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Ethical and Historical Analysis of the Holodomor

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ABSTRACT

The word genocide is not one that many people want to be well acquainted with. However, what is the international community supposed to do when a nation believes a genocide has occurred on its soil and is not being acknowledged internationally? Validating the fact that genocide occurred raises the issue of an ethical response with its acknowledgment. Between 1931 and 1933 approximately three to five million Ukrainians died in the Holodomor, the famine manufactured by Joseph Stalin. As a society we are faced with the ethical implication of acknowledging the Holodomor as a genocide and promoting education about the topic to the same level as other genocides. The point of conflict occurs when the international community is faced with the ethical dilemma of what side to take while deciding on who is in the wrong. Within the lens of Kantian ethics, if one nation does not acknowledge the Holodomor as a genocide, it is saying that it feels comfortable with other nations not acknowledging the Holodomor. Not only does this affect the victims of the Holodomor, the people of Ukraine but there is also the need to consider the victims of other genocides, by not acknowledging one genocide is society willing to overlook the others?

KEYWORDS

Eastern European Studies, Ethics, Genocide, International Ethics

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

When people hear the word Holodomor, they do not connect it to a genocide. Even when referred to as the Ukrainian Genocide or the Ukrainian Famine there is confusion and lack of knowledge. On the fourth Saturday of every November, the Ukrainian people remember the lives of those lost under the repressive regime of Stalin by lighting memorial candles at 4:00 pm. It is hard to comprehend that there would be a question of genocide when seven to 10 million people were strategically starved to death. Currently 17 nations openly consider the Holodomor as a genocide, those nations being, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Ukraine, the United States and Vatican City (Miloscia 2018). Out of all these nations only one of them, the United States, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and they only began acknowledging the Holodomor as a genocide in 2018. The question once again arises, does the international community not owe something to the victims in memory and the Ukraine as a nation?

The cause of the lack of acknowledgment is the United Nations Security Council. The security council is composed of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. There is spilt ideology among seat holders; the United States and United Kingdom are more pro-Ukraine and China and the Russian Federation are pro-Russia, while France can be seen as the swing vote. However, humanity is ultimately faced with the ethical decision and responsibility of making the decision of whether it will acknowledge the Holodomor. It should be looked at with a deontological lens that focuses on the duty of the individual. It is important to emphasize that "An action done from duty has its moral worth" according to Kantian ethics (Donaldson 1992).

Slaughter bench of history

It could be argued from a Hegelian stand point that, "History was a 'slaughter bench, upon which the happiness of nations the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals were sacrificed," arguing that in history there will always be losers and those who get the shorter end of the stick (Woessner 2011). This is true and there will always be a lamb who is at the gates of the slaughter house, but by understanding the actions which brought the lamb so close to the gates, society

should be able to spare the next one. It poses the rhetorical question of should society keep uncovering its history if there is the potentiality to find atrocity?

The answer is very clear that society should be more willing to discover their past. By maintaining a veil of ignorance and being unwilling to acknowledge the past or continue uncovering the past, society is losing a level of humanity. The suffering of a people is eternalized by those who remember it. At a certain degree there is a disappearance of survivor and perpetrators, who can recount what happened. Society bares the responsible of maintaining these accounts for future generations to learn from and not repeat the same mistakes and crimes. There will nearly always be a lamb on the slaughter bench since society is a carnivore. Even as a lamb is being put to slaughter, the herd as a whole has a sense of agency to acknowledge the slaughter. By doing so there is the potentiality to reduce the amount of blood that pools at the feet of society. While it would be ideal to end all bloodshed, it is too idealistic, as man has a somewhat carnal drive for dominance and power. However, as history has shown, it is better when a society grows from peaceful unions rather than violent bloodshed.

As a society we are indebted to those that came before us, as they have laid down the ground work for us. It could be said that since the early 1900's the world has seen well over a century of genocide. The eastern side of Europe has simply become a bathtub filled with the blood of the innocent; the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1923, the Holodomor, 1931–1934, the Holocaust 1939-1945, and more recently Srebrenica in 1995. Seemingly each time society grew in awareness but did not create a way to prevent it from repeating. Society should be striving to prevent its mutually created destruction because a strong society must maintain an "idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose," that allows society to grow from its mistakes while considering the greater good of humanity at the same time (Kant 1784).

