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## Final Report

### **Holodomor: Silenced Past and Reclaimed History in the Shadow of the Cold War**

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#### **Project Description**

In Soviet history, the Holodomor stands as one of the biggest atrocities, costing the lives of almost four million people. Today, Ukrainian state recognizes the Great Famine as genocide, and the Holodomor, which means “extermination by hunger,” is part of the foundation of Ukrainian nationalism centered on the idea of victimhood. Yet, in the 1930s *holodomor* was not “the Holodomor.” For deprived, exhausted peasants, the terror of 1932-1933 was “the hungry days,” a vast trauma that haunted them all their lives, which many carried to North America as refugees. Until its collapse, the Soviet state’s relentless campaigns of disinformation and falsification called the Famine “a temporary food difficulty,” while internationally the Famine was quickly ignored. In the 1950s, the North American cultural elite of the Ukrainian diaspora slowly rediscovered and nationalized it to further unite around its annual commemorations. What was framed then as a “Ukrainian genocide” persisted in the diaspora and was later repurposed by the political elites of the newly independent Ukraine. From hunger and planned extermination, the events of 1932-1933 traveled across time and space, reframing the tragedy, shifting its visibility, and rewriting its past.

In my dissertation, I trace these transformations in the collective representations of the Famine and argue that understanding the legacy of the Holodomor requires a global perspective. The decades-long silencing of the Famine would not have been successful without the Soviets’ capacity to selectively draw on global ideas and contexts for its legitimation. Subsequent attempts to reclaim authority over Famine history were all competing with the hegemonic Soviet

narrative. The framing of the Famine as “the Holodomor,” a genocide against Ukrainians, was, therefore, an outcome of negotiations that occurred across time and space. International actors, I demonstrate, played a key role in this process.

### **Research Questions and OSA Research Plan**

My initial plan at Open Society Archives was to work on the Cold War-era tensions over the knowledge production about the Famine. More precisely, I wanted to know to what extent Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was interested in covering the various struggles to commemorate the Famine? How, when, and for what purposes did it include the analysis of the Famine in its reports about Soviet agriculture and Ukrainian history? By unraveling the slow process of the making of the Holodomor, this phase of my research aimed to trace the path that this repressed event followed to become recognized and acknowledged during the Cold War.

Another crucial element of my project was the question of the relation between Soviet archives, atrocity files, diaspora counter-archives, and Cold War archives in shaping the public memory of the Holodomor. In my doctoral dissertation, I use materials gathered from archives located in Austria, Canada, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States including KGB, Communist Party, and Soviet state archives in Kyiv, the Library of Congress, and the most important Ukrainian diaspora community archives located in New York City; Bound Brook, NJ; Cleveland, OH; and Toronto, Canada. I further combined these materials with my analysis of oral testimonies conducted with Famine’s survivors-refugees and my in-depth interviews with mnemonic activists in the United States and Canada involved in the Holodomor recognition since the 1980s. Lastly, my fieldwork in the Ukrainian countryside, conducted in the summer of 2019, helped me to understand the ambivalent status of the unmarked mass burial sites as well as current shifts in Famine narratives due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In this regard, my fellowship at Open Society Archives formed the last phase of my research during which I wanted to reflect more on questions of methodology of working with such diverse archives and therefore distinct regimes of knowledge. Thus, my goal was to use my Visegrad Fellowship to further understand the institutional environment of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, reflect on the logic behind the creation of its archives, and incorporate these materials into my doctoral dissertation.

## **Findings**

During my research at Open Society Archives I found a very promising, yet understudied, avenues of inquiry on the knowledge production about the Famine of 1932-1933 during the Cold War. In particular I worked on the following collections (see a detailed list in the appendix):

1. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Western Press Archives
2. Soviet Red Archives
3. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit, Subject Files Related to Ukraine
4. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Samizdat Archives
5. Records of Open Media Research Institute
6. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Communist Area Analysis Department
7. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Analytic Research Institute
8. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department

Most of these collections contain: clippings from Soviet and Western press, press briefings, background reports, brochures, scholarly articles, and samizdat publications. These materials relate to a range of different topics - from agriculture, history, dissident movement, to questions of revisions of Ukrainian history and historiography in the late 1980s.

