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SOVIET INFORMATION WARFARE ON THE HOLODOMOR  
VS HISTORICAL SOURCES: ACTORS OF THE MEMORY BATTLE

INTRODUCTION

Whether one treats the demise of millions of Ukrainians by starvation in the 1930s – an event known today as the Holodomor – as a genocide<sup>1</sup> or not, and regardless of its interpretations by law studies researchers (Antonovych 2015, pp. 159–174), it was an occurrence that incontestably condemned millions of Ukrainian peasant families to slow, excruciating deaths.<sup>2</sup> Demographic studies of this historical period agree that 3.9 million people died directly as a result of the Holodomor, while 600,000 died indirectly (including, for instance, unborn babies lost through the deaths of women during this period), between 1932–1934, making a total of 4.5 million deaths in just three short years.<sup>3</sup> This comprised 15.3% of the overall population of Soviet Ukraine at the time, with around 91% of rural deaths taking place in 1933 alone

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<sup>1</sup> The term “genocide” is defined in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). The Holodomor fits point “c” of article II “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”, i.e. confiscation of food from peasants households and creating obstacles to them finding food by themselves (blockade of administrative units, villages, rajons etc., ban on leaving villages, extortion of payments through extra taxation that left peasants’ with no money, forcible return of escaped peasants to the places of their residents).

<sup>2</sup> The term “Holodomor” means “to exterminate with hunger”, and was coined in a Czechoslovakian newspaper article about the Ukrainian famine in 1933. Survivors used the term “holodovka” (“starvation” of an extreme, artificial nature). Since the end of 1980s, the term “holodovka” has been supplemented with the term “liudomor” (an extermination of human beings), to coin “holodomor”, and, gradually, the contemporary rendering “Holodomor”.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper the term “Holodomor” refers to deaths occurring as a result of a man-made famine that at its peak lasted roughly six months from the end of 1932 through the first half of 1933. The dating of the Holodomor is more complex when a specific set of decisions that create the conditions for famine are factored in, expanding the timeline to more than a year (roughly August 1932 – December 1933). I discuss this more complex timeline later in the main text. The term “starvation” in the text refers to the period from 1929 where the consequences of the politics of forced collectivisation and industrialisation first began to take hold. “Famine” here means extreme starvation caused by non-natural reasons but by extortion of food reserves and the limiting of peasants’ mobility from the end of 1932 to the first half of 1933.

(Rudnytskyi et al. 2015, pp. 53, 69). Studies have worked to establish estimations that contextualise the famine in terms of: deaths relative to losses in the broader USSR (Rudnytskyi et al. 2015, pp. 192–222); urban and rural losses (Levchuk et al. 2015, pp. 1–14); losses at a regional level (Wolowyna et al. 2020, pp. 530–548); and monthly distribution of mortality (Kovbasiuk et al. 2016, pp. 1–28). They have elaborated a methodology to enable estimations of the amount of excess deaths in Ukraine in 1932–1934. Their estimations have supported similar conclusions by historians (Kulchytsky 2013, p. 221) who have argued that, at the end of 1932, a set of decisions was taken in the Kremlin that resulted in excess mortality in Ukrainian villages in the first half of 1933 until the autumn grain harvest brought some scant relief.

Other less empirically-grounded approaches to estimating mortality in this period have pointed to between six and ten million victims, but regardless of the final number of Ukrainians who were starved to death, the Holodomor has become an inalienable part of twentieth-century Ukrainian history. It has gradually taken its place in school curricula too, so as to explain to a younger generation what it meant to live under Stalin, and what consequences this life had for Ukrainians and Ukrainian statehood. It is not too much to say that the Holodomor has become one of the pillars of “the modern collective memory model in Ukraine” (Lysenko 2020, pp. 21–22).

As a people who only gained independence some thirty-odd years ago in 1991, Ukrainians were desperately looking for a new post-Soviet identity, to establish new commemorative practices and to define a new generation of heroes and enemies. When declassifying archives, however, they were horrified by the extent of Soviet crimes, especially the Great Terror, the Holodomor, and crimes during the Second World War. Such revelations coincided with the active development of memory studies in western academic and political spheres that defined post-colonial states’ attitudes toward their pasts and their emerging, collective visions for the future. For Ukraine in particular, as Lysenko (2020) notes, the foundations of collective memory (as shared social constructs about the past) have become entangled with historical Ukrainian struggles against the Russian Empire, Soviet colonisation (the Ukrainian revolution 1917–1921, the Holodomor and the Great Terror), and German occupiers (the Second World War), the minatory forces that wrought such destruction upon the Ukrainian people.

The conditions that brought about the Holodomor in particular may provide an instructive case to illustrate the tragedy of the ambitions of empire for Ukraine in the twentieth and indeed the twenty-first century. While the 1920s marked a powerful development in various spheres of Ukrainian social life, in the areas of culture, art, education and cinema production, for example, this took place under the banner of Ukrainisation to gain more support from a Ukrainian SSR population that remembered only too well the previous years of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 and the numerous revolts against the Red Army. Already in the mid-1920s, Soviet leadership took measures to implement collectivisation in the USSR in order to extort as much grain as the state needed, too, as it could not get this grain from individual peasants,

who could set their own prices for grain. But the legal foundations for the politics of collectivization were finally defined in November 1929 by TsK VKP(b), which speed up collectivisation, a forced change that affected other grain-producing republics too. Together with the politics of accelerated industrialisation (tacitly understood to include a rapid militarisation too) declared formally in that November meeting in 1929 (although launched earlier in 1925), collectivisation could not help but to create tensions. In the countryside, peasants were deported from Ukraine, and grain was confiscated as part of grain-procurement fulfilment campaigns, which triggered starvation. Social advances meant little to nothing by then, and economic life became badly disorganised, while peasants began to flee to the towns and cities. Under such conditions, this starvation also became increasingly widespread in other grain-producing regions of the USSR at the same time.

For Ukraine the Holodomor meant transformation from long-term, all-Union starvation caused by collectivisation and grain procurements in the 1920s, to the infamous famine created through the confiscation of grain and non-grain food reserves during the “total searches”<sup>4</sup> of peasant households (Svidchennia 2016). Through this famine, the Soviet goal was to solve the problem of Ukrainian resistance to strict centrist control over all spheres of life, a politics that induced a drastic transformation in order to accord with the dominant Stalinist-Marxist approach to implement centrally-planned economies.

