

# The Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Memory Politics during the Russo–Ukrainian War

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*“... shared suffering unites more than does joy. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort.”*

Ernest Renan<sup>1</sup>

In the Ukraine's politics of memory, the Holodomor of 1932–1933 takes a key place as the genocide of the Ukrainian people, which aimed to prevent the formation of the Ukrainian nation and the separation of Ukraine from the USSR. During the Russo–Ukrainian War, the emphasis of mnemonic politics was shifted from the victimhood of Ukrainians to their resistance, which prevented the Kremlin from implementing its plans. Ukrainian historians criticised the unreasonable overestimation of the number of Holodomor victims to 10.5 million people, contrary to studies by demographers who estimated the direct losses from famine-induced supermortality in 1932–1934 at 3.94 million, and 4.5 million together with children not born in those years. Instead of the crimes of the communist totalitarian regime, Russian guilt became the key concept in the description of the Holodomor. Putin's policy of weaponising food, tragedies of Bucha, Irpin and Mariupol are considered as a continuation of the genocidal imperial policy of Russia/the USSR. The Holodomor memory politics is aimed at breaking any ties with Russia.

**Keywords:** famine, genocide, full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, politics of history, commemorative practices.

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, translated by Ethan Rundell, in: *Ernest Renan, Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992, <[http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf)>, [2023-11-25].

## Introduction

Ukraine is often called a post-genocide state<sup>2</sup> and a part of “Bloodlands”, according to Timothy Snyder’s concept.<sup>3</sup> A huge number of the population of Ukraine died during World War II (8 to 10 million) and the Holodomor 1932–1933 (about 4 million).

The Holodomor is taken a unique place in Ukraine’s memory politics as the greatest tragedy. Ukrainian historians believe that terror by famine was used in only two regions of the Soviet Union – the Ukrainian SSR and Kuban. Stalin’s Holodomor was directed not against people of a certain nationality or profession, but against the citizens of the Ukrainian state, which emerged during the collapse of the Russian Empire. According to Stanislav Kulchytsky, the Kremlin considered its enemies not Ukrainians as representatives of ethnicity, but Ukrainians as carriers of the idea of national statehood. In Ukraine, the targets of terror were peasants (terror by famine) and national intellectuals (mass arrests). The purpose of the genocide against Ukrainians was not to exterminate all of them, but to prevent the development and formation of the Ukrainian nation.<sup>4</sup>

The postcolonial approach describes Ukraine as an internal colony and compares its status to Ireland and Bengal, which were part of the British Empire; these countries also experienced famine. British and Soviet central rulers were generally indifferent to the welfare of the residents of culturally distinctive regions and turned a blind eye to the plight of Irish and Ukrainian peasants. According to Michael Hechter, since internal colonies are potential sites for the development of secessionist movements, central authorities are likely to adopt more repressive policies in the periphery than in the core of the state.<sup>5</sup>

The theoretical framework of this article is based on the understanding of Central and Eastern Europe as a particular region of memory, where a specific culture of historical remembrance has been formed, characterised by an “obsession with the past” and a “surfeit of memories”, a powerful presence of states as memory actors. In Ukraine after 2005, the state has been the dominant actor of memory politics. The memoryscape of the region is conditioned by the experience of life in extreme violence under two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Stalinism.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Джеймс Мейс, “Ваші мертві вибрали мене... Спадщина голодомору: Україна як постгеноцидне суспільство”, in: *День*, 12-02-2003, <<https://day.kyiv.ua/article/panorama-dnya/vashi-mertvi-vybraly-mene>>, [2023-11-16].

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, London: Vintage, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Станіслав Кульчицький, *Голодомор 1932–1933 рр. як геноцид. Труднощі усвідомлення*, Kyiv: Nash chas, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Bohdan Klid, “Empire-Building, Imperial Policies, and Famine in Occupied Territories and Colonies”, in: *East/West Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 2021, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 11–32; Michael Hechter, “Internal Colonialism, Alien Rule, and Famine in Ireland and Ukraine”, in: *East/West Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 2021, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 145–157.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “Eastern and Central Europe as a Region of Memory. Some Common Traits”, in: *Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past. A Comparative Study on Memory Management in the Region*, ed. by N. Möerner, Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2020, p. 15.

Therefore, the Central and Eastern European memory model is polygenocidal – in contrast to Western Europe, which recognises the unique nature of the Holocaust. Norman Naimark includes in Stalin's genocides artificial famines in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the Great Terror, dekulakisation, the Katyn massacre and removing nations.<sup>7</sup> Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak refers to the "acts of genocide" in Ukraine as the dekulakisation; the Holodomor 1932–1933; the "Polish" and "Greek" operations of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (*Narodnyy komissariat vnutrennikh del* – NKVD); the Holocaust; the Romani genocide; murders of Soviet prisoners of war by the Nazis, Poles by Ukrainian nationalists, Ukrainians by the Polish underground; three mass deportations: Crimea Tatars from Crimea, Ukrainians from southeastern Poland and Poles from Western Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this article is to analyse the Holodomor in the politics of memory during the Russo–Ukrainian War:

- the transformation of the Holodomor into a key event of national memory and politics of the history of Ukraine;
- the attitude of Ukrainians to the genocidal concept of the Holodomor;
- the formation of commemorative practices and rituals of the Holodomor;
- the replacement of the discourse of victimhood by a discourse of resistance;
- the use of the Holodomor in the foreign policy of Ukraine;
- weaponising food during the ongoing war as a continuation of Russian genocidal policy aimed at extermination of the Ukrainian nation.

