

Famine, Genocide, and Memory: Ukrainians and the Commemoration of the 1932-1933
Holodomor

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Stalin and Stalinism

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On Friday, April 18, 2008, the Toronto City Hall unveiled an exhibit prepared by the League of Ukrainian Canadians, approved by Toronto's mayor David Miller, and entitled, "Holodomor: Genocide by Famine." At the exhibit, posters displayed pictures of Joseph Stalin and other Communist leaders with labels proclaiming, "Organizers and Perpetrators of the Genocide." Other posters pronounced, "Holodomor: Genocide by Famine: 10,000,000, Ukraine, 1932-1933." A ceremony commenced in the hall in which a group of Ukrainians presented an elongated black torch—the "International Holodomor Remembrance Flame"—to a delegation that included the Canadian Minister of State Jason Kenney, the Ukrainian ambassador to Canada Ihor Ostash, and the Holodomor survivor Stefan Horlatsch. Upon receiving the torch, Horlatsch walked outside of the building and lit a candle held by a young child. The famine survivor then escorted the torch to fifteen Canadian cities over the next several weeks, and the torch afterwards visited 33 other countries, including the United States in May.¹

On its worldwide tour, the Remembrance Torch reached Russia in October 2008. Upon its arrival, the Russian government prohibited any commemorative or educational events that even hinted the famine was genocide. As the Russian foreign minister claimed in September, "[Russians] can hardly agree with the pseudo-historical treatment by [the Ukrainian capital] Kyiv of the events connected with the famine of the 1930s in the USSR as some kind of 'genocide of the Ukrainian people.'"² The government likewise cancelled events in Orenburg, Tumen, Ufa, and St. Petersburg associated with

¹ "Holodomor Remembrance Flame presented at Toronto's City Hall," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, May 11, 2008, 11; "Holodomor Ukrainian Genocide 1932-33 Part 1," [n.d.], video clip, accessed November 13, 2011, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp1ksnsI7xc&feature=related>; Tamara Olexy, "Holodomor Remembrance Flame enters U.S.," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, May 11, 2008, 27.

² "Russia denies a genocide," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 19, 2008, 6.

the Remembrance Torch.³ Indeed, the contrast between the Russian and the Western countries' receptions of the Remembrance Flame illustrates the differing ways in which the Ukrainian famine is remembered today.

The episode concerning the Remembrance Flame raises the question as to how Ukrainians, both in North America and in Ukraine, remember the 1932-1933 famine. Do they categorize it as a tragedy created by bad ecological conditions and exacerbated by inept policies, or do they regard it as genocide committed by the Soviet government? Furthermore, how does the Ukrainians' commemoration of the famine affect Ukraine's current political relationship with Russia? Does the memory of the famine antagonize that relationship, or does it have no effect upon it at all?

In this paper, I argue that Ukrainians worldwide remember the 1932-1933 famine as genocide against the Ukrainian nation, that such a memory bolsters Ukrainian nationalism, and that it exacerbates the worsening political relationship between Ukraine and Russia today. The Ukrainians have chosen to remember the famine as genocide in ways affecting many aspects of life, including political resolutions, ceremonies, artistic venues, and public education. Such memories help the living to commemorate the victims, unify Ukrainians, and inform the world about the famine as genocide. In contrast, Russians regard the famine as a tragedy that affected many peoples, not merely the Ukrainians. Indeed, the memory of the famine as genocide incites anger from the Russians, as they believe that Ukrainians manipulate history on this topic to pursue political agendas.

³ "Holodomor remembered in Russian capital despite government interference," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 19, 2008, 1; "International Holdomor Remembrance Flame arrives in Armenia," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 26, 2008, 5.

Current scholars have covered aspects of this paper, but have focused only upon the memory of the famine in the context of Ukrainian politics. In 2009, the researcher Mykola Riabchuk argued that the varying commemorations of the famine in Ukraine reflected an ideological battle between “two different visions of the Ukrainian past and future... and, as a matter of fact, two different national identities.” He detailed how political factions within Ukraine portray the famine in varying ways to advance their agenda, thus politicizing the memory of the tragedy.⁴ Likewise, in 2010, the political scientist Alexander Motyl wrote that the Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich downplayed the genocidal memory of the famine to “reestablish [Ukraine’s] role as a client of Moscow.” Yanukovich’s policies concerning the memory of the famine revealed his pro-Russian policies by de-emphasizing the famine as genocide. The Ukrainian government therefore subjugated memory of the famine as genocide to improve relations with Russia.⁵ Thus, both scholars examined the memory of the famine within the paradigm of Ukrainian politics. Yet neither looked at the commemorations of North American Ukrainians or how Russians regard the tragedy. This paper examines North American commemoration of the famine and the ways in which it affects the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, while looking at memories of Russians about the event.