Tragically, the world kept silent about this famine in Ukraine (1932–1933). This silence, though, was for several reasons, not the least of which was a multi-faceted Soviet propaganda campaign that hid the worst excesses of the famine. The world kept silent until the fiftieth anniversary of the famine, when the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine (1984–1988) investigated the Holodomor. Available sources (diplomatic and security service reports, revealed in the archives of at least eleven countries) indicate that many states knew about the famine that was exacerbating the already-widespread starvation of previous years. All too quickly, an endemic failure to access basic sustenance created many more starving Ukrainians and saw many dying and dead of hunger on the streets. Indeed, the death toll was made worse by a brutal confiscation of food and the general absence of state help. Many of these conditions were known, but remained unacknowledged for too long by foreign powers. For these sovereign states looking on, fear of German National Socialists, the need to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR, the world economic crisis, and Soviet famine propaganda that had created an attractive image of the USSR all served to encourage the reticence of world powers and the League of Nations in speaking out.

This same silence, though, has in later years morphed into a specious argument that the famine memory has been to some degree invented by a Ukrainian “nationalistic” diaspora that supposedly tried to hide its “collaboration” with the Nazi regime (Himka 2013, pp. 436–437; Rudling 2013, pp. 233–237), or that it was merely

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<sup>4</sup> “Total” here means “*povalny*”, that is, the searches that took place in all villages inside the administrative borders of Ukraine.

politicised by then-president Viktor Yushchenko (Dreyer 2018, p. 557; Katchanovski 2008, pp. 19–26; Rudling 2013, pp. 238–243). Other polemics aver that the event has been wrongly interpreted by Ukrainian historians (Dreyer 2018, pp. 556–557), or that it cannot be distinguished from the Soviet Union-wide famine(s) that were raging concurrently.<sup>5</sup>

Critics of Yushchenko say that he began to use the topic of the Holodomor abruptly in his political speeches and incorporated the famine into the collective memory of Ukrainians by introducing commemorative rituals for the Holodomor victims. However, he also launched an initiative on the National Oral History Record Project on the Holodomor that resulted in the creation of tens of thousands of oral history testimonies, now preserved in Ukrainian state archives. Thanks to Yushchenko, too, the law on the Holodomor was adopted in 2006. The museum of the Holodomor was also established, as were the national memorial sites, and he appealed to foreign states regarding the recognition of Holodomor as a genocide. The problem is that, for foreigners at least, the issue of the Holodomor seems to have appeared abruptly with Yushchenko, but they do not know that the Soviets banned all discussion of the famine. Neither do they know about the presence of individual Ukrainians' memories about the famine, Ukrainians who were waiting on a signal from the state that they could finally tell their stories without fear of persecution. It was in this Yushchenko period when people were persuaded that the state was interested in their stories and that no one would be punished for saying previously "disgusting" things about the Soviet regime. Foreign observers consequently do not know about the trauma of millions of Ukrainians who often felt better having shared their survival stories and, more importantly, having commemorated their relatives lost to famine at public commemorative sites (even though many sites were in fact created from 1990). This new public face of the Holodomor overcame the fear of survivors who remained silent because of the lasting influence of this Soviet ban on speaking about the famine. Even though this fear was passed on to relatives and successive generations, so too were the stories; Yushchenko's mother had survived the famine and it is quite likely she shared her story with her son.

Looking at the Holodomor memory through the prism of a memory battle between two unequal combatants, it is possible to view one participant as the totalitarian state (in its avatars of both the Soviet state and the Russian Federation that claims itself as a direct successor), with its instruments of historical-political formation through a "politics of memory". The Soviet regime had skilfully kept the famine in Ukraine hidden from its citizens and from the world through a strategy of deception that involved a wide array of tools in its propaganda campaign, such as silence, commemoration, suppression and manipulation (Abrams 2010, p. 159). These tools obscured the full extent of the starvation of the Ukrainian population from the famine's beginnings right up to the end of the USSR's existence decades later. Standing in silent solidarity against this historical behemoth, and those who would claim

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<sup>5</sup> For more details see: Kulchytskyj 2021, pp. 167–169.

provenance from this period, historical sources and descriptions and memories of the famine form the arsenal of the second combatant in this battle. A contemporary Holodomor researcher can thus become a voice of the survivors and eye-witnesses of the Holodomor and use a range of extant sources, widely available since the end of the 2000s, to critique the various arguments used by Soviet propaganda (bad weather, poor harvest, diseases, all-union famine, economic transformations). In doing so the archive/archivist becomes the second participant. I argue that establishing these two actors as polemically entwined allows for an easier dismantling of Soviet propaganda on the Holodomor as well as helping one see more clearly the man-made nature of the famine. Such an uncovering of propaganda techniques indeed remains relevant to contemporary geopolitical realities in modern Ukraine.

THE SOVIET AUTHORITY'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS  
AND THE ORCHESTRATION OF THE FAMINE (AUGUST 1932 – DECEMBER 1933)

Holodomor as a man-made famine took place at the end of 1932 and lasted until the first half of 1933, a chronological framing that was surprisingly only confirmed in 2015. To provide context, 1932 saw 250,000 people perish, while excess deaths in Ukraine in 1933 comprised some 3.529 million. It is important to stress that of those, ca. 3.335 million deaths occurred in rural Ukraine. To compare, in 1934 another 163,000 Ukrainians lost their lives (Levchuk et al. 2015, p. 14). These estimations now establish that the peak of the Holodomor famine took place in 1933, correlating with survivor and eyewitness testimonies of extreme mortality in 1933.

Of special importance is a private letter from Josef Stalin to Lazar Kaganovych, dating from August 11, 1932. In it, Stalin openly expresses his dissatisfaction with “Ukraine”<sup>6</sup> and his fear of “losing” Ukraine, if “[we] do not correct the situation in Ukraine immediately [*esli ne vozmemsia teper zhe za vysplavlenie polozheniia na Ukraine, Ukrainu mozhem poteriat*]” (*Holodomor Documents* 2008, pp. 23–24). Though Stalin may have chiefly feared disobedience from Ukrainian party and security service administration officials, he also fretted over peasants who fiercely defended their individualist way of farming, and who were leaving collective farms *en masse*. Security services had, of course, reacted to this exodus with typically brutal measures to suppress Ukrainian peasants. Stalin had witnessed the peasant potential to confront Soviet power in 1919 in Ukraine, when as a result of peasant revolts in Ukraine, the Soviet hold on power actually briefly ceased to exist. The rural population in Ukraine numbered as many as 24 million (compared to around 7 million urban residents in 1932) (Levchuk et al. 2015, p. 98), thus the famine was

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<sup>6</sup> Significantly, in this letter Stalin uses the term “Ukraine”, not the official title “Ukrainian Socialistic Soviet Republic”. This might indicate his understanding of the specificity of Ukraine as big and not-yet Soviet and socialistic because of the problems he saw and solved later with the help of the famine.

solving the Ukrainian question in terms of Stalin's vision that "the foundation of the national question, its inner essence is a peasant question" (Stalin 1952, p. 71).