The idea of creating a 'cosmopolitan purpose' and society centers itself around the idea that as human beings we cannot live isolation. Borders are one of the validating factors for a nation and its government, but humanity must not allow itself to become a heartless slave to those who suffer outside of the bounds of their respective nation. The argument that "patriotism is morally dangerous" should be rephrased and changed to 'nationalism,' which finds its roots in ethnocentrism and xenophobia (Nussbaum 1994). It was best said by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic at the Commemoration of the Centenary of

the Armistice, "patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism: nationalism is a betrayal of it," because it is the rejection of a globalizing world; the rejection of others (Macron 2018). By understanding and accepting the struggles of others as valuable or in need of assistance it is not a rejection of one's culture but rather an enhancement of the understanding of one's own culture and humanity. The goal of cosmopolitanism is to develop understanding for others and provide aid when it is needed, with hope of reciprocation if needed.

As a global society we must be able to understand and honor those who have suffered at the hands of others and know that the acknowledgement of their suffering disables their oppressors. Genocide is a concept that not only turns humans into monsters but "need not be part of a larger war," because war is not always needed to fuel hatred (Card 2003). When the USSR began its campaign against the Ukraine it was not waging war but rather imposing a sense of imperialism upon the country. Unlike in other genocides in which people were being gunned down in the streets or sent to death camps, the people of the Ukraine were being starved to death. This is not to say that society is more sympathetic to death from a violent cause but rather there is a higher level of awareness and education when violence is involved. While there was some news coverage about the Holodomor like the stories written by Rhea Clyman, the majority of journalists focused on exposing the evils of the USSR (Masis 2017). Sensationalism aside, there is still an overarching problem that society has a moral obligation to the victims to educate the world about their suffering. When we approach the lack of media coverage of the Holodomor from a utilitarian stand point, it is easy to see that society has failed in the execution of ensuring awareness. Utilitarianism is centered around producing the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people. As a leading super power on the global stage does the United States not have the obligation to approach Holodomor awareness and education from not only a cosmopolitan approach but also a utilitarian one? Providing educational awareness of the Holodomor like it is does for other genocides would aid in the creation of human rights awareness and genocide prevention.

Russia: Modern and historical influence

By looking at Leszek Kołakowski's philosophy of history on genocide, we can see the fragile structure of a society that centers around the idea of being all encompassing. Socialism as it was practiced in the USSR and its satellite nations

ultimately turned out to be oppressive rather than liberating. When Holodomor happened, the Ukraine was under communist rule that ultimately subjected the majority of its citizens to oppression. Kołakowski argues that “no ideology with all-embracing claims is immune to the danger of being used as an instrument of oppression and slavery,” this argument is supported by simply looking at nations that strived for the all-encompassing ideology like the former USSR under Joseph Stalin, or North Korea presently under the Kim dynasty (Woessner 2011). From the surface level the nations listed share an overarching commonality: the leaders were influenced by those before them.

In 2008, the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the Moscow Kremlin argued against the acknowledgment of the Holodomor as a genocide saying, “genocide is the killing of a population based on their ethnicity, whereas Stalin’s regime annihilated all kinds of people indiscriminately, regardless of their ethnicity” (Bovt 2008). This argument could be supported with the Hegelian idea of the slaughter bench of history, essentially saying that not all people in history count because it is inevitable certain historical events will occur, and people will be forgotten. It would not be morally acceptable to not acknowledge the Holodomor as a genocide that is rooted in famine when similar events have happened and are happening globally that do not receive the right recognition for their suffering and are placed on the slaughter bench.

Under the pressure of the current geo-political climate it is not hard to see that Russia doesn’t need any more skeletons falling out of its closet. They are trying to strengthen their international relationships with nations like the United States, while developing strength domestically. It is like a bear preparing for hibernation, eating as much as it can and trying to make sure that once it sleeps it will not be attacked by others.

Looking at the frame of international recognition of the Holodomor would be to bring it in front of the United Nations. If brought to the United Nations, there would be few problems at hand. First, the composition of the Security and Peace Council; permanent members: China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly. The permanent members have power to veto anything that could be voted on. Looking at the divide between those in support of the Holodomor (United States) and those opposed (Russia Federation), these two nations are very prominent leaders on the global stage, and each with

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their own ally; United Kingdom with the United States and China with Russia, leaving France in the middle.

