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Heritages of hunger: European famine legacies in current academic debates

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ABSTRACT

European famines and their legacies continue to play a significant role in heritage practices and societal debates. This calls for an examination of recent scholarship about these heritages of hunger, as well as the formulation of future directions that the relatively young field of famine heritage studies could explore. This article engages with groundbreaking scholarship about famines in Finland, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Ukraine and Russia in relation to museology, heritage policies, commemoration, education and monument creation. It analyses major topics and trends in famine heritage studies, and assesses how insights from this field engage with and contribute to issues that are at the heart of heritage studies in general: diasporic heritage, participation, in- and exclusion, globalisation, victimhood and trauma. This article maps out the state of the art in European famine heritage studies and, additionally, investigates what future directions famine heritage studies may take, and what questions require further exploration.

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I. Introduction

As we confront a pandemic today, let us recall that the Great Famine was a public health emergency in its own right. The failure of the potato crop 175 years ago, and the widespread hunger that followed, brought with it three destructive diseases: dysentery, smallpox and the dreaded ‘famine fever’. In the years between 1845 and 1849, a million people died, not primarily of hunger, but from the epidemics brought on by hunger and the terrible conditions in the land (DCHG 2020).

These words were spoken by Josepha Madigan, Ireland’s Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, during the National Famine Commemoration in Dublin on 19 May 2020. Following her speech, Minister Madigan unveiled a plaque to mark the first Famine Commemoration at Dublin Castle in May 2008, next to Edward Delaney’s famine monument in St Stephen’s Green (1967). During the publicly broadcasted event, three layers of memorialisation intersected: through the 1967 monument, the enactment of the commemorative event itself and the performed remembrance of the first national Famine Commemoration twelve years ago.

The ceremony lays bare the complex dynamics of acts of remembrance, showing that these processes are essentially palimpsestic in terms of the convergence of various moments in time, and involve the reproduction of these memories through various media (ritual, monument, plaque). Significantly, the commemoration also demonstrates the functioning of famine heritage in the present, and the ways in which these legacies are still highly relevant today. That recent crises have

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rekindled our awareness of European famine pasts also becomes clear from other examples: the dire situation in Greek refugee camps in 2017 brought back memories of those who fled the island of Chios in 1941–44 to escape starvation (Hionidou 2006). Journalists like Judith Baroody compared the severe winter of 2012, which was marked by ‘a time of economic struggle in Europe’, with the economic upheaval, famine and poverty in the years 1945–46 (Baroody 2012).

More controversially, European famine pasts continue to be recalled and politicised in public debates. For example, during the 84th commemoration of the Ukrainian famine of 1932–33, also known as ‘Holodomor’, President Poroshenko called on Russia to finally ‘repent’ for the famine their regime had caused (RFE 2017). Furthermore, in December 2018 British Conservative MP Priti Patel sparked off popular outrage when she stated that potential food shortages in the event of a ‘no-deal’ Brexit could be used as ‘leverage to force Ireland to give up the backstop’ (INews 2019). The insensitivity of a representative of the British government to a famine that took place under British imperial rule clearly fuelled already existing resentments about the inadequate relief policies of the London government at the time (e.g., Donnelly 2003).

Acts of memory and the creation of heritage are inextricably connected with each other. For one thing, heritage constitutes an expression of the values, historical interpretations and perceived communal pasts of communities, and, as such, tangible heritage is often ‘where memory is embodied’ (Apaydin 2020, 16) in selective ways ‘according to the demands of the present’ or ‘an imagined future’ (Ashworth and Graham 2005, 4). At the same time, we may witness the interplay between heritage construction and dynamics of cultural remembrance (and forgetting), in that shared memory of a culturally active community may form the impetus to the creation of new heritage such as monuments, commemorative rituals and museum collections, or the conservation of material and immaterial artefacts and practices. As King (2017, 3) argues, heritage is ‘arising in the intersections of socially produced memory with socially produced uneven development – that is, with power and the production of difference’, and the pasts which groups with political or cultural agency seek to remember thus impacts heritage production.

In light of the prominence of European famine memories over the past three decades, it is therefore by no means remarkable that these events have also regained attention in heritage development. The sesquicentenary of Ireland’s Great Famine (1845–50) in the mid-1990s saw a steep increase in monuments on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, Strokestown Park National Famine Museum, which opened in 1997, has developed educational programmes to transmit local famine legacies and has supported other heritage initiatives, such as *Nälkä!* (2018), a travelling exhibition on the Great Irish Famine and the Finnish Famine (1866–68). Furthermore, the museum, which now operates under the Irish Heritage Trust, launched a bi-annual National Famine Walk between Roscommon and Dublin which has now become formally accredited as a heritage walking trail (2019).