A set of decisions was taken by the Kremlin and imposed on the Ukrainian republican organs of power in 1932: to strengthen "socialist" property (August 7th); to procure grain from the peasant sector on an intense, individually-targeted basis (November 11th); to strengthen grain procurements and liquidate counter-revolutionary groups (November 18th); and to repress Ukrainian villages (November 25th). An Operational Order of the DPU<sup>7</sup> UkrSSR<sup>8</sup> was issued to deliver "a decisive blow to all counterrevolutionary kulak-Petliura<sup>9</sup> elements..." (December 5th); on "black-boarding" (extortion of all grain, a ban on movement and other repressive measures) of any village that sabotaged grain procurement (December 6th). The DPU also moved to stop the unorthodox Ukrainisation of Kuban<sup>10</sup> and denounced the Ukrainisation of Ukraine itself as anti-Soviet and "of Petliura", instead promoting a more "correct" Bolshevik interpretation of Ukrainisation (December 14th) (*Holodomor Documents* 2008, pp. 22–43).

Other documents to orchestrate the Holodomor were adopted in 1933: the so-called "Stalin's telegram" ordering punishment for individual and collective farm peasants who would not return to the state the grain supposedly stolen by them was a signal for the local authorities to implement total searches (decree adopted on January 1st); a decree that closed the borders of Ukraine and Kuban and banned the selling of train tickets to Ukrainian peasants (January 22nd); a set of decrees on loans for food, forage and seed during the spring sowing campaign; and an order to the security service to stop repressions in the countryside that was an indication that Stalin had reached his goals without "losing Ukraine". That order also implies the successful suppression of an imagined all-Ukrainian peasant uprising, declared by the DPU to have occurred in the spring of 1933 (February 13th). The last document relating to the Holodomor in the calendar year of 1933, issued on December 28th,

<sup>7</sup> *Derzhavne politychne upravlinnia*, State Political Department, the security service of UkrSSR from 1922 to 1934.

<sup>8</sup> UkrSSR is the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, created after the defeat of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, the occupation of Ukraine with Soviet troops in 1921, and its inclusion in the USSR in 1922–1923. Since 1937 it was known as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic until 1991.

<sup>9</sup> "Petliurivsky", "Petliurivshchyna" in Ukrainian, that is, tied to the Ukrainian national liberation movement, with Symon Petliura as its symbol (one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921), who was shot in 1926 in Paris.

<sup>10</sup> Kuban (during the Holodomor, part of Northern-Caucasus *kraj* of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (1924–1934), now part of Krasnodar *krai*, RF) during the Holodomor was treated the same way as Ukraine because of the numbers of Ukrainians living there. According to the 1926 census, 37% (3,107,000) of the population of the Northern Caucasus *krai* was Ukrainian. In 1927 and 1928 Ukraine looked to add these and other border regions to Ukraine due to the substantial Ukrainian population in these regions. Stalin refused, but in 1928 allowed Ukrainisation to take place in 37 rajons (of them 19 were located in Kuban) with a predominantly Ukrainian population in Northern-Caucasus *kraj* Kuban (Kulchytsky 2007, pp. 91–94). So taking into account predominantly the Ukrainian population in Kuban and the success of Ukrainisation there, the same measures were implemented in Kuban as in Ukraine at the end of 1932 to intensify starvation and induce famine.

contains statistics on resettlements from four different Russian regions, Byelorussian SSR and Ukrainian oblasts to the regions of Ukraine where effectively the local population had died of hunger (*Holodomor Documents* 2008, pp. 45–78).

These were among the most important decisions reflected in the official documents and which were adopted mostly from Autumn 1932 to January 1933. A combination of actions based on the instructions preserved in the official documents resulted in extreme starvation, leading to famine and high mortality. A deep analysis of the official and unofficial instructions that transformed the famine into the Holodomor is not the goal of this article, however, as these details have been well analysed by Stanislav Kylchyt's'ky (2018) and Anne Applebaum (2017). Rather I elaborate here on the range of sources that constitute a counter-narrative to the Soviet “politics of memory” that shaped much of the twentieth century’s failure to recognise the Holodomor famine. I argue for the triumph of the archive of official and personal sources of remembering as a key weapon in the arsenal of those who fight to preserve memory over sanctioned truth. It is a conflict that remains just as crucial today, while the shadow of Russian aggression once more falls over Ukraine, as it did in 1930s famine-stricken Ukraine.

#### THE INFORMATION WARFARE AGAINST THE FAMINE (1930s): ACTORS AND DIRECTIONS

A “politics of memory” implies the usage of certain images, events and symbols of the past with the goal of creating commonly-accepted understandings of the past among society members in order to promote the further development of a state (Kyrydon 2016, p. 121). One of the methods of such correction was the information warfare waged against the famine, as the Soviet state proved resourceful in covering up any information about starvation, employing an effective “silencing” campaign of both private and public spheres through a strategy of “quarantining” whole village populations. The physical movement of people, both survivors and eyewitnesses, was thus restricted as part of a range of conditions that tied peasants to their villages. A campaign to introduce passports began in the USSR in December of 1932,<sup>11</sup> an initiative that nevertheless did not actually issue passports to peasants. Furthermore, peasants were still obliged to seek permission to leave their villages. Authorities also prohibited rural dwellers from leaving their villages by placing them on a blacklist

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<sup>11</sup> On December 27th and December 31st respectively, Soviet State and Ukrainian Republic decrees on the passport system and mandatory registration were adopted. Internal passports were introduced only for urban residents, and for worker towns. Only one category of peasants could receive a passport: those who worked in the Soviet farms (*radhospy*). Other peasants did not receive a passport at all, a situation that persisted until 1974.

(Ukr. *chorni doshky* or “black board”),<sup>12</sup> to prevent them not only from leaving Ukraine, but from buying train tickets, or even from entering the city of Kyiv.

