Klejd KËLLIÇI

Andrea Graziosi and Frank E. Sysyn (Eds.), *Communism and Hunger: The Ukrainian, Chinese, Kazakh, and Soviet Famines in Comparative Perspective* (Edmonton and Toronto: CIUS Press, 2016). 158 pp. ISBN: 978-1-894865-47-0.

This book offers a comparative analysis of the 1931–1933 famine in the Soviet Union and the 1950 famine in China. It also focuses on different regions and local economic systems struck by famine, such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan. According to the authors, the famines in the USSR and PRC were produced primarily by socioeconomic policies and hence were man-made. Both regimes aspired to "transform and socialize, not just modernize their economic and social structures" (P. 2), and both sought to industrialize fast at the expense of agriculture. To catch up with and even surpass capitalist countries' industrial potential, the communist regimes strove to put under the control of central planning authorities the extraction and redistribution of foodstuffs on an industrial scale – to feed the workforce in cities or export abroad. Coupled with despotic and often erratic methods of implementation, these policies produced famines. Besides horrendous human loses, the famines proved the inability of the two regimes to respond to the crises efficiently and contributed to the formation of "dual societies" (Lucien Bianco, P. 64), with the peasantries isolated at the bottom of the social system.

While the Chinese famine is analyzed in the book in general terms, the Soviet famine is studied through the distinctive regional cases of Ukraine, the Volga region, Kazakhstan, and Outer Mongolia. Likewise, no attention is paid to the ethnic dimension of the Chinese situation, but the Soviet famine is viewed through the prism of the national question (as an instrument of suppression of national aspirations). This structural asymmetry somewhat undercuts the declared goal of the book to compare the great famines in the USSR and PCR. More balanced are interregional (and international) comparisons of the Soviet famine's variations, or Niccolò Pianciola's chapter on the links between Soviet-controlled Mongolia with precommunist China.

The book is thus divided into two parts: (1) the analysis of single cases, namely the Soviet, Chinese, and the Kazakh famines, and (2) a comparison of these cases.

In his chapter on the USSR, Nicolas Werth offers an overview of famines in the early 1930s in Ukraine, Kuban, and Kazakhstan. He traces the roots of the famine not only to the politics of forced collectivization but also to the long-term effects of postrevolutionary turmoil

on the agrarian economy (Pp. 11–12). These general structural preconditions were also affected by specific national circumstances. According to Werth, Stalin's goal in Ukraine was to subdue not only the peasantry but also Ukrainians as a nation. Viewing Ukrainian famine as intentional, Werth believes the famine in Kazakhstan was primarily the result of administrative incompetence and mismanagement. The predominantly cattle-breeding Kazakh economy collapsed from excessive quotas, which led to the loss of more than 34 percent of the population. In all the regions, the famine highlighted and further enhanced the Soviet type of hierarchical stratification of society: production-oriented and based on differentiation between valuable and disposable elements.

The next chapter, by Sarah Cameron, focuses entirely on the Kazakh famine, presenting a basic historical account of the events and discussing the main approaches to their interpretation. Cameron criticizes the popular historiographic trend that juxtaposes the Kazakh famine to the Holodomor in Ukraine as an "unintended" disaster, a side effect of hastily implemented collectivization and sedentarization of Kazakhs.

Turning to the Chinese case, Zhou Xun offers a comprehensive overview of the Chinese famine. Discussing the effect of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) on rural China, she raises a pertinent question: if the GLF followed the Soviet model of centralization and collectivization of agriculture, why did the Chinese authorities fail to anticipate the famine that had accompanied the Soviet precedent twenty years earlier? Xun suggests viewing the GLF in both the domestic and international political contexts. Following in Stalin's footsteps, Mao was preoccupied with consolidating his authority at home and promoting himself as the new leader of the global communist movement (P. 42). Just as for Stalin, the loss of human lives was justified in Mao's eyes by the utopian goal of rapid industrialization. The violence unleashed by the GLF allowed the consolidation of communist rule by putting the party cadres above and beyond the law (P. 48).

The chapters penned by Lucien Bianco and Andrea Graziosi compare the Soviet and Chinese famines. Bianco selects for comparison the main actors behind the famines. While the structural situation was similar in the two countries (the urge to industrialize by any means), the structure of the ruling parties, the consistency of their policies, and the role of ethnicity differentiate the Soviet and Chinese cases. Arguably, in China, the Communist Party was more embedded in the countryside and closer to the peasants, serving as the main actor of socioeconomic transformation, and hence the perpe-

trator of famine (P. 69). In the USSR, the assault on peasants was delivered by different state agencies, while the Communist Party coordinated these efforts.

Graziosi too underlines the structural parallelism of the Soviet and Chinese famines as products of shared ideology and policies of centralization and industrialization. However, in the Soviet Union, the government managed to keep the famine-stricken society under control, while in China, the country nearly collapsed (P. 93). According to Graziosi, the Soviet system was more elaborated and powerful, so it was capable of using the famine as an instrument of nationality policy (against the Ukrainians) and subduing the countryside. Mao could not instrumentalize famine the same way, and even had to partially retreat from GLF policies in order to avert the demise of the regime.

Pianciola's chapter closes the volume and serves as a general conclusion of sorts. He offers a different take on the Soviet-Chinese comparison by focusing on the pastoral region of Central Asia characterized by common economic patterns but divided between the USSR and China. Pianciola asks why the similar economic conditions and demographics (the local nomadic population plus settlers – Slavic in Kazakhstan, Han in Mongolia) produced different patterns of famine (Pp. 132–133)? He finds the answer in the different political goals pursued by the two regimes in the region, with the Soviet Union playing a much more active interventionist role. Furthermore, the lack of a particular national agenda (unlike in Ukraine) and poor communications with these remote areas made famine less intense in some parts of the region.

Overall, the book is a valuable contribution to the study of famine, underscoring both the similarities between the two communist regimes pursuing utopian ideological goals and the important differences when it came to handling this man-made disaster. A far more modern Soviet Union used famine as a political tool against recalcitrant peasants in Ukraine. In China, the famine resulted not simply from ideological irrationality (the GLF) but also from the inability of the government to cope with the situation. It would be instructive to broaden the scope of comparison by including the cases of other socialist regimes that also provoked famine in the course of their industrialization drive but benefited from the assistance of the USSR or PRC (as in the case of Albania). This assistance minimized the devastating consequences of local famines, which makes one think that it was the absence of foreign assistance and unwillingness to use it that greatly exacerbated the results of famines in the USSR and China.