While Ireland has been a frontrunner in the preservation and musealisation of famine heritage, Ukraine and its diaspora communities have also significantly invested in heritage of the 1932–33 famine, for example, through the construction of a memorial in commemoration of Ukraine’s famine victims in Kyiv (2008) and in Toronto (2018) and through the subsequent launch of the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide in Kyiv (2010). The Greek Famine (1941–44), the Dutch Hunger Winter (1944–45) and German hunger conditions during and after WWI and WWII were also subjects addressed by recent exhibitions. In 2017 the EU Parliament in Brussels hosted a temporary photo show entitled ‘The Unknown Famine of Athens 1941–2’, while the Dutch ‘Hunger Winter’ of 1944–45 was revisited in the exhibition ‘To the Farms!’ in the Dutch Resistance Museum in Amsterdam (2014), to mark its seventieth anniversary. Germany’s ‘Steckrübenwinter’ (1916–17) was one of central topics of the exhibition ‘An der “Heimatfront” – Westfalen und Lippe im Ersten Weltkrieg’ (2014) in the Münster Stadtmuseum.

The growing prominence of famine heritage – that is, versions of past episodes of hunger in the form of ‘objects and display, representations and engagements, spectacular locations and events, memories and commemorations’ on sites of cultural exchange and consumption (Waterton and

Watson 2015, 1), has given a strong impetus to scholarly research in this field. Up till recently, research on European famines focused primarily on the socio-economic and political contexts of these sustenance crises, or their historiographical representations and receptions (E.g., Hionidou 2006; Ángel Del Arco Blanco 2007; Graziosi et al. 2013; Curran et al. 2015; Ó Gradá and Alfani 2017; De Zwarte 2020). The past decade, however, has seen a significant rise in research that examines commemorative and curatorial practices, as well as ways in which European famines figure in cultural artefacts and representations that recollect these harrowing pasts. Studies by, amongst others, Lisa Kirschenbaum (2006), Laurence Gourievidis (2010), Emily Mark-FitzGerald (2013), Vincent Comerford, Janssen, and Noack (2013), Andrew Newby (2016b) and Niamh Ann Kelly (2018) have signified important strides in enriching our awareness of the material (monuments, artefacts, films) as well as immaterial heritage (educational practices, folklore) of European famines. Furthermore, these scholarly publications have enhanced our understanding of the interaction between memory processes and heritage making.

In this light, it is timely to analyse major topics and trends in famine heritage studies, and, in particular, to assess how insights from this field engage with and contribute to issues that are at the heart of heritage studies in general: diasporic heritage, participation, in- and exclusion, globalisation, victimhood and trauma. This article maps out the state of the art in European famine heritage studies and, additionally, investigates what future directions famine heritage studies may take, and what questions require further exploration. We have endeavoured to consider research on a broad range of European famines, rather than studies on non-European famines and their heritage, for two reasons: the sheer amount of European famine heritage research that is available but often underexplored, and the present impact of these European famine legacies in the public sphere. Furthermore, we have left out famine heritages in the context of Spain's famine years during Franco, the Dutch and Greek famines during World War II, and the post-war German hunger conditions, because scholarly analyses of these are still in very early stages. Those on uses of famine heritage and on the field of heritage studies are more fully developed in relation to Ireland, Scotland, Finland, Sweden, Ukraine and Russia, as well as their diaspora in North America. Therefore, for our present purpose, we reflect on studies related to these European famine legacies.

Topics and trends in famine heritage research

Famine pasts and today's memory contests

Although the area of famine heritage studies remains relatively small, recent publications have made several important contributions to the development of the field. In all these works, the influence of the present on famine legacies and their mediation as heritage is at the heart of the analyses. In *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, Emily Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 277) explains that though both famine history and memory are often popularly construed as static, commemorations and monuments of the Great Irish Famine bear evidence of the volatility and socially mediated nature of the past in our present: 'its messiness, its non-linearity, its vigorous and stubbornly visible incompatibilities'. She therefore rightfully proposes to redefine famine memory – and the heritage practices that are informed by it – from a distinct and recoverable 'thing' or set of beliefs, towards an understanding of it as an unfolding series of processes and positions that may vary per temporal and geographical context. Mark-FitzGerald's point is in line with current academic debates about the inherent fluidity of performances of memory which, as Astrid Erll (2014) observes, can travel through time and space, 'across [...] and also beyond cultures'.

The permeability and fluidity of the experience and memory of famines and their mediation as heritage also relates to the mobilisation of famine pasts for political engagement in the present, another aspect frequently addressed in famine heritage scholarship. This politicisation of famine heritage is most evident in the Russian and Ukrainian contexts. In *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995* Lisa Kirschenbaum details how official media were deployed, already during

the Leningrad blockade (1941–44), to transform personal experiences into one coherent narrative in state-approved terms: ‘media created the memory, even of those who survived the event’ (Kirschenbaum 2006, 5). After the war, official military commemorations, monuments and memorials of the blockade, for example at the ‘Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad’ (1981), served to strengthen myths of collective heroism and resistance of the united Soviet people, rather than allowing space for personal trauma and victimhood (Kirschenbaum 2006, 113–150).