The 1932-1933 Ukrainian famine—known as the “Holodomor”—destroyed much of Ukrainian culture and decimated its people. Such a tragedy was largely the result of the policies of Joseph Stalin and his initiative for modernization. Stalin’s Five

⁴ Mykola Riabchuk, “Holodomor: The Politics of Memory and Political Infighting in Contemporary Ukraine,” *Harriman Review* 16, no. 2 (November 2008), <http://www.harrimaninstitute.org/MEDIA/01290.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2011), 3, 7-8.

⁵ Alexander Motyl, “Deleting the Holodomor,” *World Affairs* 173, no. 3 (September/October 2010), 26.

Year Plan to modernize the Soviet Union was approved in April 1929, with collectivization of agriculture as its central pillar.⁶ To facilitate collectivization, the Soviet leaders recognized that they needed to subjugate the peasantry. As the historian Timothy Snyder writes, “[the future of communism] required heavy industry, which in turn required collectivized agriculture, which in turn required control of the largest social group in the Soviet Union, the peasantry.”⁷ To accomplish that goal, the authorities stigmatized and persecuted the “kulaks,” who were viewed as the wealthy peasants who exploited other farmers. Such definitions resulted in over 113,000 peasants being deported to labor camps in the beginning of 1930, cowing the villagers into submission before the Soviet authorities.⁸

Yet many peasants, especially Ukrainian farmers, resisted Soviet policies. In such ways as slaughtering livestock on a massive scale, the peasants helped to destroy the countryside and make collectivization “a large and expensive debacle.”⁹ The Soviet leaders attributed such obstruction to the national sentiments that were concentrated within the peasantry. Stalin soon acted to dispel that threat, and the actions of the Soviet government from 1931-1932 contributed to the beginning of the famine. On December 5, 1931, with the Ukrainian grain quota unfilled, Stalin ordered that the authorities collect seed grain of the peasants to satisfy the demands of the state. Also, in July 1932, Stalin again demanded a quota of 7.7 million tons of grain out of a harvest of 14.7 million tons, ensuring shortages of food.¹⁰ In addition, Soviet authorities physically trapped the

⁶ Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: The Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99, 107-108, 168.

⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 25.

⁸ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 98; Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159, 222.

peasants within their region. In December 1932, the governments introduced “internal passport[s]” that required peasants to have authorization to leave their farms, preventing them from leaving to search for food.¹¹ Thus, as Snyder writes, “[Ukraine] resembled a giant starvation camp, with watchtowers, sealed borders, pointless and painful labor, and endless and predictable death.”¹²

In addition, environmental factors played a role in initiating the famine. As the historian Mark Tauger has pointed out, several ecological factors affected the yields of grain within certain regions in the early 1930s, including drought, excessive rain, infestations, and exhausted soil from lack of crop rotation. As a result, the harvests of grain in 1931-1932 were smaller than historians had previously thought.¹³ In addition, the Soviet leaders did not have the logistics to recognize the environmental data and deal with potential issues like famine. Indeed, even if the government had possessed that information, Tauger claimed that those data “would have been swamped by the sheer volume and magnitude of crises in every aspect of the Soviet system.”¹⁴ Thus, the environment and political logistics contributed to the Ukrainian famine. Such aspects set the stage for the policies pursued by the Soviet government, which included the confiscation of the seed grain and the sealing of the Ukrainian borders. Those actions exacerbated the outcome of the environmental causes that enabled the famine.

As a result of government policies and ecological factors, the historian Robert Conquest calculated that six million Ukrainians died by starvation, adding that the

¹¹ Ibid., 170, 327.

¹² Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 43.

¹³ Mark Tauger, “Natural Disaster and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931-1933,” Carl Beck Paper in Russian & East European Studies 1506 (2001): 1, 20, 36-37, accessed October 31, 2011, <http://www.as.wvu.edu/history/Faculty/Tauger/Tauger,%20Natural%20Disaster%20and%20Human%20Actions.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid. 41-42.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian intelligentsia were essentially destroyed.¹⁵ In contrast, Snyder documents that at least three million Ukrainians died during the famine, a number smaller than that of Conquest.¹⁶ Such a discrepancy between the two scholars reflects the different periods in which they are researching. Conquest wrote during the 1980s and used the sources available at the time, including Western reports of the estimates of Soviet officials and census data from 1925 to 1937. In contrast, Snyder writes in 2010 and mostly relies upon the recent estimates of scholars.¹⁷ The difference in casualties therefore exhibits the varying resources available to the scholars. In addition, both writers point out that the famine affected regions in the Northern Caucasus, the Lower Volga, and Soviet Russia, killing roughly one million people in those areas in total.¹⁸ Thus, the Soviet government wreaked destruction upon the Ukrainian people and its surrounding regions with its policies in the early 1930s.

The scholarly debate as to whether or not the famine constituted genocide persists to the present day. Conquest cited the lawyer Rafael Lemkin, who defined genocide in 1948 as acts “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” Thus, as Conquest claimed, “it appears that a charge of genocide lies against the Soviet Union for its actions in the Ukraine.”¹⁹ Snyder uses a similar tactic, quoting Lemkin and hinting that the famine should be known as genocide.²⁰ But other historians have argued that the famine was not an intentional act of the Soviet government. For example, the historians R.W. Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft pointed

¹⁵ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 303.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 300, 303-304, 388-389; Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 467.