The source material was collected from various sources: materials from the governments of Ukraine and Russia, speeches, statements and publications of the Presidents, members of governments, politicians, historians, articles in the media, interviews (most of these publications reflect the official views of the Ukrainian and Russian authorities, and their authors can hardly be called disinterested observers), concepts of memorialisation of sites of memory and sociological surveys.

This article deals for the first time with the Holodomor in memory politics during the ongoing war. The author continues and develops the ideas of Georgiy Kasianov, who analysed ideas about famine in mass consciousness, politics and historiography, the understanding of the Holodomor as a key symbol in understanding the Soviet period of Ukrainian history, and the nationalisation of history and its use in nation-building. According to Kasianov, the Holodomor is simultaneously an ideological construct, a historical narrative, a fragment of historical memory, an image of the past, and a subject and an object of politics.<sup>9</sup> He also believes that the collective memory of the Holodomor

<sup>7</sup> Norman Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides*, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 51–120.

<sup>8</sup> Ярослав Грицак, *Подолати минуле. Глобальна історія України*, Київ: Portal, 2022, с. 198–199.

<sup>9</sup> Георгій Касьянов, *Danse macabre. Голод 1932–1933 років у політиці, масовій свідомості та історіографії (1980-ті – початок 2000-х)*, Київ: Nash chas, 2010.

often competed with the memory of the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> Using Kasianov's approaches on the nationalisation of history and its use in nation-building, the article shows how during the Russian aggression the victimised memory of the Holodomor in Ukraine is gradually supplemented and replaced by a resistance one.

Drawing upon the concept of "sites of memory", this article deals with the use of Holodomor monuments as symbols of resistance during the ongoing war. It includes Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek's research, which has examined the memorialisation of the Holodomor through study of monuments, iconographic motifs in monuments and memorials, and connections between commemorative practices in Ukraine and the diaspora.<sup>11</sup>

### **Holodomor in Memory Politics During the Cold War and Perestroika**

In the USSR, the Great Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine was kept a secret until the mid-1980s. The communicative memory of this tragedy was preserved as a countermemory to the official Soviet narrative of collectivisation in the form of personal memories and family stories. The famine disappeared from the public space; it was not described in textbooks, history books, or literature.

The memory of the tragedy was kept alive in the Ukrainian diaspora, where it was often described as the "Ukrainian Holocaust".<sup>12</sup> Before the 50th anniversary of the Holodomor, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States initiated public actions. In 1984, the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine was founded. Its chairman was Congressman Daniel Mica, (a Democrat from Florida), the Staff Director was Dr James Mace. In 1982, at an international conference on the Holocaust and genocide in Tel Aviv, Mace was the first Western scholar to characterise the Great Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine as a genocide act.<sup>13</sup> He was convinced that to centralise full power in Stalin's hands, it was necessary to control the second largest Soviet republic, which meant exterminating the Ukrainian peasantry, Ukrainian intelligentsia, the Ukrainian language, and Ukrainian history. The Commission's final report to Congress on 22 April 1988 concluded that the man-made famine was an act of genocide against the people of Ukraine, carried out by Stalin and his associates. In 1986, the first scientific book about the Holodomor in English, Robert Conquest's "The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine", was published.

<sup>10</sup> Georgiy Kasianov, "Holodomor and the Holocaust in Ukraine as Cultural Memory: Comparison, Competition, Interaction", in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2022, No. 24 (2), p. 216.

<sup>11</sup> Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek, *Eternal Memory: Monuments and Memorials of the Holodomor*, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Yaremovich, "Collectivization Through Famine: 45th Anniversary of Anti-Ukrainian Holocaust", in: *Ukrainian Quarterly*, Winter 1978, No. 34 (4), pp. 349–362.

<sup>13</sup> Джеймс Е. Мейс, "Автобіографія. Факти і цінності: особистий інтелектуальний пошук", in: *День і вічність Джеймса Мейса*, за заг. ред. Л. Івшиної, Київ: Ukrajinska pres-grupa, 2005, c. 15.

The USSR authorities believed that the USA wanted to spoil the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Soviet power in Ukraine, and tried to counteract the dissemination of information about the Holodomor as enemy propaganda.<sup>14</sup> Former Ukrainian president (1991–1994) Leonid Kravchuk recalled: “In the early 1980s many publications began appearing in the Western press on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most horrific tragedies in the history of our people. A counter-propaganda machine was put into motion, and I was one of its wheels”.<sup>15</sup>

During perestroika at the end of 1986, a special commission was founded under the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee. It consisted of scientists from the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR and the Institute of History of the Communist Party of Ukraine under the Central Committee, and was tasked with studying archival materials about the Great Famine.