In post-Soviet Ukraine, the Holodomor was similarly transformed into a key element in nationalist discourses and processes of identity formation, as several chapters in *Holodomor and Gorta Mór* by Comerford, Janssen, and Noack (2013) illustrate. Yet, contrary to the situation in Saint Petersburg, the Ukrainian famine experience has been actively deployed in politics, heritage, media and education to recall trauma and victimhood, as the collection’s contribution by Heorhiy Kasianov demonstrates. In the chapter ‘Holodomor and the Politics of Memory in Ukraine after Independence’ Kasianov states that over the last two decades Holodomor legacies have become a transformative experience and one of the main pillars of nation building. The politicisation of famine legacies as ‘the central mobilising symbol of Ukraine’s national history’ has even risen to such high levels that, as Kasianov argues, it is probably no accident that the active promotion of the famine by Ukrainian President Yushchenko coincided with the escalation of the power struggle in 2006–08 (Kasianov 2013, 180–181). That indeed over especially the past two decades collective suffering of the Ukrainian people in the face of brutal repression by the Soviet regime has been foregrounded, especially in the campaign for global acknowledgement of its atrocities. The website of the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide in Kyiv presently formulates its mission statement as ‘the establishment of historical truth and the commemorating of international community the memory of millions of Ukrainians, which was deliberately killed by Stalin’s regime’, in the face of ‘the denial of the Holodomor ... as a crime of genocide’ on the part of ‘Russia today ... the successor of the Soviet Union’. This example illustrates the ongoing demand for acknowledgement of national suffering.

Laurajane Smith argues that heritage need not be in service of the status quo, even if much heritage practice is ‘about the promotion of a consensus version of history by state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites to regulate cultural and social tensions in the present.’ (Smith 2006, 4). Compared to the top-down mediated famine memories in Soviet and post-Soviet countries, the influence of the present on famine pasts in Scandinavia has taken very different forms, as becomes evident from David Ludvigsson’s essay on film heritage in *The Enormous Failure of Nature* (2016). Ludvigsson reveals in what ways 1970s media representations of the Swedish famine of 1867–68 by history filmmakers Olle Häger and Hans Villius, for Swedish Broadcasting Corporation SVT, reflected contemporary, emerging left-wing radicalism rather than state-approved narratives. Taking the film production *Ett satans år* (*One Year of Satan*; 1977) as an example, Ludvigsson shows how media representations focused on ‘pro working-class sentiments’ and experiences during the famine, thus framing history from below. Marxist notions of ‘upper class’ and ‘working class’, frequently used in the production, give away the agenda of the film makers in creating famine heritage: ‘in the Swedish source language these words build up a story of brutal capitalism that adds to the filmmakers’ interpretation of the famine-stricken society as one deeply divided, where the rich felt little compassion for the poor and where authorities did not take the necessary responsibility’ (Ludvigsson 2016, 114). In so doing, Ludvigsson contends, media representations of the famine functioned as signifiers for the 1970s Swedish workers movement.

As we have seen, the recognition of the interconnectedness of famine pasts and the social and political present is prominent in recent famine heritage research, and in this respect famine studies strongly engage with the by now well-established performative turn in memory studies (Radstone 2007; Rigney 2009) as well as current debates in heritage research that heritage – through its ‘synergistic’ dynamics with ‘memory work-in-action’ is inherently ‘partial, subjective, contested, political, subject to particular historical contexts and conditions’ (Sather-Wagstaff 2015, 191). Furthermore, this awareness of the ways in which famine pasts are reimagined by present conditions feeds into a second major topic in famine heritage studies, namely contesting memory cultures.

As Laurence Gourievidis (2010) explains in *The Dynamics of Heritage*, focusing on the Scottish Highland Clearances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘contest’ and the ‘struggle in the terrain of recognition’ are prevailing trends in the heritage of these periods of dislocation and famine: ‘What is at stake is not the past for its own sake but the past as it reverberates in the present, the past as prey to present priorities and its fluctuating representations are testimony to the imprint of their context of emergence’ (Gourievidis 2010, 4). This competition of memories is rooted in the dynamic relationship between local, national and transnational heritage. In this light, Gourievidis shows that national museums in Scotland tend to gloss over the fate of the Highlanders as the prime victims of the Clearances by their landlords. Instead, they incorporate the Clearances into larger historical narratives of emigration and settlement in the New World. By contrast, regional grass-roots heritage initiatives in the Highlands, such as the Skye Museum of Island Life, emphasise the racial bias (Gourievidis 2010, 79) that existed in the Lowlands towards the starving Highlanders that impacted the aid that they received from Lowland communities, as well as focus on regional atrocities involved in the eviction of Highland farmers.

Different political and historical interests thus lead to different versions of the past, which often clash, a phenomenon that memory scholars call ‘competitive memory’ (Rothberg 2009, 4, 18; Eigler 2014, 64). Famine heritage appears to be inherently rooted in competitive memory cultures, as Emily Mark-FitzGerald similarly illustrates in her 2013 monograph, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*. The most telling example that she provides is the great difficult process of creating and maintaining a ‘neutral’ Northern Irish Famine memorial. As Northern Irish communities continue to be haunted by social deprivation, the difficult memories of the Troubles and ongoing sectarian strife, the Famine past is a bone of contention which is interpreted differently by Catholic Republicans and Protestant Unionists in terms of blame and victimhood. As a result, Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 161) shows, while monuments to the Famine in Northern Ireland are scarce, those that are there, such as the Enniskillen Famine Memorial (1996) are subject to ‘ongoing vandalism and neglect’.

