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FILMS ABOUT THE HOLODOMOR IN THE STRUGGLE OF MEDIA NARRATIVES: THE EMOTIONAL WAY OF EXPERIENCING TRAUMA¹

The aim of this article is to analyze the key narratives surrounding the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as represented in Ukrainian cinema and in films of a similar nature produced in Poland and Canada.

Methods: *The research employs content analysis as a systematic method for objectively describing media messages, alongside analysis, comparison, synthesis, and narrative analysis.*

Results. *The study explores the confrontation between two opposing narratives: the Soviet and Russian narrative, which denies the existence of an artificial famine and genocide, and the Ukrainian narrative, which exposes the trauma of this historical period and the subsequent experience of its suppression and denial. These narratives function as ideological constructs, amplified through the media and integrated into feature films, which serve as a powerful tool for shaping historical understanding and national identity. The article also examines the narrative of concealment, embedded in the construction of the Soviet simulacrum of a new society, and the specific interplay between documentary and artistic elements in films about the Holodomor.*

The study reveals that films about the Holodomor are perceived in Ukrainian national consciousness through the lens of experienced collective trauma. This trauma is intensified by long-term suppression and denial, as well as renewed aggression. The renewed portrayal of the enemy as foreign and aggressive is shown to be central to the societal process of coping with this trauma.

Novelty: *This research offers a comparative perspective on how the Holodomor is portrayed across Ukrainian, Polish, and Canadian films. It highlights how cinematic narratives contribute to shaping national memory and the emotional experience of historical trauma.*

Practical significance. *The results will contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of building national memory through cinema, as well as the development of educational and outreach programs based on cinema.*

Key words: *famine, genocide, narrative, cinema, trauma, propaganda, memory.*

I. Introduction

Ukrainian history in the XX century contains some very frightening and difficult chapters. For decades, their elucidation was blocked by the state policies of the State Union first and later by Russia. This suppression was due to the mythologized structures of propaganda and imposition of specific roles on individual peoples in the totalitarian state narratives. Instead, for the Ukrainian cultural and social context, as part of the pursuit to separate themselves from expansive narratives of the neighbouring country, it was crucial to process the memory about famine and genocide culturally and psychologically.

In general, the definitions used in the narratives about the Holodomor in Ukraine can create vastly different contexts. Therefore, they are vital for comprehension and further forming historically accurate contexts in Ukraine's and other states' media spaces, as it concerns the narration of restoring an integral national history, cleansed of propagandist myths.

In the paradigm of studying propaganda narratives in the media, film content receives very little attention. However, the number of viewings of documentaries and feature films on various topics on open platforms and television suggests that such media content exerts a powerful influence on the consumer, especially due to the emotional impact of the images. Thus, necessary narratives become a component of everyday consciousness, creating grounds for further manipulation of information.

II. Problem Statement and Research Methods

In the context of contemporary information warfare and competing interpretations of history, the representation of the Holodomor in visual media becomes not only a cultural and artistic issue but also a political and ideological one. The confrontation between the narrative that denies the Holodomor as a genocide and the Ukrainian perspective that presents it as a deeply traumatic national experience

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reveals significant ideological polarization. The problem lies in understanding how these narratives are constructed, communicated, and perceived through cinematic language, and how they influence the formation of collective memory and national identity.

This study focuses on the analysis of films produced in Ukraine, Poland, and Canada, which depict the events of the Holodomor either directly or metaphorically. It investigates the mechanisms through which cinematic narratives construct or deconstruct historical trauma, how they embed ideological elements, and how they interact with documentary and fictional components to influence emotional and cognitive responses among audiences.

Research methods. The research employs content analysis as the primary method for systematically evaluating the content and structure of cinematic messages related to the Holodomor. Additional methods include comparative analysis, synthesis, and narrative analysis, which are used to identify similarities and differences across national film industries, interpret underlying ideological messages, and examine the narrative strategies used to frame the famine and its consequences.

One of the pivotal episodes in Ukrainian history was the Holodomor, which required thorough study and media documentation as genocide. The issue was brought to the international political and media space. The recognition by the European Parliament of the Holodomor as a genocide against the Ukrainian people on December 15, 2022 was important. Ukrainian media¹ wrote about this as an essential step in the formation of the real history of the Ukrainian nation and its further recognition by individual countries. For Ukraine, it became a milestone in the gradual promotion of truthful informational narratives concerning historical interaction of Russia and Ukraine.

Ukraine had to counter its own narratives in the media space against the Russian propagandistic narratives. Over several years, a few fiction films were released that brought that chapter of Ukrainian history back into the spotlight: *The Century of Iakiv* (dir. Bata Nedych, 2016), *And There Will Be People* (dir. Anatoly Dimarov, 2020), *The Saga* (dir. Dmytro Laktionov, 2020). These films continue the narrative that began to take shape after the release of *Famine-33* in 1991. The feature films made outside Ukraine – *Bitter Harvest* (dir. George Mendeluk, 2017, Canada), and *Gareth Jones (Obywatel Jones)* (dir. Agnieszka Holland, 2019, Poland, Great Britain, Ukraine), also became important for comprehending this chapter of Ukrainian history. It is noteworthy that the narrative of genocide concerning Ukrainians was supported primarily by countries closely tied to Ukraine: Canada, through reception of several waves of Ukrainian emigrants and formation of a powerful diaspora, and Poland, through close neighborhood and shared historical experiences.