¹⁸ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 280-282, 197-198; Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

²⁰ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 51.

out that the Soviet government attempted to ameliorate the famine by lowering collection quotas from 6.46 million tons to eventually 3.77 million tons. In addition, records from the Politburo at that time did not mention a policy for famine, and party leaders in Ukraine and Moscow even treated the event as a serious problem. According to Davis and Wheatcroft, such Soviet leaders would not have attempted to ameliorate the famine if they had known that Stalin intended the tragedy to happen.²¹

The historian Andrea Graziosi has also thoughtfully contributed to the debate concerning the famine as genocide. While pointing out that the famine was “pan-Soviet” and affected several regions, Graziosi claims that the famine particularly hurt the Ukrainians, calculating that the mortality rate in Ukraine almost tripled from 1926-1933. In contrast, the rate of other regions at the same time did not even double.²² Graziosi concedes that the Soviet leaders did not plan the famine, but instead claims they manipulated it to suit their own needs. As Graziosi writes, “[t]he decision to *use the famine*...in order to impart a lesson to peasants who refused the new serfdom was thus taken in the fall of 1932.”²³ In teaching that lesson, Soviet authorities removed all goods from stores, confiscated meat and potatoes, and criminalized peasants who fled villages to seek food. Pointing out such actions, Graziosi writes, “I believe that the answer to our question, ‘Was the Holodomor a genocide?’ cannot but be positive.”²⁴ Thus, Graziosi claims that the famine was an act of genocide comparable to the Jewish Holocaust, with such an argument continuing to incite debate among historians today.

²¹ R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, “Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-33: A Reply to Ellman,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006), 628-629.

²² Andrea Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27 (2004-2005), 101-102.

²³ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 104-107.

While historians debate the intent of the famine, Ukrainians around the world remember the famine as genocide committed by the Soviet government against Ukraine. Such a memory is exhibited in efforts to gain political recognition of the famine as genocide from governments. For example, the Ukrainian World Congress began to plan for international commemorations for the 75th anniversary of the famine in 2007 by creating an International Holodomor Committee. The committee aimed in part “to ensure that the Holodomor is recognized by national governments and the United Nations as genocide of the Ukrainian people.”²⁵ Such words from the Congress represented the views of Ukrainians about the famine as genocide and the intent to gain recognition of the event.

Due to the efforts of organizations like the Ukrainian World Congress, several governments have recognized the famine as genocide over the past decade. In 2008, Canada, having a large Ukrainian population, officially recognized the tragedy as “a deliberate act of genocide.” The Canadian Foreign Minister Jason Kenney lamented that the famine was not widely known outside of the Ukrainian community, saying that people should remember the famine as they do the Holocaust.²⁶ The United States also embraced the notion of the famine as genocide in 2003, albeit more carefully. In a vote of 382-0, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 365, which stated, “this man-made famine was designed and implemented by the Soviet regime as a deliberate act of terror and mass murder against the Ukrainian people.” The resolution also affirmed the government’s 1985 Commission on the Ukraine Famine report, which declared, “Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-

²⁵ “The 75th Anniversary of the Holodomor,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, January 13, 2008, 8.

²⁶ Clark Campbell, “Harper Government moves to recognize 1932-33 Ukrainian famine as genocide,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 27, 2008, A4.

1933.”²⁷ Indeed, by 2008, the legislative bodies of fourteen countries, including Georgia, Latvia, Canada and the United States, had recognized the famine as genocide.²⁸ The idea of famine as genocide therefore gained traction in recent years, thus helping to fulfill the goals of the Ukrainians in promoting their views about the famine to different nations.

International politics played a significant role in the creation of such political resolutions. In May 2008, the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko gave a speech in Canada encouraging the passage of the bill that recognized the famine as genocide. In an interview, he claimed that international actions concerning recognition of the famine and NATO membership for Ukraine served as “potential rallying points” for his divided country.²⁹ Indeed, the Canadian government approved of Ukraine’s entry into NATO.³⁰ Thus, the Canadian government’s declaration of the famine as genocide may have intended to encourage the admission of Ukraine to NATO, a potential development that the Russian president Vladimir Putin supposedly adamantly opposed.³¹

In comparison, other countries chose words more carefully than Canada. Even the American declaration was comparatively tepid, calling the event a “man-made famine” and only proclaiming it as genocide through citation of its 1985 report. Similarly, when the Ukrainian government asked the United Nations to recognize the famine as genocide, the organization refused the motion until the authors replaced the word “genocide” with the phrase “crime against humanity.” The organization supposedly

²⁷ “House of Representatives adopts resolution on Famine of 1932-1933,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 26, 2003, 1.

²⁸ “14 countries’ parliaments recognize Holodomor,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, November 23, 2008, 8.