At the same time, as Mark-Fitzgerald’s analysis of this memorial suggests, famine heritage is often ‘multidirectional memory’ (Rothberg 2009, 7) in that it is often placed in dialogue with commemorations of other events: in this case an unofficial, poorly executed monument to the IRA Hunger striker Bobby Sands who died in 1981. The example that Mark-FitzGerald provides endorses the view in heritage research that monuments and museums are ‘sites of practice that are social, embodied, and generative’, for example by invoking other cultural memories and eliciting the creation of other heritage sites (Lehrer et al. 2011, 33) related to different pasts. Further research into the fluidity and re-inscription of heritage spaces to which these studies of famine legacies testify could be an interesting subject for future research. This may be even more so in light of current tides of emancipation which demand a reassessment of heritage ownership, as well as the integration of migrants and refugees, who often fled destitution, into our European societies and can relate to our famine pasts from their own experiences.

Forgetting and remembering: traumatic paradigms

European famine studies have, almost without exception, engaged with practices of ‘forgetting’ and ‘silencing’ as consequences of cultural trauma. More recent studies have addressed the complexities involved in suppressed famine heritage or have even contested the idea of traumatic ‘silence’ altogether. Kirschenbaum’s argument is in line with these discussions. Kirschenbaum unfolds the complex mechanisms that are involved in the repression of memories of the Leningrad blockade famine. She convincingly shows that processes of ‘enforced forgetting’ in post-war Leningrad were not only state-enforced by the heritage projects of Soviet and Russian regimes, as local authorities built two large victory parks, instead of war monuments, which both ‘looked more to building the future than to memorializing the past’ (Kirschenbaum 2006, 134, 140). Impulses to forget and remember came from both above and below, ‘as survivors struggled to heal themselves and their

city' and civilian victims – scarred by the harrowing experiences of hunger and death – often embraced efforts to remove physical traces of the war from their city in an effort to reorder urban landscapes (Kirschenbaum 2006, 116). If we would pose the question whether this was because of trauma or political convenience in disremembering, Kirschenbaum's critique on the trauma narrative seems to suggest the latter.

Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 84) is critical of the traumatic paradigm which has dominated Irish society's configurations of the famine past, especially during the 1990s, when the famine became construed as a defining moment of 'Irishness' in a 'language of trauma, revision and healing'. The idea of collective trauma has had 'pervasive influence on commemorative discourse and public monuments', Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 8) argues, and was often accompanied by a call for 'cultural rehabilitation', which has blinded people to existing Famine legacies as well as fuelled the assumption that the Irish today are suffering from a 'genocide-induced posttraumatic stress disorder' (Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 85). In 'Finland's "Great Hunger Years" Memorials: A Sesquicentennial Report' Newby (2016a) similarly calls for nuance in identifying Famine pasts with silence. He challenges the alleged 'amnesia' in relation to the 1860s Finnish Famine, proposing a shift away from the 'amnesiac hypothesis' to the idea of 'relative silence'. As he demonstrates, the famine years have been covered in Finnish children's books and have been crystallised in a wide range of Great Hunger Years memorials, albeit in commemoration of predominantly local experiences of hunger.

Newby furthermore stresses that it is notable that there is no national Finnish famine monument, such as in Ukraine or Ireland. This phenomenon Newby convincingly ascribes to the fact that the Helsinki government under Russian rule was responsible for its own economic and political administration during the famine in the 1860s. Blaming Finland's own government for national trauma would have been inconvenient in the formation of national narratives and identities, so the famines were instrumentalised to stress the Finns' indigenous capacity for endurance, and to define 'forbearance and stoicism in the face of Divine challenge' (Newby 2016a, 178) as national character. By contrast, in Ukraine and Ireland, where the famines took place under imperial rule, a national sentiment of shared suffering under foreign occupation prompted nationalist Famine narratives and heritage, Newby convincingly suggests.

Local, national and transnational heritage

If we turn to the transmitters and instigators of European famine heritage practices, it is impossible to gloss over the role of diasporic communities. For example, in Toronto the Ireland Park Foundation has created a memorial park to the Irish Famine which incorporates a sculpture group, entitled 'The Arrival' (2007) by Rowan Gillespie, as well as a sculptural limestone installation, marking those who died while nursing the diseased, quarantined emigrants in the fever sheds. In another part of the city a crowd-funded memorial to the Ukrainian famine was realised in 2018. While, in Ireland, the legacy of the Great Irish Famine is one of displacement and death, in the diaspora it 'persists as part of the foundation myth of immigrant nations and a vehicle for asserting ethnic difference by a shrinking demographic', Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 275) asserts. These diverging legacies are clearly visible at US and Canadian heritage sites, as she demonstrates through detailed analyses of monuments: in North America the glory of the 'emigrant experience' is mythologised and darker sides of emigration are commonly omitted. Mark-Fitzgerald's study is particularly valuable for its comparison of community-level commemorative activities in Ireland and North America, which offer a 'unique insight into the prosaic business of commemoration and its outcomes' on both sides of the Atlantic (Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 148).

Additionally, she examines famine memorials and commemorative practices in Great Britain and Australia, two other destinations of famine emigrants, thereby providing a comprehensive comparative overview of contexts of heritage making. Another example of ways in which famine heritage in diaspora is shaped by ideologies of the host society is provided by Jason King in his contribution to *Holodomor and Gorta Mor*. King reveals how the memory of famine orphans, who were adopted by French Canadian families upon their arrival, is perceived as an integral part of

Canadian heritage, such as monuments, because it ‘exemplifies that accommodation rather than assimilation defines the process by which immigrants and cultural minorities become integrated into Canadian society’ (King 2013, 116), thus epitomising what is assumed to be a Canadian tradition of tolerance and cultural diversity.