On 25 December 1987, the leader of the Communist Party of Ukraine Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, in a speech dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power in Ukraine, for the first time acknowledged the famine. However, he said that “The Soviet government in those conditions did everything possible to help the population of Ukraine, Don, and Kuban, the Volga region, the Southern Urals, and Kazakhstan affected by this disaster”. Among the causes of the famine, Shcherbytsky noted the “unjustified acceleration” of collectivisation, violation of the voluntary nature of joining a collective farm, and severe drought.<sup>16</sup> After that, Ukrainian newspapers began publishing documents and articles about the famine, the first of which was authored by Stanislav Kulchytsky.<sup>17</sup>

In 1988, at the XIX All-Union Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian poet Borys Oliynyk called “to make public the causes of the famine of 1933, which claimed the lives of millions of Ukrainians, and to name those through whose fault this tragedy occurred”.<sup>18</sup> The Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee passed a resolution on 26 January 1990, calling the famine a result of the “criminal course pursued by Stalin and his closest comrades toward the peasantry”.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Дмитро Веденєєв, Дмитро Будков, *Заручниця глобального протистояння. Трагедія великого голоду 1932–1933 років в Україні у контексті “холодної війни” 1945–1991 років*, Kyiv: Dorado-Druk, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Леонід Кравчук, *Маємо те, що маємо: спогади і роздуми*, Kyiv: Stolittya, 2002, с. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Володимир Щербицький, “Під прапором Великого Жовтня, курсом перебудови: Доповідь на урочистому засіданні, присвяченому 70-річчю встановлення Радянської влади на Україні”, in *Радянська Україна*, 26 December 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Станіслав Кульчицький, “До історії першої радянської публікації про голод 1932–1933 рр. (січень 1988 р.)”, in: *Український історичний журнал*, 2023, № 5, с. 83–92.

<sup>18</sup> XIX Всесоюзная конференция Коммунистической партии Советского Союза, 28 июня–1 июля 1988 г.: Стенографический отчет, т. 2, Москва: Политиздат, 1988, с. 30.

<sup>19</sup> “О голоде 1932–1933 годов на Украине и публикации связанных с ним архивных материалов: постановление ЦК Компартии Украины”, in: *Правда Украины*, 7 February 1990.

The anti-communist opposition used the Holodomor and the responsibility of the Communist Party for it in the struggle for power. In their opinion, the Holodomor killed the best Ukrainians, struck the Ukrainian nation and its genetic potential beyond remedy, and the consequences of this blow are felt to the present day. Therefore, this topic was initially politicised and became an important argument in the struggle to discredit and overthrow communist rule and agitation for independence.

### **Long Recovering Memory**

The recovering of the memory of the Holodomor took a very long time, since many eyewitnesses were traumatised and were afraid or did not want to remember the tragedy, and Ukrainian society did not have a common view of its past. From the late 1980s, in Ukraine two models of memory coexisted and competed with each other. These were the Soviet-nostalgic model, according to which the famine was a consequence of crop failure and collectivisation errors, and the national model that viewed the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people. The main actors of memory were the Ukrainian diaspora, intelligentsia, public figures, and Soviet dissidents (holders of the national model of memory). They shaped the main narratives of the memory politics that would be implemented after 2014.

In 1993, the first President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk issued a decree “On perpetuating the memory of the victims of the Holodomor in Ukraine of 1932–1933”. He called the famine an “administratively planned action” to exterminate the Ukrainian people. In September 1993, in the centre of Kyiv on Mykhailivska Square, a memorial sign to the victims of the Holodomor was erected – a cross with a figure of the symbol of Ukraine – mother “Bereginya” with her arms down and a child at her chest. In 1998, President Leonid Kuchma established the last Saturday of November as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holodomor.

After the Orange Revolution of 2004, President Viktor Yushchenko began to create a new model of national memory based on the crimes of the communist totalitarian regime. The key event was the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as the genocide of the Ukrainian people. In 2006, the Law of Ukraine “On the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine” was adopted. The Holodomor was recognised as genocide of the Ukrainian people. The guilt for this crime was placed on the communist regime and communist ideology. Yushchenko has repeatedly proposed establishing criminal liability for denying the Holodomor as the genocide of the Ukrainian people and the Holocaust as the genocide of the Jewish people, but parliament rejected this idea.

The main actor in the politics of memory has become the state, which regulated politics of history through laws and state institutions. In 2006, on the initiative of Yushchenko, the



**Fig. 1.** Memorial sign to the victims of the Holodomor. Kyiv, Mykhailivska Square.

*Photo from Wikipedia*

Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) was established as the central executive body in the field of restoration and preservation of national memory. Politician and academician physicist Ihor Yukhnovskiy was appointed director of the UINM. The main task of the institute was declared to be commemoration of the victims of the Holodomor. UINM acted as an instrument of Yushchenko's historical politics to popularise the concept of a postcolonial and post-genocidal Ukrainian nation that paid the highest price for its independence. Yushchenko rudely interfered in the Holodomor studies. He sanctioned local officials for poor preparations for the 75th anniversary of the tragedy, and the low number of names of famine victims found.<sup>20</sup>

In 2008, the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide was opened in the centre of Kyiv. The museum building is shaped like a candle. In front of it is a bronze sculpture of a girl



**Fig. 2.** President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife Olena Zelenska took part in the events marking the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor 1932–1933.