It is significant that until the last decade, only one film in Ukrainian art cinema – *Famine-33* (Oles Yanchuk, 1991) – can be named in the feature cinematography. Instead, documenting the Holodomor in various content forms is very important. Therefore, after another act of aggression, interest in such issues increased and both documentaries and feature films were created aimed at a wide audience that needed education about their own history and the traumas experienced.

Struggle of media narratives

The formation of a conscious understanding of one's history had to take place in opposition to propaganda narratives. Unfortunately, in general, even during the period of independence, some Ukrainians were under the influence of manipulative narratives. They interpreted the famine of 1932–1933 as caused by the economic state of the country after the civil war, despite disclosed documents proving that the Holodomor was deliberate and did not affect the whole Soviet Union but, specifically, targeted Ukrainian lands to suppress resistance. Consequently, although awareness of the Holodomor among Ukraine's population was quite high², there was no consensus regarding its estimation. Pseudoscientific research conducted by Russian scientists and a media space filled with information «exaggerating» the consequences of the Holodomor in Ukraine also contributed to this lack of consensus.

Numerous publications in the Russian-speaking internet space illustrate these manipulative narratives, including: «*Was the Holodomor a Genocide of the Ukrainian People in the Beginning of the 30s?*» («Radio Svoboda», 2007), «*There Was no Genocide of Ukrainians*», «*Why Is Kyiv Afraid of the Truth about the Holodomor*» («RIA-novosti», 2018), «*A Myth About the Holodomor Works as an Instrument of Hatred*» («Vesti.Ru», 2022), «*Bundestag Has Approved the Resolution Determining the Holodomor as a Genocide*» («Tass.ru», 2022) etc. Analyzing the narratives over time reveals a gradual shift from outright denial of the Holodomor to claims that «*everybody in the Soviet Union suffered, not only Ukraine*». In other words, while the Holodomor could no longer be denied after facts and documents were disclosed, it was reframed as a non-genocidal event. Thus, the Russian narratives remain manipulative.

Serhii Boiko, a Russian, in his article «*The Famine and the Holodomor*» writes: «In the 1990s, the theory of “the Holodomor” became firmly established among the political mainstream, academic science,

¹ The European Parliament recognized the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people. Suspilne. <https://suspilne.media/339162-evroparlament-viznav-golodomor-genocidom-ukrainciv/>

² Read more here: Opinions of the population of Ukraine regarding the recognition of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as genocide. Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=448&page=1&y=2007>

Ukraine's media, and through them – in the system of comprehensive and higher education and public opinion. On the pages of textbooks, in radio and TV programs one can see huge numbers – 5, 10, 15 and sometimes 20 million people died from famine”; “This statement has become one of the keystones of the state ideology and a kind of “credo” of “svidomi” (conscious) patriots of the Ukrainian state»¹.

Pseudoscientific research in this area aimed to support the media narrative concerning the manipulation of the genocide theme in Ukrainian state policy, attempting to prove that the famine was caused by hard times in the state, certain «mistakes» or economic needs. Russia held pseudoscientific conferences on the Holodomor issues. At one such conference, the Russian historian V. Kondrashin concluded that «Famine did not choose peoples. There was no genocide. The famine in 1932–1933 is a tragedy of the Soviet villages, including Ukraine and Russia. The issue of which people suffered more is a short-sighted, dangerous and unproductive position»². This approach allowed Russia to discuss the issue during that period, but soon mono-narration dominated all historical and political issues. This is another sign of totalitarian thinking.

G. Kas'ianov [12] attempted to depict the Holodomor in Ukraine as a metaphor or «a complex of stereotypical conceptions», «canonical discursive practices and symbols», «a third-order simulacrum» transformed, in his opinion, «into a relatively autonomous virtual object of historical policy». The author characterizes «the language of the Holodomor» as «a set of metaphors» dating back to the 19th century. In general, through juggling complex terms and creating a pseudo-justifiable context, Kas'ianov's research consistently argues for the economic desirability of Ukraine to shape a discourse of genocide and Holodomor that supposedly never actually occurred.

Russian documentary cinema also establishes narratives about the widespread famine throughout the Soviet Union. For example, in the film *Famine (Holod)*, Maxim Kurnikov, a historian says: «Nobody was better than others, everybody was equally bad». It is stressed that the famine spread across a large territory from Ukraine to the Urals, and the famine in the 1920s is explained by the civil war. Moreover, the idea is promoted that the Bolsheviks did not invent «prodrazviorstka» (food requisitioning); they merely used existing practices.

The expert historian also comments: «It was easier to sow less, to reap a smaller harvest, and thus give the state less for free. This practice backfired on the peasants. The famine of the 1920s was caused by this conscious reduction in seed volumes». Thus, the guilt for the massive famine is shifted from the aggressor to the victim. The peasants started to sow less to give less to the state, «they wanted to feed only themselves», which supposedly made the famine unavoidable due to the peasants themselves. The film also claims that «the Soviet government did its best but failed to end the famine». Some film narratives implemented the required conceptions about this historical period into the media space very subtly for the viewers who were not researchers. However, the same film provides the facts about the Holodomor, objective thoughts of researchers, memories of witnesses, and numerous detailed photos and videos. Thus, viewers are given a sense of complete objectivity in the documentary material, making these thoughts absorbed imperceptibly.

Hence, in the information space two powerful narratives oppose each other: one recognizing the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people, and another denying and downplaying this fact.

