

Roman Serbyn

On the Ukrainian Genocide, Lemkin, and Himkian Dialectics

In “Myths of National Consolidation, the Holodomor, and the Holocaust: A Response to Roman Serbyn,”¹ John-Paul Himka counters my critique² of the paper he delivered at the University of Alberta on 28 March 2011³. All three issues that Himka raises in his rejoinder beg further discussion. However, owing to length constraints I shall concentrate my attention on the Ukrainian genocide and comment on Himka’s evasive methodology and ideas in debating that subject.

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Himka and Snyder

An initial difficulty in discussing the Ukrainian genocide with Himka is his unwillingness to adopt a clear and firm position on the concept of genocide. He states that he is reluctant to use the term, yet he employs it with regard to the Holocaust, the Armenian massacres, and even “loosely [sic] in relation to the Ukrainian famine.” He finds the 1948 UN definition of genocide inadequate and Raphael Lemkin’s conceptualization of the crime problematic, but rather than give his own definition or elaborate his reasons for rejecting the notion he invokes the authority of Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* (page 413, chapter on “Numbers and Terms”). Himka claims that Snyder’s and his own views on the subject are “virtually identical.” I don’t think they are, and a comparison of their use of genocide-related terminology shows this.

Snyder chooses his words carefully and deliberately: he systematically employs the term *Holocaust* but avoids *Holodomor* and *genocide*. He defines *Holocaust* as “the German policy to eliminate the Jews of Europe by murdering them” (p. 412), which is the same as saying “Nazi genocide against the Jews.” At the same time, Snyder refrains from using the term *Holodomor*, whose meaning—“Stalin’s deliberate starvation of Soviet Ukraine”—he nevertheless accepts. He explains that his reason for not using the term is “not because the term is less precise than *Holocaust* but simply because it is unfamiliar to almost all readers of English” (p. 412). Snyder’s last statement is debatable: after all, the term *Holodomor* has been in use for quite a few years now, neologisms take a long time to become established, and people do use new words when they find them appropriate. However, what is more important for our discussion is Snyder’s acceptance of *Holodomor* as a sufficiently precise designation of Stalin’s deliberate starvation of Soviet Ukraine. I take this to mean that the act was genocide against the Ukrainians, and I think Snyder confirms my interpretation. On p. 412 he summarizes the 1948 UN definition of the crime of genocide, and on the following page he writes: “In each of the cases discussed in this book, the question ‘Was it genocide?’ can be answered: yes, it was.”

Snyder begins the description of the Ukrainian tragedy with a somewhat misleading statement that the mass starvation of 1933 was “the result of Stalin’s first

¹ “Myths of National Consolidation, the Holodomor, and the Holocaust: A Response to Roman Serbyn <<http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2011/09/>>

² “Erroneous Methods in J.-P. Himka’s Challenge to ‘Ukrainian Myths’” <<http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2011/08/>>

³ “Interventions: Challenging the Myths of Twentieth-Century Ukrainian History” <<http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2011/08/>>

Five-Year Plan.” (p. 24) It would be more accurate to attribute the cause to “Stalin’s Revolution from Above,” since the blueprint for enforced starvation in Ukraine was not the economic plan (or its failure) but Stalin’s project for a revolutionary transformation of the Soviet state and society. Nevertheless, Snyder corroborates the conclusion that the Ukrainian famine can be considered genocide by showing that there was enough food in the USSR to feed the population but that it was confiscated, stockpiled, and partly exported while offers of foreign aid were rejected. Snyder writes: “It was not food shortages but food distribution that killed millions in Soviet Ukraine, and it was Stalin who decided who was entitled to what.” He concludes: “Stalin chose to kill millions of people in Soviet Ukraine.” (p. 42). To choose to kill is to *intend* to kill, and *intent* constitutes the principal element in the definition of the crimes of *murder* and of *genocide*.