Photo by the Office of the President of Ukraine, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/glava-derzhavi-ta-persha-le-di-vshanuvai-pamyat-zhertv-golod-87253>

with ears of wheat, “Bitter Memory of Childhood”. During Yushchenko’s presidency, official ceremonies and rituals of commemorating the victims of the Holodomor were formed, including the installation of crosses, public prayers, and the publication of books of memory. The symbols of commemorative practices were a cross, mother and child(ren), hands, angel, bell, circle,<sup>21</sup> ears of wheat, and bunches of viburnum. On the Day of Remembrance of Holodomor Victims, a minute of silence takes place at 16:00, followed by the “Light a candle of the memory in the window” event. In 2023, 71.7% of respondents said they always or sometimes participate in the annual commemoration of the Holodomor victims. 59.7% of respondents said they light a candle in the window, and 19.5% participate in public events.<sup>22</sup> In 2010, the Kyiv Court of Appeal examined a criminal case opened by the Security Service of Ukraine on the fact of mass famine, in which the leaders of the USSR and Soviet Ukraine Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Stanislav Kosior, Vlas Chubar, Pavel Postyshev, Lazar Kaganovich, and Mendel Khatayevich were accused. The court found that the accused had committed the crime of genocide and closed the criminal case due to the death of the accused persons.

<sup>21</sup> Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek, *op. cit.*, pp. 302–341.

<sup>22</sup> “У близько половини українців зріс інтерес до історії після повномасштабного вторгнення – соціопитування”, in: Український інститут національної пам’яті, 23-11-2023, <<https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/u-blyzko-polovyny-ukrayinciv-zris-interes-do-istoriyi-pislya-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-socopytuvannya>>, [2024-09-12].

## Holodomor in Russian Memory Politics

Since the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010), there have been “memory wars” of varying intensity between Russia and Ukraine, which since 2014 have been taking place against the background of a hybrid war, and – from 24 February 2022 – a full-scale war. In Russia, the authorities and historians consider the Holodomor only as a “common tragedy of the peoples of the USSR”.<sup>23</sup> Russia and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine perceived the genocidal concept as an attempt to blame the organisation of the Holodomor primarily on Russia rather than on communist ideology.<sup>24</sup>

The statement of the State Duma of the Russian Federation of 2 April 2008 stated that many regions of Russia (the Volga region, the Central Black Earth region, the North Caucasus, the Urals, Crimea, and parts of Western Siberia), Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus suffered as a result of the famine caused by forced collectivisation. However, this tragedy does not and cannot have internationally established signs of genocide and should not be the subject of contemporary political speculation.<sup>25</sup>

Vladimir Putin told Viktor Yushchenko that Russia could not be responsible for the Soviet or tsarist governments, and take responsibility for their mistakes.<sup>26</sup> In 2008, Dmitry Medvedev rejected Yushchenko’s invitation to attend the Holodomor anniversary mourning events. In his message, the Russian President said that this tragedy was being used by Ukraine as an element of foreign policy. “These efforts are rather aimed at maximally dividing our peoples united by centuries-old historical, cultural, and spiritual ties, special feelings of friendship, and mutual trust”, Medvedev said.<sup>27</sup>

Russia has always denied the genocide of the Ukrainian people, but acknowledged the famine due to crop failure. In 2010, the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine, Dmitry Medvedev and Viktor Yanukovych, who denied the genocidal nature of the Holodomor, placed burning lamps at the monument to the victims in Kyiv.

<sup>23</sup> Владимир Козлов, “Общая трагедия народов СССР”, in: *Голод в СССР. 1929–1934*, т. 1, книга 2, Москва: Издательство МФД, 2011, с. 5–9.

<sup>24</sup> “Не надо смешивать память и политику”, in: *Крымская правда*, 25 November 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Заявление Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации «Памяти жертв голода 30-х годов на территории СССР», in: *Государственная Дума Российской Федерации*, 02-04-2008, <<https://duma.consultant.ru/page.aspx?955838>>, [2023-11-30].

<sup>26</sup> Віктор Ющенко, “Розмови із Путіним про українську ідентичність, Голодомор та взаємне примирення”, in: *Історична Правда*, 21-11-2013, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2013/11/21/139795/>, [2023-11-16].

<sup>27</sup> “Разъяснения по Голодомору”, in: *Интерфакс*, 14-11-2008, <<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/45578>>, [2023-11-16].



**Fig. 3.** Dmitry Medvedev and Viktor Yanukovich light a candle near the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Photo Reuters

In 2011, some books on the Holodomor were recognised as extremist in Russia. After the occupation of Crimea, a Russian-controlled court in Feodosia found the director of the Feodosia Central Library System, Galina Malyarchuk, guilty of keeping a brochure on the Holodomor and subjected her to an administrative penalty of 2,000 roubles. At the same time, a criminal case was brought against the director of a Feodosia gymnasium for possession of a similar book. The “extremist” literature about the Holodomor in Crimean libraries was seized. In 2015, the Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow was closed down; its director Natalia Sharina was later sentenced to a four-year suspended sentence for possession of 25 “extremist books”, including a book about the Holodomor.<sup>28</sup>

In the self-proclaimed Russian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk “people’s republics”, the dismantling of Holodomor memorials began in 2014. After the occupation of Mariupol, the memorial “To the Victims of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 and Political Repressions”, which had been located in the city centre since 2004, was dismantled. Artem Bobrovsky, a historian from Donetsk, said in support of the dismantling that “it was not Ukraine or Donbas that suffered most from the 1932–33 famine”, but Kazakhstan, the Volga region,