Foreigners who could be potential eyewitnesses to the famine were often banned or restricted in travel. Already in 1932 Stalin was expressing irritation with articles by foreign journalists about starvation and a decree by the Politburo TsK VKP(b)<sup>13</sup> expelled a Canadian journalist, Rhea Clyman, in September of 1932 (Holodomor Dokumenty 2008, p. 325), the first journalist to be expelled for “discrediting” the USSR. Such reporting revealed the obvious failure of widely-advertised Soviet economic transformations and probably not-so-obvious attempts to avoid the loss of Ukraine, according to Stalin’s letter from August 11, 1932. Subsequently this type of prohibition of foreign journalism shifted focus from individual bans to collective ones as the famine was reaching its peak. The state officially prohibited journalists from going to Ukraine starting from February 23, 1933 (Hudz 2015, pp. 160–161) during the peak months of starvation (see Applebaum 2017, pp. 315–322).

The 1930s saw a clear reliance on silencing strategies designed for external audiences, when they were first successfully implemented by the Soviet propaganda apparatus. While silencing had been partly achieved through the above-mentioned entry ban on entering Ukraine, another dimension to this strategy was implemented by creating excellent living conditions for journalists and diplomats in Moscow. Foreign travellers to Moscow were settled in top hotels, fed well, experienced rich cultural programs, and were only taken to trips along well-checked routes, presenting so-called Potemkin villages. Special exemplary collective farms were created for foreign visitors where guests saw well-fed, happy “peasants” working in clean clothes, in curated, famine-free surroundings near VIP-guest accommodation. Meanwhile, foreign guests’ freedom of movement was severely restricted.<sup>14</sup> Such guests were mollified by their conditions and were thus unmotivated to go elsewhere, as the state persuaded them that all Soviet citizens were living like these “Potemkin” residents.

<sup>12</sup> Чорні дошки, *chorni doshky* – the lists of units (collective farms, villages and even rajons) that “failed” to supply grain. The names of these units (and sometimes even peasants) were published in official documents and the press. Being on a black board meant punishment: preterm obligatory payments; closure of a store in that area confiscation of all goods; a ban on collective farm-trade; and repression against administration and peasants. Historians estimate that blockading borders of UkrSSR was also used, most notably in survivors’ memoirs and oral histories. Tellingly, though, there are no indications of this blockade in any archival documents.

<sup>13</sup> Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (*bolsheviks*); Tsentralny komitet Vsoioiuznoi Kommunisticheskoy partii (*bolshevikov*). The fact that the whole Central Committee controlled by Stalin adopted a decree banning foreign journalists from visiting the USSR points to the importance of the issue for the Soviet regime.

<sup>14</sup> The term “Potemkin” derives from 1787, when Russian Empress Catherine the Great made a tour of the newly-conquered Ottoman territory (northern Black Sea region; now south of Ukraine). A count Hrihorii Potiomkin, who was, among other titles, Governor and Catherine’s minister and lover, reputedly created false portable villages for her that were decorated in order to make a false impression of a relatively affluent peasant way of life. In reality, although Potemkin probably did not decorate many villages, these efforts were most likely designed to impress foreign dignitaries travelling in the entourage more than Catherine herself, and his efforts were, in all likelihood, not kept secret.



As a result, articles in the foreign press described the good life of Soviet citizens and reflected the absence of famine reporting. One American journalist, Eugene Lyons confessed later: “In this or that way all journalists were guilty of collaborating in that ugly falsehood [about the famine]” (Halij 1968, p. 32). In private talks, New York Times journalist and Pulitzer-prize winner Walter Duranty admitted he knew of the famine during his time in Moscow, but in his articles he described a “starvation” that was less catastrophic.<sup>15</sup> It has been rumoured that Duranty even swayed US understanding of the famine and the situation in the USSR in general, as well as influencing US President Franklin Roosevelt (Kulchytskyi ed. 2008b, p. 234).

At the same time, journalists who did describe the famine they had seen with their own eyes suffered from oppression, even after leaving the USSR. Malcolm Muggeridge, for instance, was labelled a liar and reactionary after publishing about the famine, first in a Russian English-speaking newspaper, then in a British one. For years he could not find a job in Great Britain, the BBC did not invite him on TV and the press condemned him (*Time and Eternity* 2010, p. 2).

Disinforming famous Western leaders was another tool for the Soviet state. The most telling example being the visit to the USSR, and Ukraine, of a former French prime minister, Edouard Herriot. His visit had been well prepared by the Soviet regime so that he did not see starving people and was not even able to talk to real peasants. As he described his visit in the foreign press and in the Soviet press, he sang the praises of the Soviet state (Dmytryshyn 2021, pp. 216–232). George Bernard Shaw and members of various Communist parties (from Canada and the USA) also spoke out loudly, denying the famine, thus influencing Western public opinion regarding awareness of the famine and affecting diplomatic recognition of the USSR (Applebaum 2017, pp. 313–314; Cipko 2017, pp. 104, 113–157; Kovalchuk & Marusyk 2007, pp. 201–202, 210–211, 219–220). It is important to keep in mind that these disinformation and manipulation campaigns took place when millions of people were deprived of food in their own households, had restricted freedom of movement to search for food and were dying from the effects of the famine.

Another instrument of the “silencing” strategy was censorship, involving restricted access to official documents and records, using special terminology (e.g. “food difficulties”) and deploying targeted censorship (both from above- and self-imposed) of officials and citizens. The most important consequence of censorship concerns the preservation of written historical sources, where at least 100,000 official documents from the so-called “governmental archive” covering the period of the famine were intentionally destroyed by the Soviet authorities (Boriak 2013, p. 17).

Silencing was also achieved through criminal punishment for writing or talking about the famine, which continued to be applied even after the famine. For instance, eight authors of diaries (1932–1934) that describe the famine (Dmytro Zavoloka, Nestor Bilous, Oleksandra Radchenko, Dorota Federbush, Oleksii Nalyvajko, Mykhajlo

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<sup>15</sup> For more details see, for instance, Applebaum 2017, pp. 316–317, 323–325.

Sinkov, Mykola Bokan and Ihnatii Prydkyj) suffered repression for years after.<sup>16</sup> An engineer called Nykyfor Skliarenko was sentenced to be shot for disseminating a non-Soviet journal with an article about the famine.<sup>17</sup> His colleague Viktor Safonov, who was discovered to have read the journal, received three years in a correctional labour camp (*Natsionalna knyha pamiati* 2018, pp. 923–924). Another aspect of repressive Soviet policies regarding the Holodomor was to blame those affected by the famine; official discourse (documents, speeches etc.) referred to peasants as “kurkuls” and “counterrevolutionaries”, who were persecuted accordingly.