²⁹ Mark MacKinnon, “Yushchenko heads home to turmoil,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 29, 2008, A14.

³⁰ Clark Campbell, “Harper government,” A4.

³¹ Gennady Sysoyev, “Russian-Ukrainian Talks Dominated by Troublesome Topic of Bloc,” *Kommersant*, April 26, 2008, 10 in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 60, no. 15, (May 6, 2008), 17.

did not wish to provoke Russia, which sits on the Security Council.³² Thus, politics played a role in the declarations given by governments concerning the famine. The memory of the famine therefore touches upon political tensions as much as it solicits emotional reactions.

While governments consider politics in remembering the famine, citizens in Western nations and Ukraine remember the famine in a myriad of cultural outlets. One such way is through ceremonies that take place upon holidays. Several countries and cities have designated days of commemoration for the famine that honor the victims. For example, in a 2008 statute, the Canadian Parliament designated that the fourth Saturday in November “shall be known as ‘Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (‘Holodomor’) Memorial Day,’” with the holiday continuing to the present day.³³ In addition, in 1993, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America and the Ukrainian American Coordinating Council designated that June 1 be commemorated as the “National Day of Mourning” for the “7 million to 10 million victims” of the famine.³⁴ New York City participated in that holiday, holding a requiem for the victims at St. Patrick’s Cathedral and hosting a talk by academics concerning the famine.³⁵ Chicago also commemorated the famine, with the city hosting ceremonies for the 75th Anniversary of the famine in 2008 and designating September 12-13 as days to remember the event. The city named that commemoration “Breaking the Silence on the Unknown Genocide,” implying the

³² Mark MacKinnon, “Ukraine’s Holocaust slowly acknowledged,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 22, 2003, A14.

³³ Canada, House of Commons, *An Act to establish a Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day and to recognize the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide*, May 29, 2008, quoted in *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine* (Ontario, Kashtan Press, 2008), 363.

³⁴ “Remembering the famine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, April 4, 1993, 6.

³⁵ Andrij Wynnyckyj, “New York commemorates 60th anniversary of famine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, June 6, 1993, 1.

need for Ukrainians for speak out about the famine in an attempt to inform the world.³⁶

Thus, cities have participated in an array of events to commemorate the famine and spread the news to other people.

It is noteworthy that these commemorations inflate the numbers of casualties beyond scholarly estimates. Commemorative events of the famine estimate the number of Ukrainian victims to be at least seven to ten million, a number larger than Snyder's and even Conquest's estimates. For example, in November 2003, the New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg issued a proclamation calling upon New Yorkers to gather together "to commemorate this 'hidden holocaust'" and honor the seven to ten million Ukrainian victims.³⁷ Such inflation is partly due to the misreading of scholastic works. In a 2008 article in the periodical *The Ukrainian Weekly*, a writer defended an increased number of casualties in part by citing Conquest. While noting that Conquest counted five million famine victims within Ukraine and one million outside of the country, the article inflated the casualties by combining the number of deaths from de-kulakization to the number of victims from the famine. Such arithmetic increased the total number of famine victims to roughly *nine* million, rather than five or six million. As the article reasoned, the "distinction between death from famine and death from de-kulakization... is difficult to define."³⁸ While the article cites other sources, its misuse of Conquest's work shows that scholarly estimates are often misinterpreted to calculate the number of victims of the famine.

³⁶Maria Kulczycky, "Chicago Holodomor commemoration engages and informs diverse audiences," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 19, 2008, 2.

³⁷ Michael Bloomberg, "New York City mayor's proclamation of Famine Remembrance Week," quoted in *The Ukrainian Weekly*, November 23, 2003, 9.

³⁸ Askold S. Lozynskyj, "The case for 7 million to 10 million," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, May 11, 2008, 6.

Indeed, the issue of casualties has provoked accusations of deliberate dishonesty toward the Ukrainians from other scholars. For example, in April 2011, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) attempted to secure a permanent exhibit for the famine in the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The UCC claimed that the exhibit for the famine should be as prominent as the one devoted to the Holocaust. In response, a group of international scholars wrote a letter to the UCC that chided the organization. The letter claimed that, even though scholars agreed that the number of deaths was between 2.6 to 3.9 million, the UCC raised the numbers to shock people and make the death toll larger than that of the Jewish genocide. According to the letter, such an action implied that the UCC believed that “the Holodomor deserves more attention than the Holocaust.”³⁹ Such bitter accusations highlight the dispute that the casualties provoke. While the casualties are probably not always increased for political purposes, the inflated numbers do compel people to consider the famine as an enormous tragedy. Thus, there may indeed be an attempt to force people to reckon with the famine by increasing the numbers of casualties, representing the attempt to spread knowledge about the event as genocide to the public.