<sup>28</sup> Сергей Громенко, “Голодомор и Крым: стертая память о трагедии”, in: *Крым.Реалии*, 28-11-2018, <<https://ru.krymr.com/a/golodomor-i-krym-sterтая-pamyat-o-tragedii/29624569.html>>, [2023-11-20].

and the North Caucasus.<sup>29</sup> In 2023, Russian invaders destroyed 14 monuments to Holodomor victims on the territory of Ivanivka community of Henichesk Raion, Kherson oblast. Russian-controlled local authorities explained that the Holodomor was not a unique phenomenon and an artificial famine.<sup>30</sup> In July 2024, the memorial signs ‘Victims of Stalinist Repressions’ and ‘Victims of the Holodomor’ were dismantled in Luhansk.



**Fig. 4.** Dismantling of the monument to the Holodomor victims in Ivanika.  
Photo Telegram channel *Администрация Ивановского муниципального округа*

## Weaponisation of Food

According to Timothy Snyder, Russia's denial of the Holodomor was actually a preparation for the use of food as a weapon:

President Putin is trying to demonstrate his control over Ukraine, and so he is telling the leaders of Africa and Asia that he is now the “master of food”. That he now has the power over hunger. That he will decide who will live and who will die. Of course, this is a very direct echo of the 1930s and Stalin's policies.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “В аннексированном Мариуполе демонтировали мемориал «Жертвам Голодомора»”, in: *Медуза*, 19-10-2022, <<https://meduza.io/news/2022/10/19/v-anneksirovannom-mariupole-demontirovali-memorial-zhertvam-golodomora>>, [2023-11-16].

<sup>30</sup> “Ликвидируем последствия искажений нашей истории: в Ивановском округе снесли памятники жертвам голодомора”, in: *ZOV Херсон*, 23-11-2023, <<https://kherson-news.ru/society/2023/11/23/233121.html>>, [2023-11-29].

<sup>31</sup> Тімоті Снайдер, “Росія використовує голод як зброю”, in: *Історична Правда*, 21-11-2023, <<https://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2023/11/21/163373/>>, [2023-11-29].

The Ukrainian authorities claim that the Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports and the creation of obstacles to the export of Ukrainian grain are aimed at creating a food crisis, just as Stalin's regime created an artificial famine in 1932–1933. Russia is not only waging war on the battlefield, but is also aiming to inflict a global food crisis by destroying Ukrainian civil port infrastructure and grain storage facilities, blocking the Black Sea coast of Ukraine, and disrupting lawful transit in Ukraine's territorial seas.<sup>32</sup> "Putin is proud to follow the greatest killers of the 20th century. If he could arrange another Holodomor for Ukraine, he would do it", said President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy.<sup>33</sup>

Zelenskyy holds summits of international humanitarian initiative on Food Security Grain from Ukraine on Holodomor remembrance days. This programme provides for the purchase of foodstuffs from Ukrainian producers by partners for the countries in Africa and Asia that are on the brink of famine.<sup>34</sup>

"Ukrainians went through genocide. And today we are doing everything possible and impossible to stop Russia's new genocidal policy. A new one – but similar to the one that killed millions of people in the twentieth century",<sup>35</sup> said Zelenskyy.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has declared the large-scale unprovoked Russian armed aggression against Ukraine to be a continuation of Russia's genocidal imperial policy, which aims to punish Ukrainians for their desire to build a modern, successful democratic state and for their civilisational choice to be part of the United Europe. Since the Holodomor, Russian imperialism has not changed its goal of destroying Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation.<sup>36</sup>

Human rights lawyers from Global Rights Compliance are preparing a war crimes dossier to submit to the international criminal court, accusing Russia of deliberately causing starvation. The weaponisation of food has taken place in three phases, starting with the initial invasion where Ukrainian cities were besieged and food supplies cut. Among the incidents documented was when 20 civilians were killed in Chernihiv in the early morning

<sup>32</sup> Address of the President of Ukraine on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holodomors", in: *President of Ukraine*, 25-11-2023, <<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-z-nagodi-dnya-pamyati-zhertv-87249>>, [2023-11-26].

<sup>33</sup> "Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the second international summit Grain from Ukraine: never again should hunger become a weapon against the freedom of people", in: *President of Ukraine*, 25-11-2023, <<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volodimir-zelenskij-na-drugomu-mizhnarodnomu-samiti-grain-uk-87265>>, [2023-11-26].

<sup>34</sup> "Opening address of President of Ukraine at the inaugural International Summit on Food Security under Grain from Ukraine humanitarian program", in: *President of Ukraine*, 26-11-2022, <<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-na-mizhnarodnomu-ustanovchomu-sam-79449>>, [2023-11-16].

<sup>35</sup> "Never again should hunger be used as a weapon – address of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy", in: *President of Ukraine*, 26-11-2022, <<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/nikoli-bilshe-golod-ne-maye-vikoristovuvatis-yak-zbroya-zver-79469>>, [2023-11-16].