This is a situation in which silence is kept by all parties to maintain peace.

Philosophy of food and famine

Does man have a right to food? Or it is simply the right to be free of wanting? Societies across history have yo-yo between these concepts but have never come to a sound conclusion. However, there is a significant difference between the two concepts, as one strives to ensure that people do not go without food while the other speaks of people being free of wanting. But what does free of wanting mean? It can be seen as a life in which a person does not struggle to gain the basic means they require to survive. This is not up to the interpretation of the individual but rather their government that could say any number of things. In a highly collectivist society, the freedom from wanting could be seen as the motivator to ensure that the group as a whole is not wanting, causing the individual to place the group before themselves. A leader who is concerned with the progression of the state as opposed to the wellbeing of their people and is willing to sacrifice one for the other. This might lead to the death of the masses, but it can also create a dependency on the aid of other nations and normalize the actions of the state generation to generation.

An example of this style is what happened in North Korea. It is known as the Arduous March in 1994 to 1998. Which can really be seen as the normalization of famine within the country (Kang 2011), meaning that due to the famine in North Korea in 1994-1998, the country received foreign aid in the form of food aid. With the country being supplied food aid during the course of the famine and then post-famine due to the lack of their own agricultural production, the idea of starvation has been normalized within their society. Even with foreign aid provided for an extensive amount of time post famine, North Korea proves that it is unable to care for itself or the needs of its people. In relation to the Holodomor and the international community as a whole what responsibility do we have in regards to providing acknowledgement as a form of justice?

Defining Genocide

What the United Nations deems as a genocide reads as follows: "Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the

Crime of Genocide (1948) as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'" (General Assembly of the United Nations 1948). While this list of qualifications seems straightforward, nations are commonly faced with the issue that acknowledgement comes with responsibility. Within this primary draft of the paper only two will be covered until further research is conducted. For instance if we look at President Bill Clinton's statement to the survivors of the Rwandan Genocide in 1998, "[w]e did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide," even though there was evidence that people were being slaughtered by the thousands (Clinton 1998). There was a hesitation in acknowledging it formally as a genocide because it would mean that the United States would be responsible for providing aid. This would mean aid for all people in Rwanda, not just expats of the United States. When looking at this set list, it should not just be applied for an event that we are presently witnessing but applied to the events of the past, so all victims are remembered and honored, not left to rot on histories slaughter bench. This extermination of people is typically coupled with war; the two are not mutually exclusive. Genocide comes from lack of justice for a group of people specifically. Society must ask itself, when we do not constitute something as a crime against humanity when it happens in the past, how will it affect our future judgement?

Since the early medieval period the people of the Ukraine have fought to gain independence from whichever governing party was in control. Whether it was the Golden Horde or the Kingdom of Poland with the Lithuanian Duchy or the USSR, the Ukraine has sought autonomy and independence for a large part of its existence. This did not stop the people of the Ukraine from developing their own culture, language, and system of beliefs which are different from the surrounding Slavic nations.

When looking at the concept of genocide, it does not only apply to killing the Ukrainian people themselves but also the eradication of their culture and language as a whole. While some scholars would consider this an ethnocide, within this paper it will be integrated as a cultural genocide.

KILLING OF MEMBERS

With regard to killing people, the direct cause of death was starvation caused by the withholding of grain by the USSR. It is important to note that it has been hard to pinpoint the number of victims of the Holodomor. While there are numbers that provide percentages of the amount of the population that perished within a given region of the country, it is still difficult to provide a definitive number of deaths. Scholars believe that in certain regions there was a 20-percent decrease in population, such as in the western side of the country where the death toll is speculated to be as high as one million people (Applebaum 2017).

The attack on the Ukrainian people is rooted in the question of peasantry, as a peasant rebellion was something that was a contested topic. Even within the peasant community there was a divide between poor peasants and the wealthier peasants, the kulaks. The kulak farmers were seen as a threat that Stalin and his predecessor Vladimir Lenin wanted to abolish before an uprising could happen even referring to them as “bloodsuckers, vampires, plunderers of the people and profiteers, who fatten on famine” (Lenin 1925). Peasant farmers who had as many as two cows and two horses could be considered kulaks and could become victims of raids, arrest or exile by the government if they were not willing to submit to the collectivist farms of the USSR. In the Ukraine 15,000 kulaks, the most active were to be arrested and an additional 30,000 were cast into exile. This cause was intended to send all 50,000 kulak families to the northern region of Russia, Northern Krai (Viola, et al. 2005). It is important to note the Ukraine had a higher number of peasants than other countries under USSR control.