Official sources kept detailed statistics that horrify the modern reader, recording how many were repressed in 1932–1933 in Ukraine. In 1932 alone, around 71,500 people were sentenced to be shot in UkrSSR. In 1933, 90% of heads of rajon Departments of Education and all the heads of the oblast Departments of Education were replaced for political reasons. In all, four thousand teachers lost their jobs. Between January and mid-October 1933, more than 15,000 Russian workers were sent to Ukraine; of them 95% were sent to take office as heads of party cells on collective farms (*Ukrajina i ukraintsi...* 2021, pp. 389, 456, 457).<sup>18</sup>

For survivors, the accusations and sentences handed down to neighbours, colleagues and other fellow citizens were a clear signal that talking about the famine would be treated as counter-revolutionary activity and would be persecuted by the state. However, by the end of the 1930s, internal audiences had been silenced as well, so after the Second World War, Soviet propaganda targeted their famine-related propaganda efforts abroad.

While Ukrainians in the UkrSSR were partly targeted through censorship and repressions, a process of commemorating progressive collective farmers (as opposed to bad *kurkuli*<sup>19</sup>), workers and other proletariat was implemented at the same time. This meant the creation of a pantheon of new heroes to galvanise the society dur-

<sup>16</sup> For more details see: Faizulin ed. 2018.

<sup>17</sup> The examination record calls this journal “c.[ounter]-r.[evolutionary] journal being published abroad”. There is neither a title nor a place of publishing, though. Since at that time Western Ukraine (part of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania) was considered by the USSR to be foreign territory, the journal could have been published there, but this is only a surmise.

<sup>18</sup> In February of 1932, administrative reform was implemented in UkrSSR, when five oblasts were created with 341 rajons. In the second half of 1932, two more oblasts were created: Donetsk and Chernihiv. The presiding institution over education in UkrSSR, the People’s Commissariat on Education in UkrSSR, sent instructions to the Departments (*viddily*) of People’s Education at the oblast level. Each oblast Department of Education, in turn, communicated with the lower-level rajon Departments of Education. There were also Departments of Education in each town and city. Eventually, 90% of dismissed heads of rajon Departments of Education would mean more than 300 administrators in education were fired.

<sup>19</sup> On January 30, 1930 in a secret decree of Politbiuro of TsK VKP(b) introduced a new division of rich peasants (*kulak*, Ukr. *kurkul*) into several groups with a corresponding measure of punishment (deportation to concentration camps or to the northern areas of the USSR or exile outside the village). The term “kurkul” was actively used during the Holodomor to blame peasants for: their resistance; non-willingness to deliver grain; or for keeping and hiding food. Also the term “sub-kurkul” (*pidkurkulnyky*) was coined in Ukraine to repress poor peasants.

ing the Second Communist Onslaught (1929–1938).<sup>20</sup> After stabilising the situation and strengthening centralised power in the Soviet republics, Stalin announced the renewal of the onslaught in 1929. This policy included forced industrialisation and collectivisation, eliminating private property, and transforming the society through “cultural revolution”. In the beginning of the 1930s, the Soviet state glorified both ordinary people (e.g. Pavlik Morozov, participants of Stakhanov movement and pioneers) and those “who fought against an enemy of the state” at any given period (leaders of the state, security service, army etc.): *kurkuls*, “*petliurivtsi*”, “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists”, “wreckers”, “supporters of Trotsky”, spies etc.

The particular glorification of ideologically “advanced” agricultural workers (Ukr. *peredovyk*; exemplary female peasant workers e.g. Pasha Anhelina, Maria Demchenko, among others) also took place.<sup>21</sup> This glorification campaign was initiated to illustrate the success of collectivisation as well as to erase the social memory of starvation. It aimed to prove Stalin’s thesis (expressed in February of 1933 on the First Meeting of Advanced Collective Farm Members, during the Holodomor) that “previously poor peasants had become well-to-do collective farmers”, and that the next step was to make “all collective farmers rich” in two to three years (*Holodomor Dokumenty* 2008, pp. 693, 694). Pioneering farmers had thus become part of this glorification campaign. They participated in so-called “socialistic competitions” to fulfil bigger production plans. Such activities, called *peredovyky*, were widely commented on, illustrated and glorified in the Soviet press. They thus legitimised the methods applied during collectivisation and grain procurements by the state in society’s eyes. The participation of these pioneering farmers, therefore, helped both to modernise agriculture according to Soviet ideals (Mattingly 2018, p. 12; Stalin 1951) and to demonstrate success in state-organised agriculture. Still, the rural community tried to resist the activities of these icons of collectivisation, and pioneering farmers who remained in rural areas often suffered at the hands of their fellow villagers. One such

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<sup>20</sup> The term “onslaught” is a typical for Soviet ideology. According to the Communist worldview, the USSR existed in spite of being surrounded by enemies who wanted to destroy it. Also, infallible Communist party ideology was defined as the only true guideline for the life of Soviet society. During the Holodomor, there were several groups of enemies as declared by the All-Union Communist Party: *petliurivtsi* (see note 10), supporters of already dead leader of Ukrainian Revolution 1917–1921; “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists”, a long-lasting term that was in use until the dissolution of the USSR; “wreckers”, a term typical for the 1930s and tied to factories and agriculture, when new technologies met with insufficient level of professional education and ill-considered state pressure for rates, norms and plans; the term “supporters of Trotsky” was used to accuse any opposition to Stalin and the Politburo line; the term “spies” was used to accuse people of collaboration with foreign “enemies”.

<sup>21</sup> These pioneers were mostly female (*lankovi* – the heads of the groups of peasants, i.e. *lanka*, who worked on a collective farm field: sowed, weeded and collected harvest) for a number of reasons: firstly, more women than men survived the Holodomor, and those men who did survive often worked as tractorists and brigadiers (the heads of the brigades, *bryhadyry*) elsewhere; did various jobs on collective farms. Secondly, men were conscripted to the army; thirdly, the Soviet press published portraits of such advanced agricultural female workers to illustrate the equality between men and women in the USSR. In contrast, collective farmers were members of collective farms (*kolhospy*) and peasant workers were members of state farms (*radhospy*).

pioneering farmer, Pasha Anhelina, even mentioned attempts on both her own life and the lives of family members (Mattingly 2018, pp. 13–14).

Little evidence of successful Soviet agricultural policies in Ukraine could be detected in Stalin's mood however. In his speech devoted to the end of the first Five Year Plan, which he delivered on January 7, 1933, Stalin used the term "former people" (Russian *бывшие люди, byvshye liudy*) to define emerging enemies of the Soviet state:

private businessmen and their assistants, private traders and their assistants, former noblemen and priests, kulaks and sub-kulaks, former White officers [who supported "white" monarchist forces who fought for restoration of the Russian Empire during the 1918–1922 Russian Civil War and the 1917–1921 Ukrainian Revolution] and officials, former policemen and gendarmes, bourgeois intelligentsia [a Russian Empire and Soviet Union term for intellectuals] of a chauvinistic type and all other anti-Soviet elements (Stalin 1951).