Snyder also draws attention to the ethno-national aspect in Stalin’s imposed starvation: “[T]he evidence of clearly premeditated mass murder on the scale of millions is most evident in Soviet Ukraine.[...] Seven crucial policies were applied only, or mainly, in Soviet Ukraine in late 1932 or early 1933” (p. 42). The examples Snyder cites are sufficient to show that Stalin’s destructive policy was aimed at a *national* group—one of the four targets recognized by the UN Convention on Genocide. It is in this context that Snyder writes: “Rafał Lemkin, the international lawyer who later invented the term genocide, would call the Ukrainian case ‘the classic example of Soviet genocide’” (p. 53).⁴ Himka, on the other hand, maintains that the famine was the result of “the reckless collectivization drive, which almost destroyed Soviet agriculture as a whole” and calls the claim that “Stalin unleashed the famine deliberately in order to kill Ukrainians in mass” a “mythicized version” of the events (“Interventions”).

Thus we can see that Snyder’s understanding of the Holocaust and the Holodomor corresponds to what is usually classified as genocide. Why then does he avoid that term in his book? Himka’s answer is that Snyder does it “on principle.” Snyder writes: “I prefer *mass killing* to *genocide*,” and he lists a number of reasons for his *preference* (p. 413). In my opinion the most serious argument, and one that does suggest a certain principled objection, is the restriction of the notion of genocide in the UN Convention to four groups of victims: national, ethnic, religious, and racial. Lemkin’s initial conceptualization of that crime included political, economic and other groups⁵. It is in this respect that Snyder is justified in saying that the term genocide has limitations as a guide to historical and moral interpretation (p. 413).

In my opinion, neither this, nor the other reservations Snyder proffers in his book constitute a compelling reason for not using the term genocide. I think he decided to avoid it because he wishes to stay out of what he calls the “inevitable and intractable controversies” that the term has generated thus far. His persistent use of the term Holocaust, now commonly reserved for the genocide against the Jews, spares him from involvement in the dispute about the uniqueness of the Jewish experience, to which the generic term genocide is susceptible. Snyder’s desire to eschew controversy is probably also behind his decision not to use Holodomor when talking about Stalin’s deliberate starvation of the Ukrainians: there is still a heated debate about its genocidal character, and Snyder wants to avoid that discussion as well. By leaving out genocide he avoids the need to qualify the other cases of mass killing he describes in *Bloodlands*.

⁴ The quotation is taken from Lemkin’s paper “Soviet Genocide in Ukraine,” which he delivered at a author at a public commemoration of the “Great Famine” in New York City in 1953.

⁵ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation - Analysis of Government - Proposals for Redress*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).

Himka's reluctance to use the term genocide may be, as he claims, identical to Snyder's, but I do not think his reasons behind it are the same. Their interpretations of the famine are quite different, and so are their views on the Ukrainian genocide and Lemkin's analysis of that crime.

Himka and Lemkin

In "Erroneous Methods" I discussed in some detail Lemkin's innovative approach to the conceptualization of the Ukrainian genocide. Here I shall only repeat the salient points of Lemkin's argument. It is important to note that Lemkin examines the Ukrainian catastrophe within the framework of the 1948 UN Convention and defines the genocide in Soviet Ukraine as a four-pronged attack on the ethnic Ukrainian nation, in which the deliberate starvation of the farming population was the most lethal in terms of lives lost. At the same time, Lemkin stresses the crippling of the Ukrainian nation by the destruction of its intellectual elites, its church life, and the forced ethnic mixing of the population. Himka remarks that he already knew about Stalin's repression of Ukrainian cultural activists when he was twelve years old and that "Lemkin's outline of the Ukrainian genocide is nothing striking." It is true that Lemkin did not introduce any new factual data. However, his striking contribution is the insightful way that he identified the main forms of the Soviet regime's attack on the Ukrainian nation and then integrated them to show that while the famine was the main mechanism of destruction, it was the combination of all those factors that rendered it a crime of genocide. What is also remarkable in Lemkin's outline is that he formulated it in terms of the UN Convention and that it is borne out by the documentation now available in the public domain.

Himka begins his discussion of Lemkin with the comment that in respect to the understanding of the Ukrainian genocide, "Lemkin's work ... has nothing to offer but antiquarian interest." Snyder, it will be remembered, was able to find Lemkin's "Soviet Genocide in Ukraine" sufficiently interesting to quote from the paper in *Bloodlands* and to include it in his bibliography. Himka's dismissal of Lemkin is not based on a scholarly analysis of Lemkin's ideas, but on admitted limited knowledge of the circumstances and conditions in which the document was produced. He thus fails to heed the principle he enunciates in his paper: "arguments, not authorities, are required to settle disputes." Himka reproaches me for using Lemkin as an authority to justify my interpretation of the Ukrainian genocide. He would have a point if I only invoked Lemkin's name and did not explain Lemkin's conceptualization of the Ukrainian genocide. Yet, while claiming that his interpretation of the Ukrainian famine is "virtually identical" with Snyder's, Himka does not bother to analyze the latter's understanding of the Ukrainian famine, which is actually quite different from Himka's own understanding of the great tragedy.