The Ukrainian narrative of the Holodomor is thoroughly explored in works by S. Kulchytsky [12], S. Biletska and P. Cherneha [3], A. Haran [7] and other researchers. Certain social changes and significant events in state policy have become defining factors for the development of this narrative.

For the current Ukrainian information discourse, the actualization of historical memory about the Holodomor as a genocide is extremely important because on 24.02.2022 Russia started massive destruction of the Ukrainian towns, killing the Ukrainian population, and deporting the children from the occupied territories. This, in fact, constitutes a new genocide of the Ukrainian people and requires further historic estimation.

Surprisingly, the aforementioned researcher G. Kas'ianov in his attempt to advance the narrative that the issue of the Holodomor in Ukraine as a phenomenon of genocide against the Ukrainian people is artificial, touched upon a very important aspect of the problem. This refers to the importance of recording the historical and emotional memory of the Holodomor in media content, including films available to a wide audience. Although the author attempts to argue that the memory of the Holodomor in Ukraine was artificially created, including efforts by the Ukrainian diaspora [10], historical facts reflected in the cultural and national field contradict this. The memory of the Holodomor is reflected in Ukrainian consciousness at different levels: as a family memory passed down through generations; as a documented fact confirmed by archives; as an artistic image recorded in texts of various genres at different times.

¹ Read more here: <http://www.globalrus.ru/>, (accessed 15.05.2023, currently removed – O.R.).

² Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences. Center for Ukrainian and Belarusian Studies, Faculty of History, Moscow State University. Institute of Slavonic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. International Conference «Ukraine and Russia: History and the Image of History». April 4, 2008. <https://www.hist.msu.ru/Labs/UkrBel/obrukr-golod.htm> (accessed 15.05.2023).

The historical narrative of the famine in the political context

Why are questions about certain moments of history, in particular about the Holodomor, becoming so relevant now, leading to a sharp confrontation between the two narratives? This is due to the constant attempt of political and mental expansion on the one hand and the struggle for the right to identity on the other.

Stabrula Pabst underscores the political implications of the Holodomor in light of Ukraine's current situation and the risk of losing self-identity due to manipulative narratives that portray Ukraine as an extension of Russia, noting: «To many Ukrainians... the Holodomor is seen as an attempt by Russian-led authorities to destroy the Ukrainian identity as they knew it. Because many modern Ukrainians see the Holodomor in this light, the Holodomor continues to shape national feelings for Ukrainians in and out of power, especially concerning national identity» (Pabst, 2017). Nicolas Jansen writes about politicization of the Holodomor issue noting, that «politicization of the tragedy can in fact harm the historical process» [16]. However, current events show that the politicization, distortion and propagandistic use of images, metaphors, and facts related to events in national history opens up wide opportunities for aggressive policies towards Ukraine.

The discrediting of the Holodomor and the Ukrainian interpretation of these events is part of a complex policy by the Russian government towards Ukraine. «Ukraine's struggle to affirm the Holodomor as genocide faces the challenge of Russia's denial, which protects its self-image. The denial comprises an array of tactics: challenging the legal definition of the Holodomor as genocide, reinterpreting the genocide against the Ukrainian people as an "all-Union" famine, covering up the true extent of population losses, criminalizing the Holodomor studies, and activating pro-Russian forces in Ukraine to subvert the country from within» [15, p. 220].

The constant revisiting of the Holodomor theme is particularly connected with the continued aggressive policy of a neighboring country towards Ukraine and its attempts to deny the planned famine in Ukraine and other Soviet republics, denying it as a phenomenon of the genocide of Ukrainians. The actualization of this theme in artistic cinema after 2014 is also a phenomenon of returning to own historical memory, a sharpened need for self-identification, including through the re-experience of historical trauma.

For Ukrainian society in the modern period, a complex return to the powerful historical trauma that was the Holodomor, is a way of processing the trauma and experiencing re-traumatization through resistance to the aggressive narrative of devaluation. In psychology, repeated trauma experience (in this case, genetic or the one which is transferred into the subconscious experience through generations) with further actualization caused by a similar situation is called a «flashback» – flashback syndrome, when the memoirs invade the consciousness forcibly. For the Ukrainian nation, this experience of historical flashback actualization occurred in 2014 when a part of Ukrainian territory was occupied, and the information space was filled with the Russian propagandistic narratives about inferiority of the Ukrainian nation, language, political dependence of the state, and messages distorting history. In response to such narratives, counter-narratives began to emerge in the Ukrainian media space.

Research papers by N. Pierre [17], G. Pollock [18], M. Roth [22], A. Staniloiu and H. J. Markowitsch [23], H. Chuchvaha [4], B. J. Louis Bezo [2], P. Hornostai [8], F. Sysyn [24] were devoted to the theme of trauma experience in history perception. The issue of mental influence of famine in the Ukrainian discourse was explored by such researchers as V. Gorbunova and V. Klymchuk [6], who considered the typology of mental psychological influence of the Holodomor on the generations of Ukrainians.

I. Reva [20] identifies the traumatic impact of the Holodomor on personal values as including a complex of national inferiority among the descendants of the Holodomor victims. The author refers to the numerous documents, memoirs and stories building an integral picture of the internal complexes born by the collective memory about famine – a fear of action, a fear of punishment, a fear of progress, devaluation of national values, love to an aggressor, etc. As the Ukrainian nation needs to overcome these consequences in the current historical moment and to reach a new level of further development, it is very important to live through traumatic feelings, to re-interpret and to convert them into experience. The fact that during past years a whole complex of fiction films concerning the theme of the Holodomor appeared is a sign that the national consciousness is ready to eventually live it through psychologically.