A gradual campaign to conflate various enemies was launched, from press coverage of Holodomor survivors as treacherous, "supposed Kulak" women (Cipko 2017, p. 111), to combining various enemies from the above list with the definition "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalist" (Danilenko 2011, p. 83). As Stalin stated in 1933, enemies "hated the Soviet power, [and had] a feeling of fierce hatred toward new forms of economy, everyday life and culture" (Stalin 1951). This rhetoric continued after the Second World War, when the USSR targeted people who had experienced the camps, or who had emigrated post-WWII. Those of the latter group were labelled "enemies of the state" who deserved any punishment they had experienced in their Soviet past.

The Soviets were indiscriminate in their condemnation of any perceived enemies who referred openly to Soviet malfeasance. The National Socialists knew about the famine from the diplomatic service in Ukraine and from Mennonites (German settlers in Ukraine) and thus openly used the famine as a topic in their speeches. During the 1930s, the National Socialist German Workers' Party often publicly mentioned the famine in Ukraine (Fonzi 2021b, p. 207; Fonzi 2021a, p. 30). The Soviet propaganda machine used these speeches to hide traces of the famine by accusing the Nazis of inventing the famine, arguing that Nazi Germany wanted to overthrow the Soviet regime and thus had dreamed up the famine to blacken Communism as the "ideal social system" (Marunchak 1985, p. 55). Soviet propaganda also used the opportunity to begin accusing Ukrainian diasporas of Nazi collaboration (ibid.; Papuha 2008, pp. 88, 91), establishing the connection: famine – Nazi plot – Ukrainian collaboration.

After WWII the USSR sought to bolster its international reputation and increase its usage of Nazism-related rhetoric against the Ukrainian diaspora to quell dissenting opinions. This propaganda accused Ukrainian refugees from the USSR who had settled in Europe and other Western countries of being Nazi collaborators. Any integration of survivors' memories of GULAG (Main Camp Administration; Rus. *Главное управление лагерей, Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei*),<sup>22</sup> the repressive Soviet

<sup>22</sup> The GULAG remains an enduring symbol of the Soviet concentration camp system from 1934–1960, although the last Ukrainian prisoner was released from a Soviet camp in 1990.

regime, or of the famine with Western academic discourse were rendered impossible until the late 1980s by such accusations. Diasporic Ukrainians were thus shunned from public social life until the end of the 1970s, when they gradually began to enter Western academia with the Ukrainian historical narratives they carried – including their accounts of the Holodomor. This Soviet propaganda momentum was needed to maintain a positive image of a country that had, in its own self-imagination, suffered the greatest losses in the war and that had so decisively combated Nazism.<sup>23</sup>

This narrative of national sacrifice was buttressed by a growing philosophical and political chasm between Western democratic countries and the Soviet Union after the end of the war. One writer, Ivan Bahrianyi, noted that the USSR's refusal to allow Ukrainian refugees to return surprised the whole world (Bahrianyj 1946, p. 1). Ordinary Europeans were asking why Ukrainians, instead of returning home after the end of the bloodiest war in history, wanted to escape their “Russian brothers” (Kalynyk 1955, p. 13) and they simply could not believe that a man-made famine had taken place (Verbytskyj 1952, p. 5). Such were the contours of information warfare against the famine. How did historical sources on the famine reflect survivors' and eye-witness' memory of it, though?

#### ARCHIVAL HISTORICAL SOURCES OF THE HOLODOMOR: THE PRESENCE OF MEMORY IN TIME AND SPACE

In this part I investigate how memory endures in archival historical sources about the famine. I lay out the types of sources that exist on the topic, and when they were created. I explore the narratives these sources prompt and I ask how various types of sources narrate the famine, and how closely oral history sources correlate with this narrative.

There are two types of sources on what we now call the Holodomor: sources of institutional and sources of personal origin. Documents produced by authorities contain an “official”, top-down perspective, with a corresponding ideological narrative of fighting with the “enemies of the people”. There are gaps in all the official sources because of the intentional destruction of documents from the years surrounding the famine. One Ukrainian historian, Hennadii Boriak, who has managed to discover the traces of such destruction, calls this process an “archivocide” (Boriak 2013, p. 13). Documents from village councils, republican organs of power, death registry books, as well as DPU documents from that period, have for the most part vanished (Boriak 2013, pp. 13–17; *Holodomor za dokumentamy* 2010, p. 22). In these official archival historical sources, from the parts that remain intact, at least, and which date from the end of 1932 and the first half of 1933, starvation is portrayed as barely more intense than periods of starvation from previous years, which is why it is impossible

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<sup>23</sup> As one can see, labelling Ukrainians as Nazis is not a contemporary invention. The roots of this propaganda effort, which go back to 1933, are visible even now, during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

to understand the reasons, processes and the consequences of the famine from official sources only. To get a fuller picture, one must use sources from individual testimony.

Surprisingly, though, even official sources such as security service documents still mentioned the famine: a special report of a head of Kharkov oblast department of the DPU, from June 5, 1933, refers to a “pretty difficult” situation with food in Kharkiv bilst “drastically worsened [since] the last time”. Documents record that in May 1933, 11402 homeless, sick and children were picked up in the city of Kharkiv (compared to 4476 in March-April and 1077 in the first three days of June). Such sources also note the presence of 992 corpses “of the dead on the ground of famine” compared to 196 during the first three days of June. They document 585 villages that had “food difficulties” by the June 1st, compared to 225 by April 1st. A great number of adult peasants are noted as having escaped the villages and abandoned their children, where people consumed substitute food, such as cats and dogs, and “cannibalism and corpse-eating progress” – 221 cases by June 1. More than 300 people are officially known to have died in Chepyshki village in spring, and around 3000 in Vovchy Yar within six weeks, with eight to twelve people dying every day in Vovchy Yar village. Many village councils did not register their dead; suicides were recorded due to “extreme exhaustion” (*Holodomor 1932–33... 2008*, pp. 875–879).