Without analyzing Lemkin's ideas as such, Himka draws attention to what he considers to be three deficiencies in Lemkin's qualifications to discuss the Ukrainian genocide: (1) Lemkin's insufficient knowledge and unreliable sources, (2) his being influenced by Cold War politics, and (3) his selling out to Ukrainian nationalists. Himka states: "The invention of the concept of genocide did not automatically give Lemkin the historical knowledge necessary to determine whether any particular case fit his definition or not." The fact, however, is that Lemkin conceptualized the Ukrainian genocide within the parameters of the UN Convention on Genocide and not in order to fit into his own definition. His own definition of genocide included social and economic groups, and if he had wished to use *his* parameters it would have been sufficient for him (and quite appropriate in the context of the 1953 New York commemoration of the Great Famine) to concentrate exclusively on the starvation of the Ukrainian peasants (a socio-economic group). In his paper Lemkin explained the four-pronged attack by the Stalin regime

against the Ukrainian *nation*, thus adopting an approach that was in harmony with the UN definition of the targeted groups.

Himka hypothesizes that Lemkin “relied on information he obtained directly from emigré nationalists.” Born a Russian subject in 1900, Lemkin lived in Poland after the Great War and continued his acquaintance with Russian affairs while studying and translating Soviet criminal laws into Polish. In the 1930s he could read newspaper reports on the atrocities taking place on the other side of the Polish-Soviet border. After fleeing to the United States he heard accounts of the famine not just from Ukrainian “nationalists” but also from famine survivors and other refugees from the USSR. In addition, there was an informed American literature on the subject. The Yiddish-language American daily *Forward* carried a series of revealing articles on the Ukrainian situation by Harry Lang, who visited Ukraine with his Kyiv-born wife, Lucy Robins Lang, in September 1933. Lucy later recounted their trip in *Tomorrow is Beautiful* (New York, 1948)⁶. William Reswick, another American correspondent of Jewish background (born in Ukraine), penned an informative chapter on the famine in his memoirs *I Dreamt Revolution* (Chicago, 1952)⁷. These Americans visited the USSR as friends of the regime and enjoyed uncustomary freedom of movement there. Disenchanted by what they saw, they truthfully recorded their experiences and observations.

Himka claims that Lemkin began “thinking of Ukraine as an object of genocide” only “later in the Cold war, in the mid-1950s,” when he was already “marginalized,” that by then his “definitions of genocide expanded dramatically,” and that he even dubbed the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 genocide. This prompts Himka to conclude that Lemkin’s usage of genocide was growing meaningless, and he reproaches me with admiring Lemkin’s work, which appeared “in this context.” Himka’s error is that he does not distinguish between *text* and *context*, between Lemkin’s conceptualization of the Ukrainian genocide and the circumstances in which this was accomplished.

A great astonishment to me in Himka’s debating tactic is his bringing into the discussion Lemkin’s personal circumstances at the end of his life. Himka writes that at the time of writing on Ukrainian genocide Lemkin was impoverished and “dependent on the Baltic and Ukrainian communities for material support.” If these circumstances are intended to explain Lemkin’s reason for calling the Ukrainian catastrophe genocide and for developing a conceptualization of it, then what Himka is suggesting is nothing less than Lemkin’s “selling out to the Ukrainian nationalists.” This is a surprising and troubling insinuation, especially by someone who himself has expressed great indignation at the allegation of being “in the pay of the Jews.”

Having rejected Lemkin’s ideas about the Ukrainian genocide without discussing them, but only with irrelevant arguments about the circumstances of their formulation, Himka disparages the Ukrainian genocide itself: “I think there are immensely more interesting and important questions about the famine of 1932-33 to research than whether or not it can be considered a genocide.” But what he fails to see or recognize is that the Ukrainian genocide consisted of more than just the famine. In addition, Himka seems to have forgotten the long and bitter debates about the Jewish, Armenian, Ukrainian, and other genocides, and disregards the numerous institutes, university

⁶ Some thirty of Lang’s articles were published in *Forward* in late 1933 and early 1934, and in mid-April 1935 six articles appeared in *The New York Journal*. An electronic version of *Tomorrow is Beautiful* is available at <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4315306>>.