Emotional processing through art is considered a very effective way of overcoming trauma in psychotherapy in general, and in trauma theory in particular; as written about by Hanna Chuchvaha [4] and which is extremely actualized by the material we are studying.

Gwenola Ricordea [21] researches the issue of historical genocide in cinema, which is an important factor in actualization of this theme. Artistic cinema becomes a means of overcoming the consequences of historical experience, living it through artistic forms, and re-evaluating it for further transformation into personal experience. While certain questions remain open, some information is denied or not comprehended, the lived experience cannot become knowledge and cease to inflict pain.

The new interpretation of the Holodomor as an integral chapter of its own history becomes a method to overcome psychological consequences – such as absence of political and national will, a feeling of inferiority, and ideological interpretations by the aggressor of Ukrainian national history.

By raising the Holodomor theme repeatedly, Ukrainians send a powerful signal in the media space: our history belongs to us, nobody can deny it, it is important; therefore, only by accepting it we can become and remain ourselves.

The analysis of scientific publications, media content, particularly documentary and fiction films, proves that Ukrainians experience the Holodomor in the context of historical trauma. It was not mentally and psychologically processed and converted into historical experience due to years of concealment, further denial and non-recognition. The sharpening of this trauma experience also relates to the recurrence of aggression and government's indecisive actions in the information space before 2022. However, the full-scale invasion of the Russian army and subsequent analysis of events in the occupied territories provided evidence of the repeated genocide of Ukrainians.

This narrative is relevant in the international media context, as many peoples went through similar hardships in the 20th century, experienced destruction or even genocide, and are currently united defending democratic values; therefore, the traumatic chapter of the history of Ukraine becomes the subject of interpretation in the media materials of artists from different countries

III. Results

Documentary films as a projection of political narratives

Narratives reflected in documentary and feature films often mirror the historical perspectives and political biases of their respective societies. In the same way, this content reflects the opposition of two contrasting narratives corresponding to two historical and worldview perspectives. Ukrainian, Polish, and Canadian documentaries about the Holodomor, for instance, present a narrative that starkly contrasts with that of Russian documentary cinema. The former aims to depict the Holodomor in its historical authenticity, through memories and documents, without manipulation and ideological distortion.

The documentary film *Hunger for Truth (Holod do Pravdy)* (Andriy Tkach, 2020, Ukraine-Canada) draws a significant parallel between Stalin's and Putin's regimes: «Putin is lying about this to the whole world because he has "KGB training", which "returns us not only to Stalinist but to Bolshevik ideas in general". According to the film, the refusal to acknowledge the "artificial famine" is rooted in the denial of a distinct Ukrainian identity and destiny. This distinction is the starting point for the difference between two narratives – a separate fate versus a "common fate", recognition of genocide and occupation versus denial.

Polish documentaries and audio podcasts also emphasize Stalin's barbarian national policy aimed at the destruction of Ukrainians: *The Great Famine, Stalin's Barbaric Policy (Wielki głód. Barbarzyńska polityka Stalina)* (Museum of the History of Poland in Warsaw, 2022), *Stalin starved 10 million people. What is the Great Famine in Ukraine?* (Truna świata, 2022), *Russia Still Downplays Genocide... The Holodomor, or How Stalin Starved 10 Million Ukrainians* (Mateusz Kudla, 2022). The surge in Polish materials on the Holodomor in 2022 correlates with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, further drawing connections between Putin's and Stalin's actions.

The primary aim of documentary films about the Holodomor is to preserve historical facts for future generations, ensuring the integrity of history. Most of the documentaries by Ukrainian, Polish, Canadian directors, and other international filmmakers rely heavily on eyewitness testimonies and historical documents. Notable examples include *Holodomor: Genocide of the Ukrainian People* (Victor Kordun, 2008), a documentary film about the causes, course and consequences of the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine; *Harvest of Despair* (Slavko Nowytski, 1985), a Canadian documentary that one of the first highlighted the Holodomor at the international level; *Holodomor: The Great Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933* (Edvins Shnora, 2008), a documentary by a Latvian director that investigates the crimes of the Soviet regime, including the Holodomor; *Holodomor: The Forgotten Genocide (Holodomor: zapomniane ludobójstwo)*, a Polish documentary that examines the Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people; *Genocide Revealed* (Yuriy Lugovy, 2011), an international project with Polish cinematographers as participants. The film tells about the Holodomor, citing documentary evidence and facts.

In the face of conflicting narratives, the documentary record of facts and memories becomes crucial. Documentary films offer a unique media format that allows for the formation of a historical worldview and a contemporary perspective on events. Unlike traditional media, documentaries provide a platform for personal interpretation, making them instrumental in preserving historical integrity. Therefore, documentaries play a special role in relating the integrity of history.

For filmmakers from Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Canada, a consistent assessment of the Holodomor emerges, one that highlights the mass starvation, corroborates the planned nature of the famine, and emphasizes its targeting of the Ukrainian people. This narrative sharply contrasts with Russian propaganda, which often downplays or denies these aspects.