Regardless of the precise numbers of casualties, citizens continue to remember the famine in many different settings. One of the ways in which people commemorate the victims of the famine is through religious settings and ceremonies, which also contribute to Ukrainian nationalistic feelings. In October 1983, thousands of Ukrainian-Canadians “sang hymns in the streets and then prayed on the Legislature steps” to

³⁹James Adams, “Ukrainian Canadian groups accused of historical dishonesty,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 16, 2011, A11.

commemorate the victims of the famine.⁴⁰ In 2003 in Denver, the three-day commemoration of the famine ended with a High Mass performed by a priest from the Ukrainian Catholic Church, with survivors of the famine participating.⁴¹ In Philadelphia, the 2008 commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the famine began at the House of Prayer of the First Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Church. While the famine commemoration usually occurred at Orthodox cathedrals, the organizer proclaimed that that year it would be held at the home of “our Baptist brother[s] and sisters.”⁴² Likewise, the New York City commemoration began at the St. Patrick Cathedral in which requiem services were held.⁴³ Religious churches therefore act as centers for remembering the famine. Indeed, the Ukrainian Church holds national significance for many Ukrainians, as Ukrainian seminaries helped to achieve separation from the Russian Church in 1917 and the Soviets persecuted many Orthodox priests during the late 1920s.⁴⁴ As a result, religious settings signify Ukrainian resistance to Russian domination, giving nationalistic significance to the Ukrainians as they gather to commemorate the famine.

While religious ceremonies constitute important centers of memory, Westerners and Ukrainians also participate within secular ceremonies to commemorate the famine as genocide. For example, in Sacramento in January 2008, ceremonies were held at the Carmichael Public Library in which the Ukrainian flag was flown at half-mast and a candle was lit in the window. Afterwards, a Ukrainian vocalist performed the song

⁴⁰ “Starvation in Ukraine remembered,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 10, 1983.

⁴¹ Ania Savage and Taras Bugir, “Denver hosts three-day commemoration of Ukrainian Famine-Genocide,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, November 23, 2003, 12.

⁴² “Philadelphia community begins Holodomor commemorations,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, March 2, 2008, 22.

⁴³ “Series of events in NYC to commemorate 75th anniversary of Ukraine’s Genocide,” *the Ukrainian Weekly*, November 2, 2008, 10.

⁴⁴ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 41, 207-208, 210-212.

“Ballad About the Year 1933” that remembered the famine as genocide.⁴⁵ Clothing and accessories also attempted to spread knowledge. In 2007, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America created black “Remembrance Wristbands” that intended to spread awareness of the famine.⁴⁶ At New York City’s 2008 commemorative services, the organizers encouraged participants to wear Ukrainian embroidered clothes and display Ukrainian flags framed with black ribbons.⁴⁷ Such solemn clothing reminded people of the nature of the event being commemorated, while the Ukrainian flag implied the special nature of the famine in affecting Ukraine. Such nationalistic symbols indicated the belief that the famine was not merely “pan-Soviet,” but was a targeted attack upon the Ukrainian nation.

Thus, ceremonies and gatherings have marked the famine as genocide with solemn acts of remembrance. People also commemorate the famine and affirm Ukrainian nationalism through artistic venues, including film. Perhaps the most widespread film used to remember the famine is Slavko Nowytski’s 1984 movie “Harvest of Despair.” That work depicted documentary footage of the famine and its victims, although some question the authenticity of the footage.⁴⁸ Regardless, many people praise the film for its artistic power and its condemnation of the Soviet actions that led to the famine. Indeed, organizers screened the film in New York City during the 2003 Famine Remembrance Week and also at the San Francisco Public Library during the 75th anniversary of the

⁴⁵ Alex Kachmar, “Sacramento Ukrainians remember genocidal Holodomor of 1932-1933,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, January 6, 2008, 16.

⁴⁶ “The 75th anniversary of the Holodomor,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, January 13, 2008, 8.

⁴⁷ “Series of events in NYC,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10.

⁴⁸ Don Cummings, “Stalin’s war against the peasants,” *Maclean’s*, December 15, 1986, 56.

famine.⁴⁹ The film therefore characterizes the famine as genocide, and various groups often use it as a commemorative event.

Ukrainian filmmakers have made other works that portray the famine as genocide. For example, the documentary film “Holodomor: Ukraine’s Genocide of 1932-33” used the expertise of historians like the professor Taras Hunczak in depicting the famine.⁵⁰ In addition, the October 1992 issue of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress’s newsletter displayed an advertisement for a film entitled, “Famine ’33.” Directed by the Ukrainian Oles Yanchuk and based upon Vasyl Barka’s 1962 novel *The Yellow Prince*, the film focused upon one village during the famine as “authorities confiscated food to brutally enforce collectivization.” The film was advertised as winning many awards, claiming to draw the viewer into a “close circle of fear, grief and bewilderment.”⁵¹ Indeed, the general importance of movies in remembering the famine was illustrated by the international conference “Visualizing the Holodomor: The Ukrainian Famine-Genocide of 1932-1933 on Film” at Columbia University in December 2008.⁵² The event featured prominent film archivists and young filmmakers exhibiting their works about the famine. Thus, film exhibits the famine as genocide and promotes the event to the world while fostering a Ukrainian national identity.