⁷ . An electronic version is available at <http://www.archive.org/stream/idreamtrevolution006158mbp/idreamtrevolution006158mbp_djvu.txt>.

courses and conferences involved in the study of genocides. Yet, the phenomenal expansion of genocide studies constitutes convincing proof that the question of genocide remains an important issue and is still of great interest not only in the political arena but also in the academic domain. Since the claims of genocide refer to historical events, the mass atrocities concerned must interest historians by their very nature.

Politics of Memories

The “immensely more interesting question” on which Himka wishes we would focus our attention is not any specific aspect of the famine itself, but the *memory* of the famine. It is not memory in general that interests him, however, but only “memory politics”, and not even all memory politics, including those that promote the memory of genocide and those that destroy it. Himka is not interested in exploring how the Soviet regime expunged the memory of the Ukrainian tragedy among the survivors and their descendants. Nor does he want to see how lies about the event were spread outside Ukraine. What he specifically wants to investigate is “the Ukrainian campaign for the recognition of the famine as genocide.” This approach to the Ukrainian famine is reminiscent of the old ideologized discourse, still popular in some academic circles, that focuses on that historical event as a political tool in the hands of Ukrainian “nationalists,” who, it has been alleged, have used it for questionable ends. Such was the underlying idea of Douglas Tottle’s *Fraud, Famine and Fascism*, a publication Himka treated as serious historical literature and discussed in his seminar on the Ukrainian famine⁸, and such was the approach applied in last year’s scurrilous “Open Letter” formulated by a group of “international scholars,” of which Himka was one of the principal authors⁹.

One form of “memory politics” that is high on Himka’s list of concerns is empathy towards the victims. Unfortunately, his ideas on the rights and obligations with respect to giving and receiving empathy appear muddled. In “Erroneous Methods” I maintain that the Ukrainian community had the right to call on the world to empathize with the victims of the famine, and that “This right is unconditional, and it belongs to the victim group of every genocide or mass atrocity.” Himka misquotes me as claiming that “This right [to empathize (Himka’s brackets – R.S.) ... belongs to the victim group of every genocide or mass atrocity,” and then adds that “the obligation to empathize is not restricted to the ‘victim group’ and that the term ‘victim group’ is a problematic category.” I wrote about the *victim* group’s right to *receive* empathy not about some abstract right of that group to bestow empathy. Confusing right and obligation, Himka’s comments that the obligation “to empathize is not restricted to the victim group,” which is of no relevance to what I stated. I regard empathy as a virtue—a moral choice that cannot be legislated or treated like an exchange commodity—and Himka’s accusation that my “formulation seems to free Ukrainians from the necessity to empathize with victims of the Holocaust and Jews from the necessity to empathize with the victims of the Holodomor,” is irrelevant. Recognition of a particular genocide is not the same as empathy for its victims. The world community may have an obligation to recognize genocides, but the need to empathize with their victims comes from the citizen’s moral makeup and cannot be legislated.

⁸ Myrna Kostash, “Genocide or ‘A Vast Tragedy’?”

<reviewcanada.ca/essays/2009/12/01/genocide-or-a-vast-tragedy/>. Douglas Tottle, *Fraud, Famine and Fascism. The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard* (Toronto, Progress Books, 1987). (http://www.archive.org/stream/FraudFamineAndFascsim/tottlefraud_djvu.txt)

⁹ “Open Letter: International Scholars Issue Open Letter on the UCCLA, UCC, and the CMHR,” Tuesday, April 12, 2011. This document and my comment were posted on the Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism Web site, but they were later removed.

The term “victim group,” which Himka finds problematic, is not particularly troublesome. I use it in the context of the UN Convention on Genocide, which treats genocide as a crime against groups. A “victim group” is a specifically targeted group regardless of whether it is destroyed completely or in part (none of the major modern genocides completely destroyed their victims as distinct groups). The effect of genocidal action on victim groups is not limited to the number of lives lost. There is also an overall impact on the survivors and their descendants. In the case of the Ukrainian genocide, as Lemkin pointed out, the genocidal action included the wholesale destruction of the Ukrainian elites (“intelligentsia”), whose loss is at least partially responsible for the present situation in Ukraine.