Narrative of confrontation as a means of experiencing and understanding historical truth in a feature film

It is important to emphasize that feature films are proposed to consider as a specific form of media content, as, similar to any media content, they contain a certain social message: «Fiction media, such as novels and feature films, are characterized by their power to shape the collective imagination of the past». While such films do not provide an objective reflection of history, they create extremely important narratives in the national media space. The artistic form of presenting the past becomes a form of emotional experience of history, different from the information contained in news reports, history textbooks, and scientific research. Through emotion and character portrayal, the recipient becomes directly involved in understanding history as a personal experience. This can even lead to secondary trauma of witnesses, especially if the historical portrayal overlaps with ongoing personal experiences. For example, in 2022–2023, there was a noticeable increase in interest among Ukrainians in complex periods of their own history, particularly the Holodomor as a genocide. The resurgence of Russian aggression and the similarities in its portrayal by Russian media, as in the case of Holodomor issues, have led Ukrainian and international audiences to a deeper understanding of historical facts and current events.

The active return to the theme of the Holodomor and, in general, the actualization of historical themes in Ukrainian cinema shows the high need of the audience for such content. At the same time, films made in recent decades are more interested, as indicated by the statistics of views on open platforms. For example, the film *Famine-33* is available for open viewing on YouTube platform in several variants and has, correspondingly, the following number of views: 177 thousand, 72 thousand, 25 thousand, 8 thousand and 6 thousand. The trailer to the film of *Bitter Harvest* on the platform has been seen by 402 thousand and 9.6 thousand. The series *And There Will Be People* has been seen in a free access 2.9 million people, the trailer has been seen 283 thousand, the series *The Saga* by 66 thousand users. The film *Gareth Jones* in Ukrainian dubbing has been seen by 14 thousand people, and the trailer has been seen 1.6 million. *The Guide* has 325 views but when the film was released, only at the first weekend 94,754 viewers saw it¹.

Feature films help reproduce historical memory through documentalism as a specific tool inherent to historical cinema as well. Astrid Erill called such a media process «remediation», i.e. restoration in the narrative strategy of the nation of historical memory, forming a continuous narrative about its existence in the context of the world. As the author notes, this process is facilitated by films, newspaper publications, photographs, historical novels, diaries, etc. [5], that is, in fact, all possible content that affects the contemporary and which we call media in a broad sense, the basis of national media culture. Although feature films are not historical truth the viewers perceive them differently compared to a documentary films, they play a crucial role in shaping the emotional perception of history by presenting facts through the prism of personal destinies, feelings, and tragedies.

As specified by Harald Welzer, «media products do not only deliver versions of the past; they also determine the perception of the present... it is not merely the passing on of experience that follows such patterns and rules, but already the perception and interpretation of the event in the very moment in which it takes place» [25, p. 291], because «cultural frameworks already influence individual consciousness as a structuring matrix for information processing – and that means that we face a circular operation when considering the phenomenon of the import of pre-formed experiences into one's own life history» [25, p. 292].

The feature films about the Holodomor highlight components of the narrative, that helps the collective consciousness to process and survive historical trauma in the modern context, which is especially acutely manifested in the case of repeated aggression.

One of the methods to deal with trauma is the polarization of historical event participants, dividing them into executors and victims, right and wrong, us and them. This stage is deemed necessary during certain historical periods, especially during repeated aggression. Over time, a significant amount of informational and cultural work will be needed to move beyond the experience of trauma, through its understanding and transformation into knowledge, achieving a higher level of perception. For instance, Iuliia Kysla points to explicit anti-Russian rhetoric and the straightforward message («Soviets are bad, Ukrainians are good»). She considers these films as an artistic implementation of national historical memory about the Holodomor built through polarization.

Similar themes are evident in the TV series *And There Will Be People* and *The Saga* forming a clear national narrative of the enemy, which causes injuries then and now, therefore «us» against «them», «Ukrainian against Russians». One dimension of such confrontation is linguistic: representatives of the authorities speak Russian, despise the Ukrainian territory and see it only in terms of conquest, obtaining everything possible from it.

The series *And There Will Be People* shows the period of formation of national independence sentiments. Through the words of different characters two positions are depicted: readiness to fight for

¹ Data are provided according to the Insider, an Internet media <http://www.theinsider.ua/art/546e04818eddd/> (data as of 01.04.2023).

freedom and a traditionally imperial readiness to surrender to Moscow (the sentiments of expected return of tsar or support of the Bolshevik government from Russia; the characters speak Ukrainian in the first case and Russian – in the second one). Thus, this linguistic polarization serves as a sign of political affiliation, a technique increasingly popular in recent films. The trauma inflicted by the forced incorporation into Bolshevik Russia was also associated for Ukrainians with the destruction of their faith. In the film *Famine-33*, the Katranyks hide a church cup, and in the series *The Saga* the heroine who comes with her daughter for help to the priest sees him being shot just near the church.

People's identity is built through belief, culture, language, that is why the genocide concerning a particular nation is built on ruination of these components of its identity which is sequentially reproduced in the films analysed, for example, the fact of killing kobzars as bearers of historical memory. Thus, the recent artistic films about the Holodomor provide an opportunity to reaffirm that this experience is indeed traumatic. The historical trauma is being reactivated through repeated attempts at destruction.

Documentary realism of the Holodomor films

Documentary realism combines documentary and artistic tools in fiction films to depict significant periods in national history or important events. This approach necessitates a specific documentary realism of fictional portrayals of the Holodomor.

Pramod K. Nayar specifies: «Documentary realism is a mode of address through which audiences and readers are invited to accept that the persons, events, and encounters signified are actual rather than imagined» [19, p. 369]. This is highly relevant for a range of the Ukrainian fictions and series depicting the 1930s Holodomor.