<sup>36</sup> "Заява Верховної Ради України у зв'язку з 90-ми роковинами Голодомору 1932–1933 років в Україні", in: *Верховна Рада України*, 22-11-2023, <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3488-IX#Text>>, [2023-11-25].

of 16 March 2022, when Russian fragmentation bombs exploded outside a supermarket in the city where Ukrainians were queueing for bread and food. Also, food supplies were cut to Mariupol and humanitarian relief corridors were blocked or bombed. The second phase includes the destruction of food and water supplies as well as energy sources across Ukraine during the fighting; a large city in the south, Mykolaiv, was left without drinking water from early in the conflict. The third element is Russian attempts to prevent or restrict exports of Ukrainian food; 270,000 tonnes of food were destroyed in late July and early August 2023.<sup>37</sup>

The Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak compared the Holodomor to Russian attacks on civilian energy infrastructure:

Last weekend, Ukraine paused to mark the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor. Now, a new terror stalks our lands: the Kholodomor. Spelled with just one extra letter, this word means “death by freezing”. The words “hunger” and “cold” sound similar in Ukrainian, and the outcome is the same. Have you ever tried to imagine mass death from freezing? Millions of slow, torturous, painful deaths – no movie or book can convey these horrors, either, and we don’t even want to try to imagine them. But this is exactly the fate that the Russians are preparing for Ukraine today. For weeks now, with winter fast approaching, they have been peppering Ukraine’s civilian energy infrastructure with hundreds of missiles.<sup>38</sup>

### **Holodomor and the Securitisation of Memory Politics in Ukraine: From Victimhood to Resistance**

After the Euromaidan revolution and the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, Ukrainian authorities adopted a mnemonic warrior strategy in an attempt to eradicate the Soviet-nostalgic model of memory. According to this strategy, there should be a unified vision of the past and the alternatives tabooed and criminalised.<sup>39</sup> It was shock therapy in the field of memory politics, called decommunisation; historical memory began to be considered part of state security. The Soviet past was declared an existential threat to Ukraine. The politics of history of Ukraine is aimed at reducing dependence on Russia, including a common vision of the past.<sup>40</sup>

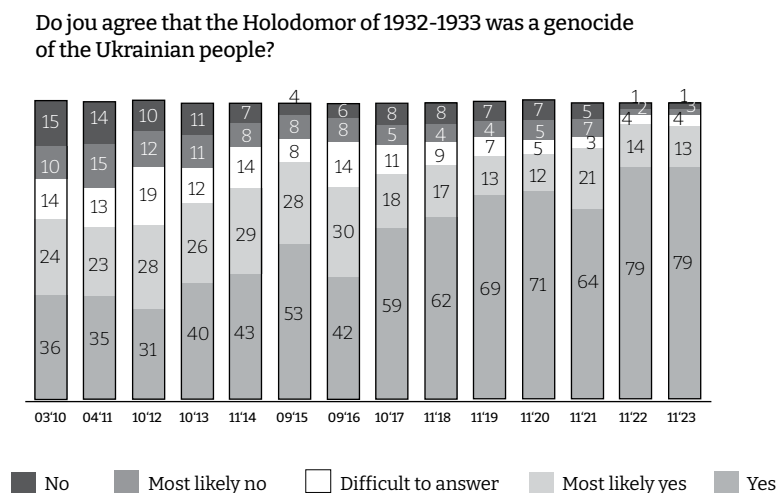
<sup>37</sup> Dan Sabbagh, “War crimes dossier to accuse Russia of deliberately causing starvation in Ukraine”, in: *The Guardian*, 24-09-2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/24/war-crimes-dossier-to-accuse-russia-of-deliberately-causing-starvation-in-ukraine>>, [2023-11-28].

<sup>38</sup> Andriy Yermak, “In Ukraine, Russia is trying to freeze us into submission or death. It will fail”, in: *The Guardian*, 1-12-2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/01/ukraine-russia-freeze-power-starvation-holodomor-terror>>, [2023-11-28].

<sup>39</sup> Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, “The Politics and Culture of Memory Regimes”, in: *Twenty Years After Communism*, (edited by Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik), New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> Tomasz Stryjek, Volodymyr Sklokin, „Wprowadzenie. Kultury historyczne. O niepowodzeniu pojednania historycznego z nowej perspektywy”, in: *Kultury historyczne Polski i Ukrainy: O źródłach nieporozumień pomiędzy sąsiadami*, pod. red. T. Stryjeka i V. Sklokina, Warszawa: Scholar, s. 12.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has changed the attitude of Ukrainians to historical issues, especially those related to the “common” Soviet history. Over the past ten years, there has been a one and a half times increase in the number of respondents who agree with the thesis that the Holodomor of 1932–1933 is a genocide of the Ukrainian people. In 2010, only 60% of Ukrainians considered the Holodomor to be genocide of the Ukrainian people. According to the latest poll, in 2023, 92% agree with this statement (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The attitude of Ukrainians to the Holodomor 1932–1933 as a genocide of the Ukrainian people<sup>41</sup>

During the war, the victimhood discourse of the Holodomor created under Yushchenko began to be replaced by a resistance discourse. Historian Hennadii Yefimenko believes that the Holodomor is not only a victim, a tragedy, and a crime, but also the resistance of Ukrainians, thanks to which we survived as a people. This is the history not only of those who died from a criminally organised famine, but also of those who survived and eventually won. As a result of this struggle, the Kremlin was defeated and the Ukrainian nation survived.<sup>42</sup>

Ukrainian historians have begun to criticise the exaggeration of the number of Holodomor victims. Previously, the number of victims was often estimated by politicians and some historians to be between 7 and 10 million. This was due to the lack of reliable

<sup>41</sup> “Динаміка ставлення до Голодомору 1932–33 рр.,” in: Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», November 2023, <[https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_holodomor\\_112023\\_0001.pdf](https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_holodomor_112023_0001.pdf)>, [28-11-2023].