The information about the Famine is scattered and fragmented throughout the records of RFE/RL. The most systematic are discussions of the Famine in collections related to revisions of Soviet history and historiography and the emerging collective memory of the Famine in late Soviet period (1980s-1990s). Then, the history of the Famine is mentioned in various reports and analysis pertaining to the state of Soviet agriculture (late 1950s). Finally, the Famine was incorporated into the Ukrainian dissident discourse (1960s-1970s). Still, although there are some major publications related to the history of the Famine and its consequences on Ukrainian history

and culture published in the 1970s, the topic remained largely marginal in dissident discourse until the late 1980s. In the next parts of my report I will briefly discuss these materials.

One of the earliest mentions of the Famine is in collections related to the analysis of Soviet agriculture following the death of Stalin. In these materials, however, the Famine in Ukraine is not discussed as a distinct event but rather a part of broader collectivization famines that developed during the First Five Year Plan (1928-1933). Various reports that discussed Khrushchev's era analysis of Soviet agriculture, failures of socialist planning, and mismanagement in collective farms briefly mentioned the collectivization famines but rarely demonstrated the scale, mortality, and violence associated with them.

Similarly, throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s Radio Liberty Research division created a number of reports about the state of Soviet agriculture and again included the information about collectivization famines. Yet, in most of the cases, RFE/RL followed the official Soviet framing of these famines as "incidents," "failures," and "mismanagement." In a very similar way, RFE/RL discussed the state of Chinese agriculture following the rapid and violent collectivization of the 1950s. Accordingly, the scale of the Great Leap Forward Famine (1959-1961) is not discussed.

This agricultural discourse changed in the beginning of 1980s when RFE/RL got interested in covering the development of the Famine in Ethiopia (1983-1985), various famine relief humanitarian actions, and the scale of violence associated with this disaster. Accordingly, in the late 1980s the RFE/RL discourse on the Famine in Ukraine changed and included a more detailed discussions of violence and terror associated with collectivization famines.

The inclusion of Famine in Samizdat archives is equally marked by periods of silencing. Throughout the 1960-1970s, the history and memory of the Famine is rarely incorporated into Ukrainian dissidents' discourse. One of the most interesting examples is the speech of Ivan Dziuba, one of the most prominent Ukrainian dissidents, delivered at Babyn Yar in 1966. The speech is considered a watershed event in the Ukrainian-Jewish relations that marked a significant change in the Ukrainian attitudes towards the mass killings of Jews. Yet, many parts of Dziuba's speech could be easily related to the Famine which he experienced as a child and from which his family fled. However, Dziuba in his numerous correspondents with other

dissidents and articles published in the journal *Literaturna Ukraina*, frequently diminished any discussions about the Famine and openly rejected the Ukrainian diaspora efforts to commemorate it. There are however notable exceptions from this silencing of the Famine in dissidents discourse. One of the most prominent example is the 1974 issue of the journal *Ukrainskyi Vysnyk* that discussed the genocidal aspects of the Famine and its broader consequences on Ukrainian society and culture.

RFE/RL was the most systematic in covering the changes in the official discourse on the Famine in the late 1980s. Across various archival boxes that relate to the revisions of Ukrainian history and historiography I found more than 100 clippings from Soviet Ukrainian press that discussed the emerging collective memory of the Famine; numerous local attempts of Famine memorializations; and the struggles to revise Ukrainian historiography. The clippings came from popular and academic journals, such as *Literaturna Ukraina*, *Silski Visti, Ukraina, Kultura i Zhytja, Visti z Ukrainy, Vitchyzna, Radianska Ukraina*, and *Ukrainskyi Istorychnyi Zhurnal*, just to mentions a few.

The revisions of Famine history and the emergence of the collective memory of the Holodomor is discussed within the broader themes of democratization of political and historical discourses, issues of state sovereignty, national identity (questions of language), Ukrainian-Russian relations, and changing attitudes towards the Soviet past. In this regard, particularly interesting are materials from 1989-1993 that demonstrate the rapid epistemic shift in naming and framing the Famine of 1932-1933. For example, articles from 1988 refer to the Famine as simply “hunger” and “tragedy” while already in 1991 the Famine is called the Holodomor and framed as a genocide. Equally interesting is the transition in the attitudes towards Ukrainian Diaspora and their attempts to commemorate the Famine - from a rather skeptical and negative coverage in mid 1980s to the full embracement of diaspora’s commemorative efforts in the beginning of the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