In eighteen village councils out of thirty-four, cases of “starvation, swelling and mortality” are acknowledged; in one village of 502 people, many of them have “been swollen of famine” and need “emergency food help”. Between January and March, ninety-four people are recorded as having died (thirty-eight on collective farms), “hungry” people eat dead horses, cats, dogs, old leather, a mother eats the corpses of two of her children and murders another son to eat him; in another village, corpses remain unburied for several days, only to be buried in a mass grave later (*ibid.*, pp. 773–774).<sup>24</sup>

To analyse this harrowing narrative of famine better, I distinguish such types of individual testimony, which I refer to here as historical sources of personal origin with respect to the famine. These are: memoirs and oral histories of the famine; letters from famine-afflicted peasants as well as eyewitnesses such as workers, Komsomol [Communist Youth Movement] members, and children; articles in the non-Soviet Ukrainian press and the Western press of that time; documents produced by foreign security services and diplomats; poems and works of art; and diaries.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Official Soviet documents are of five levels: all-Union level (all-Union organs of power and personal archival funds of Joseph Stalin, Lazar Kaganovich, Viacheslav Molotov); republican level (Soviet and party organs of power, including correspondence of Ukrainian party leaders); Ukrainian regional level; security service documents (DPU) and demo-statistical documents (Boriak 2007, p. 13; Pyrih 2003, pp. 83–95).

<sup>25</sup> I distinguish six types of such sources. The division is not strict because some sources partially overlap with other groups. The fourth group, documents produced by foreign security services and diplomats, is particularly difficult to classify. On the one hand, these documents can be found in the archival sources of various Ministries, thus they are products of state organs. On the other hand, these documents were produced by diplomats and security service agents communicating with agents and foreign counterparts, often as direct observation and personal communication with starving Ukrainians,

Memoirs and oral histories on the famine make up the most numerous group, more than 110,000.<sup>26</sup> “Classical” oral history projects were developed post-WWII with the collection of oral histories in Displaced People (DP) camps (Voropai 1953, pp. 24–25); “The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System” (HPSSS) conducted 705 interviews with post-WWII refugees from the USSR; the Oseredok project is a Ukrainian museum and archival heritage institution based out of Canada (see Andriewsky 2021, p. 161); and the James Mace and Oral History Project of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine secured 179 original recordings of oral histories capturing the reality of the famine (*Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 1998 p. 219), later growing the repository to 210 at the beginning of the 1990s (Kulchytskyi 2018b, p. 15). Memoirs were already being published during WWII in Nazi-occupied Ukraine (at least 180 testimonies were published, not counting numerous articles mentioning the famine), while hundreds of Ukrainian memoirs were published abroad in the post-war period.

In 1987, Volodymyr Shcherbytskyi, the first secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, publicly confessed that there had been a famine in 1933, which opened some space for oral history projects in Ukraine to begin. As well as participating in these oral history projects, then, after Shcherbytskyi’s confession, many survivors (and later – their descendants) also began to send their memoirs to the state archives and to the regional press in Ukraine, a flow of memory that continues today. These latest recollections of the famine, arriving as they do during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, compare survival during the Holodomor and the current Russian occupation (Kostiv 2023).

Interestingly, testimonies written before the 1990s and those after contain important differences. Earlier testimonies contain more details on the Ukrainian social and political village life and on Ukraine in general, due to the age of respondents during the famine – adults or teenagers. With the generational change in respondents who still engage, testimonies written in Ukraine since the 1990s contain more information on family experiences of survival. During the famine such eyewitnesses had been too young to remember much about the famine itself, and thus they usually do not provide general information about a village or the country, or the experience of other people who survived.

By the end of the 1980s, as Ukrainians began engaging with these new oral history projects, many other Ukrainians started to erect monuments to the victims of the famine without waiting for official instructions from Kyiv.<sup>27</sup> However, such initiatives often continued to meet with resistance from Soviet local party authorities (Veselova 2007, p. 5). Even though after the proclamation of independence the

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which groups these sources with other individual sources like letters, observations by foreign journalists, diaries, as well as with oral history and memoirs.

<sup>26</sup> These and later figures on the number of extant sources are imprecise, but represent the author’s best estimations.

<sup>27</sup> For more details see: 33-j: *holod* 1991, pp. 128, 303; *Trahediia* 2003, pp. 54, 56–58; *Holodomor* 2001, p. 410.

situation with Holodomor studies and the commemoration of victims began to improve, members of the Ukrainian Communist Party also continued to deny the man-made nature of the famine, or even the famine itself, right up to the Party's dissolution in 2015 (the final decision being accepted in 2022). Nevertheless, by 2020 there were around 7,000 monuments to Holodomor victims in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

In letters from peasants and eyewitnesses, two types of letters can be discerned: those either sent by starving Ukrainian peasants to relatives, or those sent by starving peasants, workers and students to Soviet authorities in Kharkiv and Moscow, and to local press. Such appeals were often published in the foreign press and were used by the foreign diplomatic and security services in dispatches informing their governments about the situation in the USSR. As a result of the Soviet "archivocide" (Boriak 2013, p. 13), though, there are no more than a few hundred of this latter sub-type of letters left in Ukrainian archives.

Reports about the famine collected by certain foreign journalists or specialists in various fields invited to the USSR to promote industrialisation were published in the foreign press or as separate editions. Gareth Jones' notes confirming the famine's existence are probably the most famous example of this type of source, and his diaries are now available online (Jones 2015). An Austrian engineer, Alexander Wienerberger, known as the "official photographer" of the Holodomor, also published his memoirs of his experiences of the Holodomor in Kharkiv, the former capital of Ukraine, and its vicinity.

Sources created by foreign security and diplomatic services are unique in their political consequences, as in many cases they were based on personal observations or informants. There are at least 650 testimonies from eleven countries that I managed to find. Canadian historian Roman Serbyn assumes that the publication of such sources at the end of the 1980s led to a shift of Soviet propaganda that could no longer deny the famine (Serbyn 2010, pp. 63–64). It is important to note that the work of the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine (*Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine* 1988, pp. 1–228, 509–513) also influenced Soviet propaganda targeting the famine and broke the Soviet regime's silence around the Holodomor (Kulchytsky 1999, p. 27–45).

The fifth group of sources of personal origin, poems and works of art, contains both primary and secondary sources. Regarding extant poems, fourteen poets, intellectuals and eyewitnesses have been identified so far who saw the famine and described it in poetic form during or immediately after the famine, and later during the Nazi occupation, where several of these poets continued to capture their experiences. Secondary sources include fiction and poetry written after WWII to the end of the 1980s.