The attack on the peasantry would ultimately lead to the collection of grain and other resources from the people on the countryside. Additionally, by the summer of 1931, the amount of livestock that had been bred had decreased significantly (People’s Democrats Demchenko 1931). This can be seen as one of the direct products and failures of collectivization event though it had not even reached 100-percent of the peasant population. Regardless, the failures of collectivization and Stalin’s Five-Year plan would act as the spring board for the Holodomor. Additionally, it could be said that the act of collectivization took away all the farmers’ motivation to work and produce grain because there was not a market economy or a sense of market competition, therefore eliminating the desire to produce goods. In 1932, groups of men and women were sent out into the countryside to look for grain to collect, and later other means of food.

Testimonies have even stated those who were collecting grain would go to great lengths to collect grain. They “searched in stoves, broke floors and tore away walls,” and “took a bead necklace...assuming it contained something edible” (Applebaum 2017). The measures which were taken allowed the famine to occur at the capacity it did in the given time frame.

Death by starvation might be one of the most inhumane ways for a person to die. Yet it can also be seen as one of the most preventable. According to the World Health Organization, between starvation and death there is nearly always disease. When people don’t have enough food to eat, acute malnutrition sets in and weakens the immune system, meaning that those who were suffering during the Holodomor were most likely suffering not only from hunger but other illnesses (World Health Organization 2017). In a historical context, being sentenced to death by starvation was designed to be long and painful, as in the case of Maximilian Kolbe during the Holocaust who was subjected to death by starvation at Auschwitz in 1941. We see that this style of death was not only extremely painful and unethical but, in some cases, needs to be finished with a final action like a lethal injection (Craig n.d.).

In the Ukraine between the winter of 1931 and 1932, the citizens of the rural sectors of the Ukraine were starving because of the collection of their food in the year prior and the blockade that stopped the importation of food. Between the years of 1932 to 1933, it is estimated that between three to seven million people died. It is important to note that it was not just the kulaks who were dying, but it was many people all across the Ukraine. There were people dying in the streets of major cities like Kharkiv and there are the rural horror stories of children dying and being cannibalized by their own mothers.

KILLING OF CULTURE

Stalin’s regime executed its genocide strategically against the Ukrainian people and also against their culture and language. The term “little Russia” is a name used for the Ukraine that was commonly used during the twentieth century and still exists in certain social circles. There is a significant amount of negative connotation with this term, because the Ukraine is not a smaller version of Russia.

One of the first points of attack was the Ukrainian language. When looking at language under a philosophical lens it should be view with constructivist epistemological principles, meaning that humans construct the meaning of their

world from what their mind knows; “I think there for I am” (Descartes 1644). Linguistic relativism supports the idea that language and linguistic limits that an individual understands and processes aid in their determination of the world around them. When language is placed under attack it can be determinantal to the culture of those who speak it and have a society and culture built around it. There are linguistic similarities between Russian and Ukrainian, such as use of the Cyrillic alphabet. Both languages fall into the subset of Eastern Slavic languages, but the level of shared vocabulary is not as high as other Slavic languages such as Polish. Modern Ukrainian speakers might have a higher probability understanding Russian due to the increased level of exposure to the language in the media.

Ukraine under the control of Pavlo Skoropadskyi, the founder of the Hetman dynasty after the Russian Revolution in 1917, created a sense of hope for maintaining Ukrainian autonomy. Under Skoropadskyi the first national library and Ukrainian Academy of Science were founded, in addition to the establishment of Ukrainian as the country’s official language for business (Applebaum 2017). Even with this there was still a push for a more pro-Ukrainian government: Ukraine for Ukrainians. In 1918 there was even the removal of all Russian language-signs in the city of Kyiv, replacing them with Ukrainian ones. Within the years of 1923 to 1929 the movement of Ukrainization grew rapidly (Applebaum 2017). This included the push for the creation of Ukrainian language schools and the push for Ukrainian literature of all sorts, including books, poems and plays; these nearly doubled within the six-year time frame (Pauly 2014).