For filmmakers, it is a method of emotional fixation of the national history for the 21st-century generation, reintroducing narratives of genocide against the Ukrainian people into the media landscape. It conveys historical truth to the audience through emotional impact, including character portrayals, striking imagery, plot tension, and vivid contrast. As the researcher notes: «These reports, from the Holodomor archives and therefore verifiable, document cannibalism, starvation, murder and the progress of the Holodomor» [19, p. 366], all of which are depicted in the majority, if not all, films concerning this historical period.

Thus, an integral national narrative of the present is formed, processing significant historical moments and incorporating them into the contemporary media field: «Documentary realism is the effect of an insertion of the traumatic stories into the pedagogic, or national-official, narrative of the nation» [19, p. 368]. Astrid Erll states: «Actual, historical documentary material is incorporated in new movies, and this integration of photographic and filmic media serves to create an effet de réel: The fictional story seems indexically linked to the historical events it depicts» [5, p. 389]. This unity enhances the media's influence on the audience, making it more impactful.

In the films three main principles of a documentary image creation are used:

– **typification.** All the films analyzed contain the scenes of famine, mass deaths of the Ukrainian population in villages; fiction films show with documentary precision the facts recorded in historical documents of the epoch. The majority of the films also depict the facts of forced collectivization, dispossession, and of grain expropriation, supported by figures and directives.

For instance, in the film *Bitter Harvest* I. Stalin's plans are quoted: «*Stalin: Ukraine must learn to obey to our will, without its mineral resources and huge crops of grain Russians will not be able to survive*». *We will follow Lenin's plan but with no mercy*», which are documented in directives, orders, speeches.

Scenes of deceased people in their homes, along roadsides, or piled onto carts are depicted in the films of *Famine-33*, *Gareth Jones*, *And There Will Be People*.

In the beginning of *Famine-33*, documentary information about the silence around the Holodomor in Ukraine is provided: «Even a journalist Walter Duranty from the New York Times helped to hide this tragedy». The portrayal of this journalist is multifaceted in the Polish film *Gareth Jones*.

In the film *The Guide*, harrowing facts of the Holodomor are recounted by a girl: «They collected acorns, wanted me to cook them something to eat. What did I have to do? They took grains and cattle to the collective farm and Dad told me to take the children and escape. We started to eat acorns, and there were boundaries everywhere, soldiers. Maybe they won't come here?»

In the series *The Saga* a woman with two children finds herself unable to leave the village, unless she fabricates a story that she resides in the city, only after which she is granted permission to depart.

The series *And There Will Be People* depicts the blockade of hungry peasants in villages, detailing the influence of the party's directives on the village's actual conditions. It also portrays the reactions of different officials to these directives, as well as pervasive fear and silence in the face of terror. Here it is also mentioned *The Law of Spikelets* adopted in 1932 (full name is the *Decree of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the All-Union Council of People's Commissars, About Protection of the Property of State Enterprises, Collective Farms and Cooperatives, and Strengthening of the Public (Socialist) Property*), which mandated execution by a firing squad for stealing collective farms' property. For example: «- For stealing collective farm's property is the supreme penalty – shooting by a fire squad!»; «Are you silly, the state is in need!».

The figures demonstrate the extent of dispossession as it was a widespread program implemented in Ukraine:

- There cannot be 8 kurkuls per 100 houses, the plan is not fewer than 30 per 100 houses. How many people subscribed to the collective farm?
- 29...
- You failed the plans. The one who is against the collective farm will be declared Kulak's agent" (*And There Will Be People*).

The film *Famine-33* specifically names party officials: «Molotov, Kahanovych – for these two in the carriage there is a lot of everything to eat (the character enumerates food). And in the Kremlin there is a lot of everything. Look at Stalin, look how fat he got».

– **author's interpretation** provides the fiction filmmakers with an opportunity to convey emotionally charged historical truth through the creation of compelling narratives. For example, in the film *Gareth Jones*, thin and emaciated children sing couplets about Stalin, who is depicted as «looking obliquely at fertile Ukraine», offering a conception of how peasants understand who is guilty in their tragedy. Additionally, the journalist-narrator in this film compares the Soviet people to animals, referencing Orwell's *Animal Farm*: «All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others».

In one scene from the series *And There Will Be People*, a large bust of Stalin and scraps of red cloth are left in the corridor of the depopulated orphanage, indicating that officials prioritized ideological symbols over feeding hungry children.

In the film *The Guide*, the villages decimated by famine are shrouded in dense fog, seemingly concealing the horrifying truth from the outside world. Another poignant scene depicts the death of an old man at an abandoned station (symbolizing a closed territory, a trap), amidst triumphant songs and a radio broadcast touting the prosperity of Soviet Ukrainian villages.

The author's interpretation enables the creation of a vivid narrative of the people who lived during that time, adhering to factual truth while allowing viewers to experience real emotions alongside the characters.

– **images' interpretation** is one of the aspects of the author's interpretative format, serving as a unique form of historical storytelling. For instance, the portrayal of Oksen's dispossession (*And There Will Be People*) allows viewers to understand that the victims of this process were not exploiters, as propaganda depicted but ordinary working people. Similarly, the character Volod'ka in the same series exemplifies a fanatic devotion to the party, resulting in the deaths of many villagers under his rule.

In Ukrainian films depicting the Holodomor, children often serve as poignant symbols of the famine's devastating toll on innocent and vulnerable individuals. All the films about the Holodomor consistently feature images of orphaned children, left without anyone to care for them, alongside the tragic scenes of forceless children lying or sitting near their deceased parents.