Victimology, closely related to empathy is the other of Himka’s concerns. Again, Himka is not interested in the psychological effect of the Ukrainian genocide on the post-genocidal psyche of Ukrainians, but only in what he calls “competing victimology” or, more precisely, how Ukrainians compete with Jews, and not the other way round, for the number of victims and for public sympathy. In “Interventions” Himka claims that “this kind of competing victimology is used to justify the violence of radical Ukrainian nationalists during World War II.” It is this competing victimology that Himka considers to be the foundation of the Ukrainian genocide campaign, and against which he promotes his own denunciatory counter-campaign.

Let us consider the merits of his arguments. The opening of the Soviet archives has not made it possible to determine the number of victims of the Ukrainian genocide. Since 1933 estimates have ranged from three million to ten million, and the only consensus we have today is that several million persons perished. The magnitude of the tragedy was so horrendous that the figure of six million brought out by Harry and Lucy Lang from their trip to Ukraine in 1933 seems plausible even today.¹⁰ Ukrainians assert their genocide, as do other victim groups. They strive for public attention and sympathy for the famine victims and campaign to have the Ukrainian genocide recognized. This is not done in competition against the Jewish, Armenian, or any other genocide. Ukrainians do not claim special status for the Holodomor, as is done by the proponents of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Himka is wrong to maintain that today the martyrology of the Holodomor is used to justify the terrible violence that occurred in Ukraine during the Second World War.

Himka claims that I downplay the role of competing victimology in the Ukrainian community and illustrates his argument with two examples. He writes that on 20 July 1985 Yuri Shymko spoke “in the provincial parliament of Ottawa [sic],” where he expressed solidarity with the Jewish community in remembering the “six million victims of the Holocaust” and with the Ukrainian community for paying respect to “the seven million victims of the Soviet genocide.” Himka’s point is that Ukrainians have engaged in one-upmanship in a victimology contest. What he leaves out, however, is what is germane to the discussion: the fact that this was the period when the Soviets, supported by anti-Ukrainian elements in Canada, either denied there was a 1932-33 famine in Soviet Ukraine outright or passed it off as a natural calamity with a low mortality rate, and that both the Soviet and Canadian detractors were trying to discredit the Ukrainian diaspora with disinformation and doctored documents. Consequently Shymko’s political speech requires a much fuller contextualization than what Himka provides.

¹⁰ *New York Evening Journal*. 16 April, 1935. The figure quoted there was provided by “a high official of the Ukrainian Soviet” in Kharkiv.

Himka's other example, the scandalous Bobby Leigh-Marta Tomkiw scam, needs an even fuller contextualization and a more objective explanation. The project did not originate from the Ukrainian community but came from two con artists who saw an opportunity to make some money on the credulity of Ukrainians eager to spread information about the Holodomor. The trailers that appeared on the Internet, with material plagiarized from the Nowytski-Luhovy film "Harvest of Despair" and a propagandistic story line, should have warned people that the project was a sham. Unfortunately, well-meaning people were misled and gave the unscrupulous duo financial and moral support. To cite this incident now as an example of Ukrainian competitive victimology is unbecoming.

Horrendous mass atrocities create feelings of victimization in individuals from the target group and in their descendants and conationals, who naturally vie for attention and strive for recognition of what occurred. This is a common characteristic in the preservation of collective national memories of the Armenian, Ukrainian, Jewish, and other genocides. Collective memories of tragic events compete with reminiscences of happier moments and even with genocide denial. There can also be rivalry between victim groups, and Himka is right to insist that a single standard be applied in evaluating the suffering of the victims of all genocides, including the Ukrainian and Jewish ones. I could not agree more, but that principle also requires that equal standards be applied in evaluating the victimologies linked to the Holodomor and to the Holocaust. What is needed is a comparative victimology approach.

