as a culture of inherent resistance.

Conclusion

The collectivization of Soviet agriculture was a campaign of domination that aimed at nothing less than the internal colonization of the peasantry. Domination was both economic and cultural. Collectivization would ensure a steady flow of grain—tribute—into the state's granaries and coffers. It would also enable Soviet power to subjugate the peasantry through the imposition of vast and coercive administrative and political controls and forced acculturation into the dominant culture. Although the Communist party publicly proclaimed collectivization to be the socialist transformation of the countryside, the "hidden transcript" and practices of collectivization revealed it to be a war of cultures.

The peasantry saw the conflict in similar terms. They too had a Manichaean view of the world, theirs draped in the language of apocalypse rather than class war, in which the town and Communism represented Antichrist on earth and it was the duty of all believing peasants to resist the collective farm, the tool of Antichrist. Collectivization posed a profound threat to the peasant way of life, to its entire culture. In response, peasants of every social strata united as a culture, as a class in a certain very real sense, in defense of their traditions, beliefs, and livelihood. Peasant resistance to collectivization would be rooted in their culture rather than specific social strata and would draw upon an arsenal of peasant tactics native to their culture. Peasant culture would live on in peasant resistance. For peasants, as for the state, collectivization was civil war.