<sup>42</sup> Антон Печерський, Геннадій Єфіменко: “Голодомор 1932–1933 років і сучасний напад РФ на Україну – дві ланки одного ланцюга”, in: *АрміяInform*, 25-11-2023, <<https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/11/25/golodomor-1932-1933-rok-iv-i-suchasnyj-napad-rf-na-ukrayinu-dvi-lanky-odnogo-lancyuga/?fbclid=IwAR0iTJR7uShtpV8a4Ojd0Vi0-dvBE-nudd75uoYrWzEgGvP1g8zYGbxrnLIE>>, [16-11-1981].

sources and the desire to show that the number of Holodomor victims was not inferior to the Holocaust, and possibly exceeded it. After 2008, a team of demographers from Ukraine and the United States (Oleh Wolowyna, Nataliia Levchuk, Omelian Rudnytskyi, and others) analysed available sources, including those from Russian archives, and took into account the migration factor to the maximum extent possible. Demographers estimated the direct losses from famine-induced supermortality in 1932–1934 at 3.94 million, and 4.5 million together with children not born in those years.<sup>43</sup>

In autumn 2021, National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide published a book of forensic statistical and forensic criminal examinations, in which it established the number of Holodomor victims at 10.5 million, including 9.1 million in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>44</sup> On 1 December 2021, a group of historians and public activists addressed an open letter to the leaders of Ukraine. They accused the director of the museum Olesya Stasiuk and one of the authors of the book, General of the Security Service of Ukraine Mykola Herasymenko, of numerous falsifications and “starting a campaign of discrediting and actual defamation” of scholars who oppose the figure of 10.5 million victims.<sup>45</sup> Exaggerating the number of victims shows that Ukrainians’ resistance to the Kremlin’s actions is less than it really was, or even ignores it altogether, the letter’s authors said.

The Ukrainian authorities have not defined their position on the number of Holodomor victims. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine and the UINM supported the authors of the open letter. As a result, Olesya Stasiuk was dismissed from her position as director of the museum and is trying to be reinstated in court. Later, signs of plagiarism were found in her dissertation.<sup>46</sup> But the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine did not react to the situation. Some embassies and consulates abroad screened the documentary film “10.5”, based on forensic, statistical, and forensic criminal examinations.

In Ukrainian discourse during the war, Russia took the place of the Communists as the perpetrator and organiser of the Holodomor. It is in Moscow’s close embrace that the causes of the genocide lie; the severing of all ties with Russia, including cultural and his-

<sup>43</sup> Omelian Rudnytskyi, Nataliia Levchuk, Oleh Wolowyna, Pavlo Shevchuk, Alla Kovbasiuk, “Demography of a man-made human catastrophe: The case of massive famine in Ukraine 1932–1933”, in: *Canadian Studies in Population* 2015, No. 42 (1–2), pp. 53–80.

<sup>44</sup> *Геноцид українців 1932–1933 за матеріалами досудових розслідувань*, Упоряд: О. Петришин, М. Герасименко, О. Стасюк. Київ: Marko Melnyk Publishers, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> “Відкритий лист науковців та громадськості щодо фальсифікацій у сфері дослідження та поширення інформації про Голодомор–геноцид Українського народу”, in: *Історична Правда*, 1-12-2021, <<https://www.istorpravda.com.ua/columns/2021/12/1/160581/>>, [16-11-2023]; Олександр Гладун, Наталія Левчук, Олег Воловина, “Ще раз про кількість втрат унаслідок Голодомору: експертна оцінка”, in: *Український історичний журнал*, 2023, № 5, с. 93–118.

<sup>46</sup> Геннадій Єфіменко, “Казус Стасюк: майстер-клас з дискредитації історичної науки та тематики Голодомору в Україні”, in: *Ділова столиця*, 18-02-2022, <<https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/blog/kazus-stasyuk-mayster-klas-z-diskreditacii-istorichnoji-nauki-ta-tematiki-golodomoru-v-ukrajini-18022022-451784>>, [2023-11-16].

torical ties, is a guarantee against a new genocide. According to Yefimenko, “The Holodomor as genocide was a crime not only and not even so much of the communist regime as of communist Russia, and in this definition, the noun ‘Russia’ is the main one, not the adjective ‘communist’”.<sup>47</sup>

During the war, the Ukrainian authorities decided to complete the Holodomor Museum in Kyiv. As Minister of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine Mykola Tochytskyi explained, “The National Holodomor Museum is not only a matter of preserving the historical memory of the genocide of the twentieth century, it is directly related to the struggle that the Ukrainian people are waging for their existence today. After all, this war of conquest unleashed by the aggressor country is a direct continuation of the eternal and unchanging Russian imperial policy aimed at destroying everything Ukrainian”.<sup>48</sup>

### **International Recognition of the Holodomor 1932–1933 as Genocide**

An important part of the state policy of Ukraine is the recognition of the Holodomor as genocide by another states. The recognition of the Holodomor as genocide at the international level was significantly accelerated by the full-scale Russian invasion, during which the Russian authorities openly declared their intention to destroy Ukrainians as a nation. This fact demonstrated the historical continuity of Russian crimes from the Holodomor to the massacres in Bucha and Irpin.