Open Society Archives should be considered an important research site for everyone interested in working on the epistemic tensions over the history and memory of the Famine during the Cold War. Especially valuable are collections documenting the changes in historical

discourse and the emergence of collective memory of the Famine in the late 1980s. This systematic collection of press clippings is a very important empirical resource especially that most of these newspapers are not digitized and, therefore, unavailable outside of Ukraine. Equally interesting is the changing discourse of the Famine in reports related to agricultural affairs. Open Society Archives offers then a crucial empirical window into the developments of the Famine knowledge in relation to changing discourses on famines and agricultural catastrophes throughout the 20th century. Finally, a promising site for future research is the question of the relative silence of the Famine in the discourse of Ukrainian dissidents. Also, in this regard Open Society Archives is one of the most unique sites to further research this question.

Lastly, I would like to stress that my research at Open Society Archives would not be possible without the support of OSA staff. Katalin Gádoros and Nóra Ungár created an especially welcoming and inclusive space for all the fellows through organized workshops, weekly lunches, and countless informal meetings. I am especially thankful to Anastasia Felcher, Archivist of the Slavic collection and Robert Parnica, Senior Reference Archivist, who both guided me through the vast collections of RFE/RL related to Ukraine. Also my numerous conversations with and feedback received from Csaba Szilágyi, Chief Archivist, and István Rév, Director of the Open Society Archives, helped me to further strengthen the design of my doctoral dissertation and find new exciting avenues of inquiry for a future postdoctoral project.

## Materials used during my Visegrad scholarship (June-July 2022) at the Open Society Archives

### Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Western Press Archives

<b>300-120-3:5</b>	Agriculture
<b>300-120-3:6</b>	Agriculture: USA
<b>300-120-3:7</b>	Agriculture: USSR
<b>300-120-3:8</b>	Agriculture: USSR
<b>300-120-3:9</b>	Agriculture: USSR
<b>300-120-3:10</b>	Agriculture: USA
<b>300-120-3: 14</b>	Anniversaries: China
<b>300-120-3:11</b>	Agriculture: USSR
<b>300-120-3:13</b>	Amnesty International
<b>300-120-3:47</b>	De-Salinization
<b>300-120-3:49</b>	Captive Nations
<b>300-120-3: 56</b>	De-Stalinization
<b>300-120-3:129</b>	Genocide
<b>300-120-3:221</b>	Propaganda
<b>300-120-3:222</b>	Propaganda
<b>300-120-3:223</b>	Propaganda
<b>300-120-3:245</b>	Sovietology

### Soviet Red Archives

<b>300-80-1:1072</b>	Ukrainian Samizdat
<b>300-80-6:71</b>	Ukraine: History and Historiography 1993-1994
<b>300-80-2:120</b>	

### Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit, Subject Files Related to Ukraine

<b>300-81-2:49</b>	Protection of Historical Monuments
<b>300-81-2:4</b>	Famine in Ukraine 1989-1991
<b>300-81-2:15</b>	History 1989

<b>300-81-2:16</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:17</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:18</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:17</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:18</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:19</b>	History 1989
<b>300-81-2:31</b>	Materials on the history of Ukraine 1990
<b>300-81-2:32</b>	Materials on the history of Ukraine 1990
<b>300-81-2:33</b>	Materials on the history of Ukraine 1990

Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Samizdat Archives: Published Samizdat

<b>300-85-12: 81</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 53</b>	
<b>300-85-9:100</b>	
<b>300-85-12: 81</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 23</b>	
<b>300-85-12:104</b>	
<b>300-85-48: 12</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 73</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 82</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 86</b>	
<b>300-85-9: 90</b>	
<b>300-85-12: 106</b>	

Records of Open Media Research Institute

<b>205-4-207: 41</b>	Red Cross Humanity Aid
<b>205-4-207: 44</b>	Ukraine and Diaspora
<b>205-4-207:62</b>	Political and Public Parties
<b>205-4-207: 63</b>	Political and Public Parties



<b>205-4-201:29</b>	CIS
<b>205-4-201: 30</b>	CIS
<b>205-4-206: 155</b>	Civil Congress of Ukraine

Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Communist Area Analysis Department

<b>300-4-3:17</b>	World Politics
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Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Analytic Research Institute

<b>300-5-180: 69</b>	Ukraine 1985-1990
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Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department

<b>300-5-180: 69</b>	USSR
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