Competing Victimologies and the CMHR

A resounding case from which to study and compare competing victimologies is the controversy over the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) being built in Winnipeg. The CMHR was the brainchild of the late Israel Asper, a Winnipeg-based Canadian media magnate of Jewish background and the founder of the Holocaust and Human Rights Study Program, now known as the Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program. Tired of taking students to Washington to see the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Asper decided to build a similar institution in Winnipeg. The result was a project, in which only "Human Rights" were retained in the name of the institution, but the centrality of the Jewish genocide was maintained in the conceptualization of the museum and the organization of displays. Of the proposed twelve galleries into which the museum is to be divided, only the Holocaust is to have a permanent, stand-alone gallery, while fifty or so other genocides and mass atrocities are to share an adjoining gallery for rotating temporary displays. The museum floor plan specifies that the Holocaust zone "will acknowledge the seminal importance the Holocaust played in the creation of transnational human rights laws and principles," and that "visitors will be immersed in evocative images and soundscapes that communicate the gravity of the atrocity." From the Holocaust exhibits, "visitors will enter a zone [that] has been divided into two main sections," one featuring "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and the other housing "The Mass Atrocities exhibit"¹¹.

The elevation of one victimology and the subordination to it not only of the other victimologies, but also of human rights, in a museum that is supposed to be centred on human rights and is mostly financed with public funds provoked protests from Canadians who considered the arrangement misdirected and unfair. The Ukrainian Canadian

¹¹ The floor plan was made public by *The Winnipeg Free Press* on 27 November 2010. See www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/fyi/floor-by-floor--a-visitors-guide-to-the-cmhr-110900634.html.

Congress asked for equal space for a permanent Holodomor display. Other Canadian ethnic communities and individual citizens also made their criticisms and demands heard. Asper's daughter Gail, the driving force behind the CMHR project since her father's death, and the museum's administration have adamantly continued defending the privileged position of the Holocaust display.

To justify the central position of the Holocaust in the CMHR, the museum's administration has argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights grew directly out of international revulsion against the Holocaust. In a recent *Maclean's* interview Gail Asper claimed that the Holocaust was "the catalyst for the world coming together to say 'never again,' precipitating the anti-genocide conventions and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights."¹² This is the position of the museum's administration and of some of its public supporters. Dr. Catherine Chatterley, director of the Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, recently stated that "Hitler's systematic murder of Europe's Jews was the catalyst for the development of international human rights law and activism."¹³ I think that Himka will agree that this type of sophisticated advocacy for a pivotal position of the Holocaust in the CMHR is an expression of a particular victimology, but a competitive victimology nevertheless.

As to the claim that the Holocaust was responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are serious reservations. For example, Professor Samuel Moyn of Columbia University has written: "High profile observers—Michael Ignatieff, for example—see human rights as an old ideal that finally come into its own as a response to the Holocaust, which might be the most universally repeated myth about their origins. [...] Contrary to conventional assumption, there was no widespread Holocaust conscience in the postwar era, so human rights could not have been a response to it."¹⁴ And Professor Emeritus Michael Marrus of the University of Toronto has made a similar comment about the tenuous Holocaust-UDHR nexus: "The museum points to the declaration [UDHR – R.S.] as evidence that the Holocaust was somehow the moving force behind the modern human rights movement. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence for this contention. [...] I think the prominence given to the Holocaust, however well meaning, is historically incorrect."¹⁵

Himka's reaction to the competing Jewish and Ukrainian victimologies has not been at all in the spirit of his self-professed standard – *quaecumque vera* (whatsoever things are true). Instead of objectively examining both sides of the confrontation, he has lent his professional knowledge and authority to a coarse attack on the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Together with his pupil in Ukrainian history, Per A Rudling, and a half-dozen collaborators, he drafted an "Open Letter of International Scholars" that began with a mendacious claim: "The Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress have been campaigning against the plans of the Canadian Museum for

¹² "In conversation: Gail Asper," *Maclean's*, 23 March 2011 <www2.macleans.ca/2011/03/23/overcoming-indifference-why-it-isn%E2%80%99t-a-museum-of-genocide-and-winnipeg%E2%80%99s-windfall>

¹³ "The War against the Holocaust," *The Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 April 2011.

<www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/westview/the-war-against-the-holocaust-119110699.html>

¹⁴ Samuel Moyn. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, 6, 7).

¹⁵ Charles Lewis, "Rights Museum Needs a Rethink , Academic Says," *National Post*, 5 April 2011.