On 16 November 2022, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine called on the parliaments of the world to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people. If it was recognised as genocide before 2022 by only 15 UN member countries and the Vatican, then after 2022 the crimes of the Holodomor in Bucha were recognised by 17 states, including Germany and Great Britain, (which had previously rejected acts recognising genocide of the Ukrainian people in 1932–1933). Also, the Holodomor was recognised as genocide by a number of international organisations, including the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Table 1). Some countries have condemned the Holodomor as a crime against humanity.

<sup>47</sup> Антон Печерський, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> “Микола Тоцицький зустрівся з представниками Світового конгресу українців”, in: *Кабінет Міністрів України*, 09-09-2024, <<https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/mykola-tochytskyi-zustrivsia-z-predstavnykamy-svitovoho-konhresu-ukraintsiv>>, [15-09-24].

**Table 1.** International Recognition of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as Genocide<sup>49</sup>

	Date	Country
1	20-10-1993	Estonia
2	28-10-1993	Australia
3	20-06-2003	Canada
4	26-11-2003	Hungary
5	02-04-2004	Vatican
6	24-11-2005	Lithuania
7	20-12-2005	Georgia
8	16-03–4-12-2006	Poland
9	19-06-2007	Peru
10	25-10-2007	Paraguay
11	30-10-2007	Ecuador
12	21-12-2007	Colombia
13	19-02-2008	Mexico
14	13-03-2008	Latvia
15	03-03-2017	Portugal
16	4-10–11-12-2018	USA
17	06-04-2022	Czech Republic
18	26-04-2022	Brazil
19	24-11-2022	Moldova
20	24-11-2022	Ireland
21	30-11-2022	Germany
	15-12-2022	European Parliament
22	21-12-2022	Chile
23	1-02-2023	Bulgaria
24	10-03-2023	Belgium
25	23-03-2023	Iceland
26	28-03-2023	France
27	23-05-2023	Slovenia
28	25-05-2023	UK
29	13-06-2023	Luxembourg
30	20-06-2023	Slovakia
31	28-06-2023	Croatia
32	7-07-2023	Netherlands
33	26-07-2023	Italy
	12-10-2023	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

<sup>49</sup> Compiled by: "Визнання Голодомору актом геноциду в світі", in: *Національний музей Голодомору-геноциду*, <<https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/vyznannia-v-sviti-holodomoru-aktom-henotsydu/>>, [16-11-2023].

## Conclusion

The recognition of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people occurred gradually, but today it has the support of the majority of the Ukrainian population. Commemorative practices of Holodomor victims have developed, including many Christian and folk symbols (crosses, candles, ears of wheat, and bunches of viburnum).

The Holodomor has always been a politicised topic and was used by Ukrainian politicians in the struggle among themselves and to confront Russia. The Holodomor memory politics is aimed at breaking ties with Russia. During the ongoing war in Ukrainian memory politics, the crime of the communist totalitarian regime was transformed into a Russian guilt. The discourse of the victimhood during the Holodomor is being replaced by a discourse of resistance.

The Ukrainian authorities show that the policy of extermination of the Ukrainian people has been pursued by Russia since the Holodomor, and the modern tragedies of Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol are a continuation of the genocidal imperial policy of Russia / USSR. Recognition of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people by foreign states remains one of the important directions of Ukraine's foreign policy. After the crimes in Bucha the Holodomor was recognised as genocide by 17 states.

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**1932–1933 m. Holodomoras atminties politikoje Rusijos karo su Ukraina metu**

*Santrauka*

Ukrainos atminties politikoje 1932–1933 m. Holodomoras užima svarbią vietą kaip ukrainiečių tautos genocidas, kuriuo siekta užkirsti kelią ukrainiečių tautos susiformavimui ir Ukrainos atsiskyrimui nuo SSRS. Per Rusijos ir Ukrainos karą mnemoninės politikos akcentas buvo perkeltas nuo ukrainiečių nukentėjimo prie jų pasipriešinimo, trukdžiusio Kremlui įgyvendinti savo planus. Ukrainos istorikai kritikavo nepagrįstą Ukrainos Didžiojo badmečio aukų skaičiaus pervertinimą iki 10,5 mln. žmonių, prieštaraujantį demografų tyrimams, kurie tiesioginius nuostolius dėl bado sukkelto itin didelio mirtingumo 1932–1934 m. įvertino 3,94 ir 4,5 mln. aukų kartu su tais metais negimusiais vaikais. Vietoj komunistinio totalitarinio režimo nusikaltimų svarbiausia Holodomoro apibūdinimo sąvoka tapo Rusijos kaltė. Vladimirui Putinui naudojantis maistu kaip ginklu, Bučos, Irpinės, Mariupolio tragedijos tapo Rusijos (SSRS) genocidinės imperinės politikos tęsinium. Holodomoro atminties politika siekiama nutraukti bet kokius ryšius su Rusija.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** badas, genocidas, plataus masto Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą, istorijos politika, atminimo įamžinimo praktika.