Finally, there are more than thirty diaries from the period of the famine written by eyewitnesses of various social strata; teachers, peasants, urban dwellers,

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<sup>28</sup> The author expresses her gratitude to Vitalii Ohienko, a historian from the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, who shared these data with me.



party members and children.<sup>29</sup> These sources provide insight into the famine with detailed chronologies and reflections recorded during the famine itself. The majority of these diaries have survived as a constituent part of archival-investigative cases (Ukr. *Архівно-слідчі справи, arkhivno-slidchi spary*), where they had been used as proof of “counterrevolutionary” activity of the diaries’ authors. These archival sources are now kept in various Ukrainian oblast regional archives and in the State Branch Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine.

One can therefore see that survivors’ testimonies did not appear “abruptly” after WWII out of nowhere as an attempt, according to the Soviet propaganda, to secure Ukrainian refugees from accusations of being Nazi collaborators. Between the end of the 1980s and the 2000s, various types of official and individual sources about the Holodomor gradually began to challenge knowledge about the famine as they entered the public sphere from a variety of archives. The numerous oral history projects on the topic served to have a similar effect.

The famine imprinted itself on the consciousnesses of survivors and eyewitnesses who as a result represented the famine they experienced with their own eyes in these sources of personal origin. In addition to testimonies about the famine published in the non-Soviet Ukrainian press and the Western press, there were numerous articles about the protests and aid actions by Ukrainians in many countries – for instance, an influential newspaper appeal in the Lviv *Dilo* on September 25th, issued by the Ukrainian Public Committee for Saving Ukraine to Johan Mowinckel, Prime Minister of Norway and the Head of the Council of the League of Nations, signed by the deputy head of this Committee Milena Rudnytska and a secretary Zenon Pelenskyi (Kliuvak, Kutsynka 2008, pp. 93–95). Equally, an article about the International Conference on the Famine called by then-Archbishop of Vienna and Cardinal Theodor Innitzer (*Dilo*, December 21, 1933) (Kliuvak, Kutsynka 2008, pp. 102–103) did not go unnoticed internationally. There are other examples, of the activity of Ukrainians living abroad and of foreign leaders (both religion and secular), although this activity did not reach the goal of providing food assistance and saving the lives of starving Ukrainians. There was, however, evidence of the inability of the international community to intervene into what we recognise now as USSR’s genocidal policy against Ukrainians. There was also the obvious, superseding supremacy of national interests of foreign states over humanitarian crises. The effectiveness of Soviet propaganda diminishing the difficult existence of Ukraine as a nation – albeit a divided one – nevertheless did not manage to completely dent Ukraine’s appeal to many international institutions.

Despite the efforts of Soviet propaganda, then, the memory of the famine was gradually turning into an established social memory of the event. This communication of the famine experience, through personal experiences of survival via various publication channels, and acknowledgements of the famine expressed in commemorative events and reporting and writing, brought closer attention to the Holodomor

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<sup>29</sup> See, for instance: *Represovani...* 2018, pp. 4–342 for a description of seven diaries.

topic in the 1980s, the last decade of the Cold War, one example of which was the aforementioned activity of the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine, 1985–1988. How, though, did the longer process of recalling the famine actually take place in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic? To begin with, printed recollections of the famine did not have to wait until the 1980s; the first “liberalisation” of anti-Soviet expression had allowed reflections about the famine to appear in print when the Soviet regime in Ukraine was replaced by Nazi occupation in 1941. Already in July of 1941 the press in Nazi-occupied Ukraine were publishing the first testimony about the famine (*Holos...* 1941, p. 3).

A second liberalisation took place in 1956. In Ukraine, reaction followed immediately: various party members raised the issue of the famine at numerous closed-party meetings. At a party meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers, poet Andrii Malyshko stressed that Stalin had intentionally organised the famine, and asked why the Twentieth Party Meeting of 1956 had ignored it (Hrynevych 2007, pp. 389–390). A third liberalisation began in 1986, when another poet, Ivan Drach, in a first-time meeting of writers (June 1986) in the Ukrainian parliament, referred to the famine as a man-made catastrophe and spoke of the millions of its victims (Nahailo 2021; Mace 2003).

Following a third liberalisation, tens of thousands of oral history testimonies about the Holodomor have been recorded in Ukraine. Their narratives have much in common with the sources of personal origin, left by survivor’s eyewitnesses, pointing at a man-made famine in the eyes of the authors: a report of the Polish Embassy to the Holy See from March 1934 states that after the famine, the Ukrainian national movement was no longer a threat and the capital was transferred to Kyiv (Athanasius et.al, eds. 2011, p. 81). A poem composed by a village teacher Oleksii Nalyvajko (1933) names robbery of the party as the reason for the “dying of people because of the hunger”: “There is no guilty in that [famine] // But bilshovyks, // They have cheated peasants // And now they eliminate them. // Do you hear, you, butchers, // Who take away, rob, // That you have returned Ukraine into a slavery!?” (Nalyvajko 2018, p. 319, translation by the author).

Despite official Soviet attempts to remove any record or memory of the famine, people in the USSR retained their memory of the famine however they could, from keeping memoirs in a sock drawer to delivering them to researchers, or sending them to the regional press when it was permitted. Many families, often overcoming fear and trauma, did their duty too, passing narratives about the experience of survival strictly through the generations. And then, finally, at the end of 1987, Ukrainian society received a signal from the party that memories of the famine were not officially silenced anymore. The writing of oral histories and the publication of testimonies about the famine began in earnest, and efforts to commemorate famine victims in various regions of Ukraine became increasingly widespread, as evidenced when monuments were erected even in Western Ukraine, which did not suffer from the 1932–1933 famine. Having battled the mighty Soviet propaganda machine with tools fashioned from the whispered and scribbled memories of one

of the great, unacknowledged tragedies of the twentieth century, the long war for the memory of the Holodomor is finally being won. The archives stand today as testimony to the enduring power of memory over ideological erasure, where those who died needlessly can now be remembered and honoured appropriately by their countrymen and women.

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SOVIET INFORMATION WARFARE ON THE HOLODOMOR  
VS HISTORICAL SOURCES: ACTORS OF THE MEMORY BATTLE

**Key words:** Holodomor, Soviet propaganda, information warfare, genocide denial, politics of memory, sources of personal origin, Ukraine

The article explores the role played by awareness and memory in combating Soviet information warfare on the famine in Ukraine of 1932–1933 based on the historical and media sources on the Holodomor. The author analyzes instruments used by the Soviet state in the 1930s not only to hide information about starvation from the other states, but also to suppress memory about it. The article presents different types of historical sources on the famine that have been preserved. Knowledge of surviving historical sources, as well as of actions of the Soviet propaganda to silence the famine, allows deconstruction of the myths invented by the Soviet regime.

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