With regard to the role of diasporic communities, scholarly research on Irish famine heritage which compares homeland and diasporic remediations is much richer than that on other contexts. This is odd in view of the significance of other diaspora communities in the construction and transmission of Famine heritage, such as the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, based at the University of Alberta in Canada, which facilitates and funds research, education and heritage on the Ukrainian famine of 1932–3. The frequent lack of attention for a comparative perspective on homeland and diasporic configurations of famine heritage becomes clear from Jan Germen Janmaat’s (2013) otherwise interesting article on educational textbooks about the Ukrainian famine and Ireland’s Great Famine, in *Holodomor and Gorta Mor*. Educational textbooks can be considered portable heritage, as they are shaped by memory politics and crystallise values, while being utilised in various settings. Janmaat concludes that both in relation to the Ukrainian famine and the Great Irish Famine text books do not present a ‘one-sided nationalist account of the Famine’ (Janmaat 2013, 86), but, more problematically, he fails to include textbooks published for the market in countries renowned for the Irish and Ukrainian Famine diasporas, such as the US, Canada and, in the case of the Irish Famine, Britain.

In view of the distinct ways in which diasporic memory can develop, through intersection with other diasporic heritages or under the influence of diasporic ‘nostalgia’ (Huyssen 2003, 149) for the homeland, it is a shame that Janmaat restricts his case studies to Ireland and Ukraine. Certainly, more comparative work on famine heritage in contexts of homeland and diaspora communities is called for, as Newby also observes in the previously discussed article, included in his special issue. As of yet, he argues, it is still necessary to confirm whether any 1860s Finnish Famine memorial sites exist at all outside of Finland, including in diasporic settlements in Northern America and the former Russian Empire territories (Newby 2016a, 182). In making this statement, Newby points out an important direction heritage research concerning various Famines should take; a direction which moreover may enhance our understanding of similarities and interactions between various diasporic communities in commemorating, teaching and musealising famines.

Moving from the local and national to the transnational, the effects of globalisation and migration on famine legacies and heritage policies are another major topic in famine heritage studies. Contrary to Pierre Nora’s concept of ‘*lieux de memoires*’ (1989, 9), in which memorial projects are constituted in an isolated national moment, Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 155) agrees that memorials occupy ‘a range of political and aesthetic positions closely linked to one another within a global memory culture’, that is, within a network of heritage making by which memorials and commemorative activities reproduce repertoires of representation, or may attain different meanings in relation to other global practices and contexts.

Gourievidis (2010, 186–7) gives examples which illustrate this sense of globalised heritage. She shows that in Australian museums the migration of Scottish Highlanders during the Clearances is integrated with narratives of multiculturalism and Aboriginal histories. In the Migration Museum in Adelaide, for instance, Clearance emigrants are represented alongside Irish famine emigrants, ‘as the epitome of those who were escaping destitution and came to Australia “in the spirit of hope”.’ As Gourievidis’ examples intimate, the heritages of the Clearances and the Great Irish famine become ‘multidirectional’ (Rothberg 2009, 14) in the setting of the museum which suggests strong analogies between the circumstances of dislocation and hunger of the Irish and the Scottish Highlanders. It would be interesting to further research whether such displays of multidirectional heritage pave the way for deeper understanding between various societal groups in terms of their past plights. This is a route that famine heritage research could certainly explore more profoundly in future.

Evoking empathy

Famine heritage can also be used to teach about human suffering and human rights in the globalised present more generally, as Maureen Murphy shows. The Great Irish Famine Curriculum in New York State Schools, on which her chapter in the volume by Comerford, Janssen, and Noack (2013) focuses, is part of the state's Human Rights Curriculum, and explicitly asks students to look at common themes within histories of famines, slavery and genocide, encouraging them 'to develop an awareness of hunger in their own communities and to become active volunteers in programs and organizations that offer food and other support and services to the poor.' (Murphy 2013, 104) Although Murphy's article does not go into these issues, aligning with the legacies of other communities in heritage construction can also be problematic in terms of the ownership of memories and heritage that other communities claim as uniquely belonging to them. Awareness of the dynamics of competition inherent to memory processes and heritage construction is therefore immensely important, even when the value of connecting to other memory cultures cannot be overestimated.

The societal uses and relevance of famine pasts today depends on the ways in which heritage initiatives can bridge the gap between these legacies and today's citizens. In that respect, the ability of these heritage practices to create empathy in present-day audiences – who often have a different cultural background as well – is vital. This subject of affect has been a central point of concern in recent heritage research. Silke Arnold-de Simine's seminal study, for example, has interrogated the limits of affect in museums where representations of past suffering might also 'brutalize spectators or normalize atrocities' as well as be rather 'sanitized' in order to remain family-friendly (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 46). Similar concerns about affecting today's audiences are expressed by famine scholars. Niamh Ann Kelly, in *Imagining the Great Irish Famine* (2018, 26) illustrates the difficulties in making visitors relive and empathise with the past, when such a past is marked by 'historical absence' in the sense of high mortality as well as the lack of tangible traces. As Kelly shows, heritage institutes often try to compensate for this by resorting to theatricality as a strategy to trigger performative memory. For example, Kelly argues, Doagh famine village features a staged eviction involving a reconstructed cottage and five 'fully costumed' life-size mannequins which are used to bring the past closer to the museum visitors (Kelly 2018, 189). A tunnel through which visitors walk enhances the idea of a journey to the past, but this emphasis on affect goes at the expense of historical detail, for the room provides various enacted scenes that together provide 'a dramatically condensed lineage of history' that is less informative (Kelly 2018, 180).