In the film *Gareth Jones*, a Welsh reporter Garret Jones who secretly reaches Ukraine, encounters a harrowing scene in a village house where exhausted children are found boiling something without any adults, their emaciated faces devoid of emotion. The revelation that they are boiling their dead brother's body lying in the snow shocks the journalist, highlighting the brutal realities of famine and its dehumanizing effects. The famine eliminates all the borders, destroys moral values, and human nature itself. Jones begins to be afraid of children when he meets them in the forest. The children's voices singing *And He Ate All His Children* sound like a song of death.

In the series *And There Will Be People* doctor Myroslavs'kyi administers vaccinations to the emaciated children in the shelter, only to discover they are neglected and starving. Expressing concern, he appeals to the Head of the shelter for aid, but is met with indifference, highlighting the callous disregard for the children's well-being. The revelation that they are deemed «inappropriate» due to their status as kurkuls' children underscores the deep-seated social divisions perpetuated by Soviet narratives:

- «– The children are extremely emaciated, contact the district Head for aid!
- Bread is needed now for more important things.
- What can be more important than children?
- They are kurkuls' children! Do you feel the difference?»

This is a very important moment to understand Soviet narratives based on the social division.

In the film *Famine*, it is specified that Americans fed children and the peasants did not understand why to rescue «unnecessary» children if they are unable to work.

Historical filmmakers, inspired by the realism of documentary cinema, employ minimal expressive techniques to convey the historical chronicles with artistic sensitivity. This blurring of the line between fiction and documentary reflects a shared commitment to authentically portraying historical reality, as both genres strive to capture the nuances and complexities of the past.

The narrative of alternative reality through silence concerning the truth about the Holodomor

In both the totalitarian society of the Soviet era and the contemporary Russian totalitarian regime, the revelation of the truth regarding the genocide perpetrated against the peoples under its control is deemed unacceptable. This theme is prominently featured in both documentary and fictional portrayals of the Holodomor in Ukraine.

For instance, in the Polish film *Gareth Jones*, the protagonist, a Welsh reporter and a young reporter of the British Prime-Minister Gareth Jones, who was able to interview Hitler, seeks to uncover another significant story. He comes to Moscow to interview Stalin. Upon arriving in Moscow, Jones encounters influential American journalist Walter Duranty, who, as he gradually realizes, is complicit in concealing the true nature of events in the USSR. Despite the resistance he faces, Jones manages to travel to Ukraine, where he witnesses the devastating effects of the famine.

However, when arrested, Jones finds himself compelled to distort the truth under threat of harm to imprisoned British engineers. He writes: «Ukrainian villages are beautiful, people are satisfied with everything, collective farms are efficient, there is not and has never been famine». The Soviet regime, eager to maintain its façade of a utopian society, vigorously suppresses any leaks of information that contradict its narrative. Upon returning home, Jones confronts the reluctance of publishers to acknowledge the harsh reality: «Maybe, we should look in a historical context, not everything goes well from the beginning?». He emphasizes the imperative to those in power of speaking truth: «You have to speak the truth»; «Stalin is not a creator of a new utopia, do not let be deceived»; «If we close eyes to this famine, Stalin will have followers»; «They have the same system of exploitation but more violent. Stalin is not a father of people but a tyrant». The journalist was able to make the truth public only by risky attempts: «And at the same time, as if by a signal, all the sheep started to bleat»; «It was already impossible to hide that from the world».

A similar narrative unfolds in the film *Hunger for Truth*, wherein a Canadian journalist Rhea Clyman embarks on a mission to uncover the truth about conditions in Ukraine. Despite her initial hopes for witnessing a justly developing nation, Clyman is confronted with the stark reality of depopulated villages and widespread hunger.

The documentary underscores the role of figures like Duranty in obfuscating the truth and perpetuating a campaign of disinformation to conceal the famine from international scrutiny. Before the trip to Ukraine, Duranty comes to Rhea saying that he has already «prepared her necrology» because she acts recklessly, acts against the will of the Soviet government. Hence, here a narrative of the truth concealment is also built: «You do not want that to be known abroad», the famine is veiled with a «campaign of disinformation», foreign journalists are prohibited to go to Ukraine.

The film *Famine-33* depicts the narrative of information silence in the beginning: «even the journalist Walter Duranty from the New York Times helped to hide the tragedy».

The series *And There Will Be People* portrays the futility of attempts to challenge the official narrative within the Soviet bureaucracy. Characters such as Hinzburg, a Soviet official, and Hanzha, a convicted collective farm head, are silenced or marginalized when they attempt to expose the horrors unfolding in the villages. The narrative further depicts the restrictive measures imposed by authorities to prevent peasants from leaving their villages, thereby perpetuating the silence surrounding the unfolding tragedy. Hinzburg is admitted guilty in «anti-Soviet activity» and that is why he commits a suicide seeing that his attempts to improve something are hopeless («You won't be able to discredit me»).

Hanzha allows himself to express doubt that the system is right when the January Decree was being discussed. According to it, Ukraine had to finish dispossession before spring 1932:

«– How do you estimate this Decree?

– As a wrong Decree from the authorities.

– What are you saying!»

