

The Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine: An Anatomy of the Holodomor, by Stanislav Kulchytsky, tr. Ali Kinsella (Edmonton, AB: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P., 2018; pp. xxvi + 175. C\$31.95).

Under the leadership of Josef Stalin, Moscow launched forced collectivisation across the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1929. The human toll was horrific—between five and nine million people died during the famines sparked by collectivisation—and the burden of suffering uneven. Several groups suffered disproportionately, with Ukrainians and Kazakhs the most prominent examples.

Within the field of Soviet history, the collectivisation famines of the 1930s are a contentious issue. A polemical and long-running debate has raged over the question of whether Stalin used famine to target Ukrainians as a national group, while the Kazakh case, as well as the horrors endured by other

EHR, CXXXV. 575 (August. 2020)

groups, have received comparatively less attention. For many Ukrainians, the Ukrainian famine has become crucial to the creation of national memory. The catastrophe is often known by a shorthand, ‘Holodomor’, an amalgamation of the Ukrainian words *holod* (famine) and *moryty* (kill), and the author, Stanislav Kulchytsky, uses this term in the subtitle of his book.

Kulchytsky is one of the leading Ukrainian historians of the famine, but until the publication of this book, a revised and updated version of a study, *Ukraiïns'kyi holodomor v konteksti polityky Kremlia pochatku 1930 rr* (‘The Ukrainian Holodomor in the Context of Kremlin Policy in the Early 1930s’), first published in 2014 in Ukrainian, none of his books on the Ukrainian famine had been available to readers in English. Now translated by Ali Kinsella, the book offers an English-language readership insight into the tenor of the debate over the Ukrainian famine, as well as an understanding of the way that this discussion has been inflamed by present-day political tensions between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine’s ongoing war with Russia is invoked in the first paragraph of the introduction by Bohdan Klid (p. xi), as well as multiple times in the manuscript itself by the author (pp. xxii and 148). Kulchytsky disavows the idea, popular among some Ukrainian scholars, that the famine can be referred to as a ‘Ukrainian holocaust’ (p. 134) though, for him, the Holocaust is still an important point of comparison, one that he references throughout the book (pp. xx, 140, 143–4).

Kulchytsky argues that the collectivisation famines of the 1930s can be divided up into ‘all-Union famine’ which was followed by ‘the catastrophic famine of 1932–33 in a number of Soviet regions, including the Holodomor in Ukraine’ (p. xx). He begins his narrative with the Bolsheviks’ rise to power, seeking to demonstrate that the root cause of the ‘all-Union famine’ was not just the launch of forced collectivisation in 1929, but the Bolsheviks’ attempt to ‘go over from market to extramarket forms of economic relations between town and country’ more generally (p. 29). But in the last months of 1932, he contends, the character of famine in Ukraine and in the Kuban (a region where Ukrainians were an important ethnic group) shifted, and the Holodomor began. Stalin launched a violent campaign against starving Ukrainians, deploying techniques such as the closure of borders so that the starving could not flee and the ‘blacklisting’ of villages, a severe penalty that included a total ban on trade and deliveries of food. This punitive campaign, Kulchytsky argues, was motivated by Moscow’s desire to quash Ukrainian separatist tendencies. Kulchytsky makes few references to archival sources—though there are many to published works of primary sources—and the book reads more like an extended essay, the culmination of his years of thinking about the famine, than a work of scholarship deeply grounded in the archives.

Kulchytsky calls upon the United Nations to recognise the Ukrainian famine as genocide, but his argument is weakened by the absence of any substantive discussion of how the Ukrainian catastrophe might fit the United Nations definition. As scholars in the field of genocide studies have shown, the United Nations definition is unwieldy, and it can be challenging to shoehorn a particular historical case into the definition. The author tends to critique scholars from the West as a group (pp. xx, 1), but he does not name who he is disagreeing with, or offer a detailed discussion of their arguments. One striking omission is Anne Applebaum’s recent work on the Ukrainian famine, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (2017). Though presumably Kulchytsky

would agree with Applebaum on many issues, she stresses the regime's assault on Ukrainian culture far more than he does (Kulchytsky builds his case largely around the regime's confiscation of grain), and it would have been interesting to know what he made of the difference.

The book is clearly targeted at an audience beyond academic circles. It is illustrated with numerous photographs, and a helpful glossary provides detailed discussions of important terms from the period. But various elements of the book make it challenging for non-specialists to follow: which regions of the Soviet Union suffered devastating famines beyond Ukraine and the Kuban is never clearly explained. Kulchytsky implies that various features of the Ukrainian catastrophe, such as border closures and blacklisting, were unique to the Ukrainian case, while in fact these same techniques were also deployed against starving Kazakhs.

In the book's last chapter, which describes the heart of the Ukrainian famine, the author spends more time condemning the works of various Russian historians than humanising the plight of the starving. Here an opportunity was lost, as the Ukrainian famine should be recognised as one of the great crimes against humanity of the Stalin era.

SARAH CAMERON

University of Maryland, College Park