Gourievidis (2010, 98) addresses similar tensions between the promotion of affect and informative profundity in several Scottish museums. She describes curational devices which hinge on the principle of 'vicarious empathy' conveyed through imagination and individualised experience. Rather than presenting the clearances through artefacts, Gourievidis states, museums convey dramatised experiences of the Clearances, like the staged 'exile experience' in Aros or the crafted re-enactment of an eviction scene at Timespan, which convert history 'into spectacle performed through sets high on emotionalism verging on the dramatic and sensational for visitors inured to television image' (Gourievidis 2010, 132). These 'media-oriented displays', Gourievidis argues, raise eyebrows among many historians who fear a distortion of historical contexts.

Problematic concepts

In addition to the major trends and topics outlined above, recent scholarship also elucidates some of the problematic concepts and issues facing famine heritage scholars today. One of these issues is materiality. For most European famines, there are few material objects available for curators to display. In particular for the nineteenth-century Scottish, Irish, Swedish and Finnish famines, it remains challenging that the famine-affected poor had few personal possessions, and that traces of rural dwellings have all but perished. Moreover, oral cultures have rarely been recorded, meaning

that contemporary voices are usually presented in exhibitions through scripted narratives, which are either based on historical written sources or fictionalised by curators altogether.

In her book, Kelly (2018, 25) describes exactly these curatorial challenges for museums and galleries in exhibiting the Great Irish Famine: 'history of dispossession seems an anathema to museum and exhibition presences, with poverty defined in the first instance by an absence of material matter, negligible political presence, and diminished personal empowerment'. Gourievidis (2010, 125) also addresses the predicaments faced by curatorial staff through lack of material artefacts that can be displayed. As Gourievidis states, artefacts in museums are very powerful 'symbolically and emotionally charged [...] visual shorthands, triggering recollections or images and thoughts acquired through education and social interaction'. In other words, artefacts help visitors to contextualise and connect the Clearances to previously acquired knowledge, and the recurrent 'separation of Clearance narratives from folk artefacts in regional museums is highly problematic' because it divests these famine pasts from their culturally specific contexts and thereby defies understanding (Gourievidis 2010, 104).

The struggles with the lack of materiality of famine pasts is therefore often regarded as disadvantageous to curating famine narratives. By contrast, as Kirschenbaum shows, in Soviet Leningrad the lack of physical objects also presented specific opportunities for state authorities to shape its famine legacy. In the underground Memorial Hall, opened below the Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad (1974) in 1978, artefacts on display included a violin used in Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, a pail and shovel representing the local air defence forces who stood watch on rooftops to put out incendiary bombs and a 125-gram bread ration, which are all 'suggestive and moving but hardly convey the extent of the human suffering within the city' (Kirschenbaum 2006, 125–26). Materiality was thus deployed to soften the trauma and reconceptualise the famine into terms of resilience and heroism, in ways suited to state-approved narratives of the blockade.

The Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad itself, however, offers a more inclusive conceptualisation of heroism and victimhood, Kirschenbaum argues (2006, 224–5). Contrary to many other 'victory' memorials, the six figures on the monument depict 'ordinary Leningraders', including a woman holding the body of her child in her arms. The concept of victimhood has been particularly problematic in Leningrad/Saint Petersburg, Kirschenbaum shows, because of the overarching hegemonic narrative of the 'heroic defence of Leningrad', which was reinforced by documents and images memorialising air raids and artillery attacks rather than civilian deaths due to starvation (Kirschenbaum 2006, 189). At the same time, Kirschenbaum demonstrates the importance of 'small stories' such as memoirs and literature creating memory and myths, which 'could at once validate, complicate, and destabilize' hegemonic narratives (Kirschenbaum 2006, 178).

This holds especially true for memories of cannibalism during the Leningrad occupation, which resurfaced in the 1980–90s. These countermemories 'violated a long-standing taboo' while simultaneously functioning as 'dark reminders of how close all Leningraders had come to the abyss' (Kirschenbaum 2006, 238, 245). As such, they paradoxically functioned as an opportunity to emphasise moral worth and maintenance of cultural norms during the most horrific of circumstances. Leningrad famine legacies therefore provide a good example of how complex memory cultures are with respect to issues of victimhood and perpetratorship. Those who can be regarded as heroic victims in one memory narrative may also have crossed the lines of morality in other respects.