Human Rights in Winnipeg to mount a permanent Holocaust gallery.¹⁶ This is not true, and at the end of that paragraph the authors admit as much when they state that the UCC wants the Holodomor to have “no less coverage ... than the Holocaust.” The UCCLA, for its part, has been steadfast in demanding that the twelve CMHR galleries be “thematic, comparative and inclusive.” Neither organization asked for the suppression of the Holocaust gallery. What they have demanded is equal treatment for the Holodomor.

In their open letter the authors do not seem to have been attentive to giving correct and complete information about the museum. In urging scholars to sign the open letter, Catherine Chatterley did not hesitate to “stretch” the truth when she claimed that it is the Canadian government that “is building a Museum of Human Rights” where “it is proposed to found a gallery on the Holocaust, and on the effect that the post Holocaust settlement had on the international idea and practice of Human Rights.” Unless one was well acquainted with the details of the controversy surrounding the CMHR, the message that one received was that the Canadian government was building a museum dedicated to human rights with a prominent place for the Holocaust, while two Ukrainian organizations were trying to sabotage it.

The open letter attracted over a hundred signatures, for the most part outside Canada. Himka explained that international support was necessary because, “in Canada, everybody’s a prisoner of their ethnic minority.”¹⁷ I suspect that the authors appealed to “international scholars” because it was easier to get support from individuals who had little, if any, information about the real issues involved and who would unwittingly react favourably to the (mis)representation of the dispute in the letter itself and in Chatterley’s explanation. I also suspect that some academics who signed the letter on trust did so without carefully reading the whole document, for it is difficult to imagine who would knowingly support the advocacy that one of the parties to the dispute about the CMHR be enjoined to “stay out of the debate”. The free and open exchange of ideas is essential to the functioning of a democratic society and the essence of academic life. The letter’s imperious tone, factual errors, and propagandistic style were probably the reasons why many scholars, familiar with the museum project’s history and the contents of the document declined to sign it. The remarkable aspect of the letter’s campaign is not the number who signed it, but the scholars who refused to support it.

Subliminal Suggesting

I find one paragraph in Himka’s paper particularly disturbing. It concerns intolerance and extrusion. Himka writes: “There are moments in Roman’s text which suggest that my taking a different stance may mean that I stop being a Ukrainian.” Himka does not identify these „moments.“ I reread my text twice but was not able to find any passage that would fit that accusation. Himka adds that others have called him “not only a ‘Ukrainophobe’ but a Russian Jew.” Then he tells the story of how Peter Borisow, whom he identifies as “a vocal Holodomor activist,” proposed that Professor Alexander Motyl be expelled from Ukrainian organizations and the Ukrainian community unless he changed what he was saying about the Ukrainian famine. What has all this to do with me? Nothing, except that Himka may wish to suggest that his affirmation at the beginning of the paragraph—myths of national consolidation are intolerant towards intellectual pluralism and are extrusive—equally applies to me because I do not reject

¹⁶ A draft of the open letter with some history of its origin was posted on engageonline.wordpress.com/2011/04/08

¹⁷ “Discord, Accusations Taint Human Rights Museum Debate,” *The Globe and Mail*. 16 April 2011.

myths of national consolidation and promote the recognition of the Holodomor as genocide.

In the same paragraph, Himka mentions a “sculpture of a jackal called ‘John-Paul svoloch’ a photograph of which” has been circulating with a denunciation of Himka’s “incessant howling, in promiscuous pursuit of self-promotion.” To this attack on him, Himka attaches the following comment: “(cf. Roman’[s] characterization of me as one who ‘heads for the limelight of the public intellectual’).” I take exception to Himka’s claim that what I wrote, based on his own description of his roles as an academic and a public intellectual, is comparable to the vile inscription. My quotation refers to Himka’s own findings in his “Interventions”: (1) he has a wider readership as a public intellectual than as an established academic; (2) the first method is sloppier, it oversimplifies, and contains errors. I see nothing wrong in a public intellectual seeking the limelight to assure a greater exposure for his ideas. My objection is not to the limelight, but to the ideas.

As to Himka’s Ukrainianness, I have never questioned it. It is of no consequence for the evaluation of his ideas, which must be examined on their own merits. Where a problem can arise is when his controversial arguments on Ukrainian issues are accepted only on the strength of his appeal to his Ukrainianness, and not on a rigorous examination of the evidence presented.