In addition to film, paintings also have promulgated the famine as genocide to the public. In 1984, the Canadian artist William Burak restored several paintings of his

⁴⁹ Helen Smindak, “Film screening, memorial concert reflect Ukraine’s suffering,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, November 30, 2003, 11; “San Francisco to present special program on Famine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, April 13, 2008, 23.

⁵⁰ “Historian join ‘Holodomor’ documentary feature film team,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, February 17, 2008, 13.

⁵¹ “Premiere Showing: ‘Famine ’33,’” in *Ukrainian Canadian Newsletter*, October 1992, 11. The advertisement appeared as a handout within the newsletter.

⁵² Yuri Shevchuk, “Columbia U. conference to commemorate the Famine-Genocide,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 19, 2008, 10.

Ukrainian teacher Julian Bucmaniuk, who in the 1950s painted works depicting the Soviet regime. One work displayed Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler burning in hell during the Last Judgment, exhibiting Bucmaniuk's anger against Stalin in equating him with Hitler, a correlation that the famine most likely influenced.⁵³ The drawings of the artist Olexander Wlasenko also displayed art concerning the famine. In the 2008 exhibit entitled "As We Slept," Wlasenko's works juxtaposed Soviet propaganda of socialist images with pictures of victims of the famine. As Wlasenko wrote about the exhibit, "[it] explores the tension between artifice and actuality, participating in the contemporary discourse around ethics, identity and the rehabilitation of historical memory."⁵⁴ Indeed, Wlasenko's display exhibited the contrast between the Soviet state's ideals and the suffering of its people. It attempted to connect the famine with the Soviet government, creating the historical memory that the government initiated the famine.

Another powerful artistic display concerning the famine was Mykola Mykhaylovych Bondarenko's 2003 exhibit in New Jersey. Entitled "Ukraine 1933: A Cookbook," the drawings depicted the food that the Ukrainians consumed during the famine, including weeds, birds, and dead animals like cows, horses, and cats. The drawings also displayed hammers and sickles upon the iron rods that the villagers used, hinting that the Soviet government was to blame for the disaster.⁵⁵ Thus, paintings constituted a way in which Ukrainians expressed the deliberate nature of the famine, especially in portraying the suffering of the peasantry. Such art intended to spread the knowledge of the graphic nature of the famine to people.

⁵³ "Rye bread used to restore murals in Ukrainian church," *The Globe and Mail*, January 21, 1984.

⁵⁴ "'As We Slept' exhibit recalls Ukrainians Famine-Genocide of 1932-1933," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 12, 2008, 11.

⁵⁵ Oleksander Kopitonenko, "Works reflecting Ukraine of 1933 displayed in NJ," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, December 7, 2003.

While art spread memory concerning the famine as genocide, the most important method for Ukrainians in informing the world consisted of educating children about the event. In January 2003, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) affirmed at its executive board meeting that “[education is a] critical aspect of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide.” In its promotion of education, the UCCA resolved to push high schools to teach about the famine in a course entitled “Genocide Around the World,” and even to screen the film “The Harvest of Despair” on the Public Broadcasting Service.⁵⁶ Scholastic competition also attempted to educate children. In October 2008, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation awarded a \$1000 prize to the high school student who submitted the best essay about the famine.⁵⁷ Indeed, in Chicago in 2003, the Ukrainian Genocide Famine Foundation organized an educational program about the famine for three hundred children. The kids watched “The Harvest of Despair,” visited the Ukrainian National Museum to see exhibits about the famine and listened to guest speakers talk about the event.⁵⁸ That event exhibited the extent to which Ukrainians went to educate children about the genocidal nature of the famine.

Indeed, many Ukrainians in Canada have taken an active interest in promoting education of the famine as genocide. In June 2008, during a board meeting for the Toronto District School Board, a group of Ukrainian-Canadians sat in the room in order to force the school board to include the famine as a case study in a genocide course for high school students. In response, the board passed an amendment that said that other

⁵⁶ Tamara Gallo, “UCCA executive board meeting focuses on upcoming 70th anniversary of Great Famine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, February 9, 2003, 5.

⁵⁷ “Winnipeg student wins essay contest on theme of Ukraine’s Holodomor,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 12, 2008, 27.

⁵⁸ Katya Mischenko-Mycyk, “Chicago Ukrainians mark 70th anniversary of Famine-Genocide of 1932-1933,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, October 12, 2003, 11.

“crimes against humanity” existed like the Ukrainian famine, but they would not be included within the course.⁵⁹ Several Ukrainian Canadian outlets responded with resentment. As the historian Roman Serbyn wrote in a June 2008 letter to the editor, “[f]orced starvation has been a weapon in the genocidal extermination of peoples since time immemorial... To leave the Holodomor, the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33, out of the curriculum makes no pedagogical sense.”⁶⁰ The periodical *The Ukrainian Weekly* wrote on June 22, 2008, “It seems that victims of the Holodomor, at least to the trustees [of the Toronto school board], are only statistics... Ignoring or not including the Ukrainian genocide in the curriculum is both offensive and unacceptable, especially since 2008 is the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor.”⁶¹ The rejection of the famine as a feature in curriculum about genocide offended many Ukrainians. Such offense exhibits the extent to which Ukrainians feel that the famine constitutes genocide, and that the public schools should teach children the same idea.