Famine studies today express a strong awareness of the complexities surrounding culpability and suffering. The 'dangers of an uncritical view of victimhood', as Ribeiro de Menezes (2014, 19) has warned in the context of the Spanish famine under Franco, are also faced by heritage scholars of the Irish and Ukrainian famines. Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 86) explains that famine narratives are commonly drawn around distinctions of victim and perpetrator 'embodied via narrative figuration and inscription'. The critique of traumatisation of the famine, as also voiced by Cormac Ó Gráda (1999), is that the conflation of diverse and complex social categories into a single class of famine sufferers 'oversimplifies and ignores historical reality', and serves to 'a version of famine history in which the descendants of those who survived all become vicarious victims' (Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 90). Mark-FitzGerald suggests that

a ‘transformative aesthetic of Famine’ would refrain from a simplistic ‘restaging of the encounter between victim and viewer’, while ‘refusing easy sympathies or empathies’ with the victims’ experiences (Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 280). Kelly (2016, 11) also addresses this issue of ‘ethical spectatorship’, and argues for taking responsibility that comes with showing and seeing suffering. Here, Rowan Gillespie’s *The Famine Memorial* (1997) in Dublin can be taken as an example of breaking with the orthodox tradition of presenting unproblematised victimhood, as it includes the names of survivors of the famine and stresses ‘the modern-day success stories’ expressed by the surrounding financial district, rather than its victims (Pine 2010, 9–14).

In Ukrainian heritage practices, issues with the concept of victimhood and victim-perpetrator discourses are even more evident. Papash, in the volume edited by Comerford, Janssen and Noack (2013), analyses collective trauma and victimhood in Oleg Yanchuk’s *Golod-33* (*Hunger ’33*, 1991), which remains the only Ukrainian cinematographic representation of the famine to date. Highlighting tropes and symbols that connect suffering with Ukrainian nationalism and identity formation, Papash (2013, 201) describes how the rhetoric of victimisation serves as a marker of nationality: ‘Ukrainian identity is defined by its readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom and, consequently, by an ethic of Christian love’. In the film, Ukrainian spirituality is juxtaposed with the communist lack thereof, while the unspoilt character of the Ukrainian peasantry serves as sharp contrast to the brutal repression by the industrialising Soviet state: ‘From the very beginning, the film presents the Famine as a consequence of the stand-off between two ideologies, communism and nationalisms and as a result of the struggle between the forces of “darkness” and the “light”’ (Papash 2013, 200). As Papash’s essay implies, *Golod-33* illustrates the deeply-rooted dichotomies that mark heritage of the Ukrainian famine.

In dealing with the concept of victimhood, probably the most controversial analogy provoked in both Ukrainian and other famine contexts is that to the Holocaust. For filmmakers, sculptors, educators and curators, analogies to the Holocaust create certain opportunities, such as the recognition of heritage, a familiar frame for international audiences and, for victims and their descendants, a sense of redress (Ribeiro de Menezes 2014, 34–38; Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 276; Kasianov 2013, 171). Papash (2013, 208), rather uncritically, explains the significance of the Holocaust for framing the Holodomor: ‘If we have only one visual representation of a historical event, for example the Famine, we can hardly talk about having any at all. However, a comparison with the cinematographic representation of the Holocaust, the exemplary collective trauma par excellence, is telling’. Kasianov (2013, 180–1), in the same essay collection, further highlights state involvement in retaining the categorisation of the Holodomor as a genocide, and the political campaign under President Yushchenko (2005–10) to make it ‘into a symbol for the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the twentieth century, which had exceeded the Holocaust and other examples of genocide in its effects’. Holocaust analogies are not only provoked in Ukrainian famine heritage but in Irish commemorative discourses as well. Accusations of genocidal intent have long been present within a minority of Irish nationalist tradition but during the Great Famine’s sesquicentenary analogies between Great Britain and Nazi Germany became voiced in the mainstream as well, as Mark-Fitzgerald shows. For example, activists Chris Fogarty tried to erect markers around Ireland noting the location of “mass murders” of the Irish by British regiments’ (Mark-FitzGerald 2013, 85). Although visual references to Holocaust memorialisation are the exception rather than the rule, declarations of genocide and British culpability for the famine have a significant presence within American memorials and are almost absent in the Irish context. This again indicates the strongly nationalist framings of Irish-American experience with the famine in diasporic heritage, as Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 161) convincingly demonstrates.

Analogies to the Holocaust and efforts to officially designate famines as genocide are, however, also problematic, in particular because of the difficulty in clearly defining the terminology, conflicting memory cultures, and the mnemonic contest to uniqueness. Such framings of famine memory have particularly been resented by Jewish communities and Holocaust memorial organisations. Nonetheless, Murphy (2013, 103) views these analogies as an opportunity to get European

famines on the curriculum in the US, as was the case when the Irish Famine became a strand in the New York State Education Department's Human Rights Curriculum, which already included the Atlantic Slave Trade and the Holocaust. While the inherent fluidity of memory and its endless interactions with other forms of remembrance may therefore spark off controversies and memory competitions, at the same time the multidirectionality of famine heritage also opens up routes to further institutional recognition and firmer embedment in the public sphere.

4. Future directions

As this article has demonstrated, the field of famine heritage studies is continually evolving and breaking new ground. Yet while the studies we have discussed here have contributed much to the development of the field, many important aspects of famine heritage are yet to be investigated. We suggest four possible directions for famine heritage scholars to explore in future research.