In 1925 there was even a push to unify Ukrainian speakers beyond the borders of the Ukraine; specifically, those who lived in Russia on the eastern border of the two nations and those in Poland on the western border. While nothing significant came to fruition, there was a splinter in the woodwork of the Ukraine. Those living in the rural countryside on the eastern border were opposed to the push for Ukrainization and the acceptance of Ukrainian, not necessarily due to outstanding Russian loyalty. Teachers would claim that they did not have the time or resources to teach students Ukrainian and often would not even be fluent themselves (Applebaum 2017). This was one of the passive ways that the language was attacked. Later there would be a harsher front of re-Russification that strived to make Ukrainian “a second-rate, subordinate language that people, “intending to live [in the Ukraine] had to abandon” (Graziosi 2015). This can be seen as Russian implementing cultural imperialism onto the Ukraine that acted as a precursor to

genocide. Stalin was creating a system that would continue to chip away at the pride and culture of the Ukraine until striking heavier blows that aimed to destroy national identity. Stalin's push to hegemonize the Ukraine to Russian ideology could also be seen in other USSR satellite states.

Stalin would deliver another detrimental blow to the Ukrainian people by attempting to terminate religion. In modern day Ukraine, religion is a very important part of life, with 71.7 percent of the population declaring themselves believers in God (Razumkov Center 2018). A total of 67.3 percent of the population of the Ukraine identifies as a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Razumkov Center 2018). Judging by the numbers from modern-day Ukraine it is clear to see that Stalin did not succeed in his attempt to remove religion. The assault on religions was one of the significant attacks on the Ukrainian people. There are stories of "people bursting into tears" as bells from church bell towers were cut down and fell to their deaths, symbolizing the death of religion for many Ukrainians under the rule of Stalin (Applebaum 2017).

IMPOSING MEASURES INTENDING TO PREVENT BIRTHS WITHIN THE GROUP

Starvation is a process that fully takes over an individual's body. A normal body with fully functioning metabolism depends on blood glucose as its primary source of energy. When a body starts to undergo starvation or fasting for 48-72 hours the liver starts synthesizing ketone bodies which are three water-soluble molecules to obtain fatty acids that can be used as fuel for the body and brain. As this process continues the brain and body slowly drain themselves pulling and more from its fat reserves until they are diminished. A body that is going through the starvation process will additionally suffer with infertility because the body has low levels of body fat which affects a woman's endocrine system, ultimately resulting in the lack of an ovulation cycle. The women who were starving in the Ukraine were mostly likely suffering from the same conditions.

According to a study conducted by Vallin et al. looking at how birth rates were affected by the Holodomor and World War II, they found drops in life expectancy of infants. In the Ukraine in 1933 the life expectancy for a female infant was 10.8 years and 7.3 for males (Vallin, et al. 2002). Due to the prevention of births and short infant life expectancy via famine induced starvation, Stalin eliminated part of a generation of Ukrainians.

CONCLUSION

If we look at the what is considered to be a genocide, there is a direct cognitive connection to atrocities such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. The education and public awareness efforts for the Holocaust alone are commendable, as they not only spread educational awareness about the Holocaust but also encourage the message of 'Never Again,' and education about human rights. Even though the word 'genocide' itself did not appear until approximately 1944 in Raphael Lemkin's book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, the act itself is as old as civilization (Lemkin 1944). Jean-Paul Sartre stated in his 1967 essay that "the thing itself is as old as humanity and there has never been a society whose structure has preserved it from committing this crime." Looking at history it would be easy to see that societies of the past have not been able to avoid committing this crime. History has held the Nazis responsible for the extermination of many ethnic and religious groups across Europe, but it has also allowed Joseph Stalin and his cronies to get away with crimes against humanity. As a society that is constantly globalizing, it is important to think about the ethics of not acknowledging the crimes that were committed as a genocide if they fit the needed qualifications. It is something that humanity owes to the victims of the past and the information deserves and needs to be known by future generations.

In John Rawls' *Law of People* he puts forth eight principles which are designed to help society grow and accept one another, within this context the most important being number six: "Peoples are to honor human rights" (Rawls 1993). Meaning that as an ever-globalizing society we need to be accepting of the suffering of others and acknowledge those events that are in the past. As society does not acknowledge the Holodomor as a genocide it is slowly tearing away at the cloth of humanity.

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