Any doubt is declared to be a treason; any resistance is suppressed:

«– If the property is common what should it be defended from? (Volod'ka's wife)

– From the enemies of the people (Volod'ka)

In the series *The Saga*, the enforced silence regarding events in Ukrainian villages is depicted through the prohibition imposed on peasants, preventing them from leaving for the cities. This restriction forces peasants to attempt escape through frontier posts. Similarly, in the film *The Guide*, peasants are also forbidden from leaving their villages. *Bitter Harvest* further illustrates this divide between the city and the village, showing that survival is possible only within the city, as people are barred from exiting the rural areas.

In essence, the Soviet regime crafted a deceptive simulacrum, masking its oppressive tactics and atrocities behind grandiose slogans and ideals. The portrayal of these events in both documentary and fictional formats serves to shed light on the truth obscured by totalitarian regimes.

Thus, the problem of information manipulation in the case of aggression, which remains acute even in our time, is actualized in many details of documentary and feature films.

IV. Conclusions

In the media space of Ukraine and the world, the acknowledgment of the Holodomor as a genocide against the Ukrainian people is directly linked to the confrontation of two narratives: totalitarian and national. In Ukraine, discourse surrounding the Holodomor's recognition as genocide resonates with repeated experiences of national trauma and aggressive influences on Ukrainian statehood, particularly the events of 2014 and instances of genocide in 2022. Notably, since 2014, the Holodomor theme has been increasingly raised in Ukrainian media, including film content.

In the accepted historical narrative by the democratic world (document), the Holodomor is acknowledged as a deliberate genocide targeting a specific population. Within the opposite narrative, emphasis has shifted to the comprehensiveness of the phenomenon, the possible objective causes of hunger, as this corresponds to the general context of hiding the truth, characteristic of totalitarian societies. This is actualized in fiction and documentary films through a series of documents, historical facts, situations, artistic images and scenes. Films about the Holodomor prominently feature narratives of truth concealment and the construction of alternative informational realities by the totalitarian state, often implicating journalists in the dissemination of propaganda.

The resurgence of the Holodomor theme in Ukrainian and global contexts underscores efforts to reclaim national independence and restore a coherent historical narrative based on historical truth. This process involves reinterpreting historical traumas in order to overcome their consequences, moreover, it is reinforced by re-traumatization in connection with armed aggression.

In the context of trauma, as evidenced by the analyzed films, defining the enemy as «other» – representing a different nation, language, and set of cultural values – is crucial. Authority figures are often depicted as Russian-speaking and portrayed as violent enforcers of inhumane orders from the totalitarian regime.

The amalgamation of documentary and artistic techniques in these films, known as documentalism, amplifies their impact and helps shape relevant narratives within the information space.

Documentary and feature films appear to be clearly the most powerful tool for shaping historical narratives in the everyday consciousness of the information consumer, as the film possesses those means that are not available for other media content – imagery and emotionality. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that in the analyzed historical films, expressive documentarism is manifested even in artistic cinema, which increases the impact on the viewer. In some products, we can even talk about a certain diffusion of artistic and documentary elements. On the other hand, emotional accents are quite clearly manifested in documentary films, especially when working with eyewitness accounts. The combination of documentary and artistic techniques in these films enhances their impact and helps shape relevant narratives in the information space.

In the context of experiencing a trauma, the definition of the enemy as a «foreigner» – a representative of another nation due to his language and set of cultural values – assumes critical significance. In our research, we found the same phenomenon in documentaries about the war in Ukraine for the years 2022 and 2023.

Thus, in the confrontation between two media narratives about the Holodomor, Ukrainian society and the democratic world advocate for the right to an unadulterated truth, free from manipulation, affirming the right to national self-determination and resilience in confronting historical trauma.

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Росінська О. А. Фільми про Голодомор у боротьбі медіанаративів: емоційний спосіб переживання травми

Мета статті – проаналізувати ключові наративи, що стосуються Голодомору 1932–1933 рр., представлені в українському кіно та у фільмах подібного характеру, знятих у Польщі та Канаді.

Методологія дослідження. У дослідженні використовується контент-аналіз як систематичний метод об'єктивного опису медіаповідомлень, поряд з аналізом, порівнянням, синтезом та наративним аналізом.

Результати. Досліджено протистояння двох протилежних наративів: радянського й російського, які заперечують існування штучного голоду та геноциду, та українського наративу, який викриває травму цього історичного періоду й подальший досвід його придушення та заперечення. Ці наративи функціонують як ідеологічні конструкти, посилені через медіа та інтегровані в художні фільми, які є потужним інструментом для формування історичного розуміння та національної ідентичності. Розглянуто наратив приховування, вбудований у конструювання радянського симулякра нового суспільства, та специфічна взаємодія між документальними та художніми елементами у фільмах про Голодомор.

Показано, що фільми про Голодомор сприймаються в українській національній свідомості крізь призму пережитої колективної травми. Ця травма посилюється тривалим придушенням та запереченням, а також відновленою агресією. Показано, що оновлене зображення ворога як іноземного та агресивного є центральним у суспільному процесі подолання цієї травми.

Новизна. Це дослідження пропонує порівняльний погляд на те, як Голодомор зображується в українських, польських і канадських фільмах. Воно підкреслює, як кінематографічні наративи сприяють формуванню національної пам'яті та емоційного переживання історичної травми.

Практичне значення. Результати сприятимуть кращому розумінню механізмів побудови національної пам'яті через кіно, а також розробці освітніх та просвітницьких програм на основі кінематографу.

Ключові слова: голод, геноцид, наратив, кіно, травма, пропаганда, пам'ять.