Ukrainians have also attempted to use museum exhibits to educate the public about the famine as genocide. A prominent example of that effort is the current debate about exhibits within the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which opens in Winnipeg in 2013. Funded by the Canadian government, the museum plans to contain two permanent galleries, one for the Canadian aboriginals and the other for the Holocaust. In response, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress expressed fury in a report to the Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore, saying, “This is unacceptable... [the Holodomor] should

⁵⁹ Kate Hammer, “High-school course on genocide draws protests,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2008, A12.

⁶⁰ Roman Serbyn, letter to the editor, *The Globe and Mail*, June 14, 2008, A24.

⁶¹ Alex Chumak, “Toronto School Board trustees turn a blind eye to Holodomor,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, June 22, 2008, 6.

be provided no less coverage... than the Holocaust.”⁶² The UCC began a postcard campaign to Moore to force him to create an independent committee that determines the museum’s content.⁶³ In a pamphlet directed to the content board, the UCC claimed, “[w]e would therefore anticipate and encourage the museum’s curators to... secure/develop a prominent exhibit of the *Holodomor* (the genocidal Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine).” The UCC wanted a permanent display detailing “the experiences of those Canadians who fled persecution and genocide (including the *Holodomor*).”⁶⁴ Thus, the UCC desires a permanent exhibit for the famine within the museum, like the Holocaust. Such a position implied that the famine was as genocidal as the Holocaust, and Ukrainians wish to teach that theory through the museum’s exhibits.

In addition to museum exhibits and education, the scholarly community contributed to spreading knowledge about the famine as genocide. One example is the semi-annual academic journal *Holodomor Studies*. Founded in 2009 and edited by Roman Serbyn, that journal includes many articles concerning the famine by scholars like Cormac O’Grada, Stephen Wheatcroft, and Roman Serbyn himself. The publisher Charles Schlacks explained the purpose of the journal in the preface of the first volume, “I decided to launch this journal for two reasons: first to document and explain genocidal acts against Ukraine; and second to counteract and expose ‘Holodomor denial.’”⁶⁵

Another scholastic attempt of commemoration was the 2008 book *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine*, edited by Lubomyr Y.

⁶² James Adams, “Group says rights museum slights suffering of Ukrainians,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 11, 2010, A8.

⁶³ James Adams, “Rights Museum,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 22, 2010, A3.

⁶⁴ “The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: A Canadian Ukrainian Perspective,” Ottawa 2009, http://www.uccla.ca/CMHR_11June09.pdf (accessed November 13, 2011).

⁶⁵ Charles Schlacks, “Publisher’s Preface,” *Holodomor Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): iii.

Luciuk. That anthology included essays by scholars like Hiroaki Kuromiya, Andrea Graziosi and Alexander Motyl. In the foreword, Luciuk argued that the famine was insufficiently known around the world, though it should have the “unenviable status of being a crime against humanity arguably without parallel in European history.”⁶⁶ While not specifically naming the famine as genocide, and indeed containing scholarly debates about its genocidal nature, the foreword implied that the famine should take its place among genocides as a monstrous act. Such scholarly attempts to commemorate the famine attempt to educate both scholars and the public about the nature of the famine.

Thus, Ukrainians within the West engage in many cultural activities to commemorate the famine as genocide. Such commemorations contrast with the memory of Russians, who regard the famine as a tragedy that affected many nations besides Ukraine. For example, on November 28, 2006, the Ukrainian legislative body passed an article declaring the famine as genocide against the Ukrainian people.⁶⁷ In response, the Russian State Duma in April 2008 made a resolution claiming, “[t]he famine...affected many regions of the Russian SFSR (the Volga Region, the Central Black-Earth Zone, the North Caucasus, the Urals, the Crimea and part of Western Siberia) and of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus.” After condemning the collectivization that resulted in the deaths of the famine, the resolution finished, “[t]here is no historical evidence that the famine was organized on ethnic grounds... This tragedy should not be the subject of present-day political exploitation.”⁶⁸ Thus, the Russian government remembers the famine as a

⁶⁶ Lubomyr Luciuk, “Foreword: Reaping What They Once Sowed,” in *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine*, ed. Lubomyr Y. Luciuk (Ontario: Kashtan Press, 2008), v.

⁶⁷ Svetlana Stepanenko, “Famine Recognized as Genocide,” *Vremya novostei*, November 29, 2006, 2, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 58, no. 48 (December 27, 2006), 20.