Firstly, more attention is needed for how famine heritage gives shape to multiple perspectives. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, modern European famines and their legacies are continuing to divide European communities due to recurrent dichotomies of victims and perpetrators, which are still dominant in most famine heritage contexts. An example is the ongoing call by Greece for financial compensation, after Greek prime Minister Tsipras stated in a speech to parliament in March 2015 that Germany should make reparations for its pillage of the country during WWII, which, in his view, had caused the famine and deprivation. Further attention for nuances in reconstructing famine pasts may not only give scope to reassessments of dominant narratives, but it may also help transcend the polarisation that still dominates the legacies of these famines in today's public debates. Rothberg's recent study *The Implicated Subject* (2019) could be useful source of inspiration here, by raising awareness of beneficiaries who 'occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm' (1). As Rothberg contends, such an 'engagement with implicated subject positions alongside victims and perpetrators [...] can lead not only to a rethinking of the dynamics of violence and justice' (12). Famine studies should also shift the focus from victim-perpetrator discourses to shared experiences of suffering which evoked transeuropean solidarity, especially in the form of philanthropic relief. Such an approach may be one possible pathway to overcome these divisions.

Within the same context, more scholarly attention is needed for rural heritages of hunger. Rural infrastructures and communities play a significant role in the histories of modern European famines; often as areas which were worst affected by hunger because of potato blight (Great Irish Famine), weather circumstances (Great Finnish Famine) or collectivisation (Soviet Ukraine). Conversely, rural areas also served as places of refuge from famines, or as regions from which relief could be obtained. In light of this, it is not remarkable that rural Europe is central to the heritage practices and cultural legacies of these periods of starvation. The exhibition 'To the Farms!' at the Dutch Resistance Museum in Amsterdam (2015) and the Doagh Famine Village heritage centre in Ireland are among many examples of how rural history informs famine heritage. Future, comparative research may uncover the ways in which rural landscapes and modes of existence feature in heritages of various European famines. These include recurring tropes and frames through which the rural dimensions of European famine pasts have been remediated in the past century. This more inclusive approach, differentiating between rural and urban perspectives, is fitting to the broader reassessment of dominant narratives in famine heritage.

Secondly, famine heritage studies could benefit from looking for analogies in transnational contexts. Although important attempts have been made to overcome methodological nationalism in famine heritage studies (Comerford, Janssen, and Noack 2013; Newby 2016a) most scholars still work within national frameworks. Shifting the focus to transnational contexts could offer possibilities for exploring new themes such as solidarity, human rights and shared repertoires of representation. This connection of famine pasts to other relevant concerns with regard to human rights is, for example, at the core of Ontario's financial support for the Holodomor Awareness tour –

a mobile, wheelchair accessible classroom that tours the state to educate students on Ukrainian famine. According to Liz Sandals, Minister of Education, the Awareness Tour will simultaneously ‘promote a deeper respect for human rights, social justice and democratic values in general, helping prepare students for their role as engaged, responsible and caring global citizens’ (Ontario Newsroom 2015). The societal uses and relevance of famine pasts today thus depends on the ways in which heritage initiatives can bridge the gap between these legacies and today’s citizens. In that respect, examining the ability of these heritage practices to create empathy in present-day audiences – who often have a different cultural background as well – is vital.

This links up to our third suggestion for future research, namely how to be inclusive to new groups of Europeans in famine heritage practices; migrants and refugees in particular. As Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 213) convincingly argues: commemoration of the famine past offers ‘a deeply felt opportunity to restore dignity to marginalized victims of a massive human tragedy’ and thereby contains ‘the transformative potential for self-knowledge, communion with others of similar background, and a profound means of connecting with ancestral experience’. Recent heritage practices in Ireland, such as those organised by the Irish Heritage Trust, connect past experiences of famine with those of migrant communities and refugees in an impressive effort to turn shared experiences into mutual understanding. On 31 May 2019, the Irish Heritage Trust, in collaboration with Strokestown Park Museum and EPIC the Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin, held a symposium, as part of the launch of the Famine walk, which included a presentation by Syrian refugee Abdullah al Jaber, about his journey to Dublin, as well as a screening of the documentary *Through Abdullah’s Eyes – Syrian Refugee’s Journey Through Europe*. This role played by famine heritage initiatives in furthering solidarity in today’s society, and in addressing present-day societal concerns on a broader scale, is worth of further investigation by scholars in the area of famine heritage.

Fourth and finally, we would welcome further exploration of the opportunities that the digitalisation of heritages of hunger offers to the field. Most famine heritage studies, including those examined in this article, rely primarily on the thorough, qualitative scrutinisation of textual and visual sources, often combined with site visits and oral history interviews. Yet the possibilities of quantitative research are fast growing, and could lay bare tropes and frames in the representation and reception of famine pasts that traditional research methods simply cannot. For example, computer vision techniques (e.g., Smits and Wevers 2020) could be used to sort images of famine victims from digitised newspapers and discern transnational visual tropes. Another possibility would be to use a digital humanities approach to analyse large data files containing online reviews from famine exhibitions. Fully deploying all the possibilities of digital humanities will not only further the thematic scope of the field but would also be a vital way of moving from national to transnational methodological frameworks in which to understand the past and present significance of heritages of hunger.

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