⁶⁸ Ksenia Veretennikova, “In Condemnation Mode,” *Vremya novostei*, April 3, 2008, 2, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 60, no. 13 (April 22, 2008), 15,16.

tragedy that affected many peoples, not as genocide against the Ukrainians. Indeed, Russia claims that such genocidal claims represent “political exploitation” and not honest historical objectivity.

Such a contrast between Ukrainians and Russians in remembering the famine exacerbated the troubled relationship between Russia and Ukraine during the past decade. For example, in April 2008, the Russian foreign ministry listed factors that were damaging relations between Russian and Ukraine, which included, “the portrayal of the 1930s famine as genocide against the Ukrainian people.” Such a position on the famine angered Russia as Ukraine attempted to enter NATO, which was also on the list of damaging factors.⁶⁹ Thus, according to the Russians, the commemoration of the famine as genocide was equally bad as the Ukrainian entry into NATO. Furthermore, in November 2007, activists from Russia’s Eurasian Youth League vandalized the exhibit at the Moscow Ukrainian Cultural Center entitled, “Ukraine’s Great Famine.” The Youth League justified its attack by claiming that the Ukrainian display placed blame for the famine upon the Russian people.⁷⁰ Thus, the evidence suggests that the memory of the famine as genocide contributes to incendiary acts within Russia. That reaction demonstrates that the famine contributed to the worsening relationship between Russian and Ukraine over the past decade.

The memory of the famine as genocide has also solicited claims of dishonesty from Russians. For example, in July 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) debated a resolution

⁶⁹ Gennady Sysoyev, “Russian-Ukrainian Talks Dominated by Troublesome Topic of Bloc,” *Kommersant* in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*.

⁷⁰ Natalya Makogon, Pavel Korobov and Yulia Taratuta, “Eurasians Find ‘Food’ for Violence,” *Kommersant*, November 19, 2007, 6, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 59, no. 47, (December 19, 2007), 7.

introduced by the Ukrainian delegation that encouraged “all parliaments to adopt acts regarding recognition of the Holodomor.” The Russian delegation reacted strongly, with the delegation member Natalya Karpovich claiming, “[w]e must acknowledge that the Holodomor was not only in Ukraine, that Russians, Poles, Kazakhs and other peoples suffered in this tragedy.” Upon passage of the resolution, the speaker of the Russian Federation Council Sergei Mironov declared, “[i]t’s complete nonsense... This is being done in defiance of the actual facts, the actual historical truth... When someone wants to revise history or see only some isolated fragment of history, that’s simply deceit.”⁷¹ The countries that wished to promote the memory of the famine as a Ukrainian event did not exhibit historical truth, according to the Russians. Another charge of Ukrainian historical dishonesty came from the Nobel Prize winning writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn. As he wrote in a 2008 letter to the editor,

“The provocative outcry about ‘genocide’ only began to take shape decades [after the famine] – at first quietly, inside spiteful, anti-Russian, chauvinistic minds – and now it has spun off into the government circles of modern-day Ukraine, who have thus outdone even the wild inventions of Bolshevik agitprop... This vicious defamation is easy to insinuate in Western minds. They have never understood our history: You can sell them any old fairy tale, even one as mindless as this.”⁷²

Solzhenitsyn thus compared promoting the famine as genocide with the lies of the Bolshevik regime under Stalin. According to Russians, the Ukrainian claims about the famine as genocide represent chauvinism and naïve belief in propaganda. Russians therefore feel that the West modifies history to remember the famine as genocide, painting the Russians as villains and ignoring other nationalities that were victims of the

⁷¹ Nikolai Filchenko, “OSCE Allays Famine,” *Kommersant*, July 4, 2008, 6, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 60, no. 26, (July 22, 2008), 15-16. The source is unclear as to whether or not the resolution declared the famine specifically as genocide.

⁷² Alexander Solzhenitsyn, letter to the editor, *The Globe and Mail*, May 31, 2008, A21.

event. Such beliefs about the famine contributed to the worsening relationship between Russia and Ukrainian during the late 2000s. Thus, the memory of the famine contains international political dimensions as well as strictly commemorative ones.

Ukrainians around the world remember the 1932-1933 famine as genocide, while Russians remember it as a tragedy that affected many peoples. The evidence suggests that the contrast between the memories of Ukraine and Russia has harmed relations between the two countries over the past decade. Ukrainians remember the famine as genocide in many ways, including political resolutions, ceremonies, artistic venues, and public education. Such practices seek to educate the public about the genocidal view of the famine. Indeed, the rituals and practice exhibit the influence that memory can have upon the collective conscious of people, even if the facts are unconnected to historical reality, as the inflated numbers of victims of the famine demonstrates.

Thus, rituals like the International Holodomor Remembrance Flame represent more than the commemoration of the tragic event of the famine. The Remembrance Flame and similar rituals also convey the endurance of the Ukrainian national character. As with the Jews and the Holocaust, the circumstances of the famine forged strong bonds between Ukrainians, giving them strength after surviving the worst of experiences. Such bonds foster hope for a bright future built upon a tragic past, even as the memory of the famine polarizes political relationships in the present world.

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