

The Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine: An Anatomy of the Holodomor. By *Stanislav Kulchytsky*. Translated by *Ali Kinsella*.

Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2018. Pp. xxvi+176. \$31.95.

The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan. By *Sarah Cameron*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv+278. \$49.95.

These two books approach the topic of the Soviet famines from different directions. The Holodomor (the Ukrainian terror-famine of 1932–33) is, by now, a well-studied topic both in the West and in Ukraine itself. The Ukrainian diaspora had kept alive the memory of this Stalinist crime, which became a major component of national identity in independent Ukraine. Stanislav Kulchytsky is a Ukrainian scholar whose distinguished career has spanned many decades; expertly translated into English by Ali Kinsella, his book is a good example of the contemporary Ukrainian historiography of the Holodomor. In contrast, the Kazakh famine of 1930–34 is much less known in the West. In the 2000s the Nazarbayev administration suppressed the discussion of Soviet crimes for fear of spoiling relations with Russia. It was only recently that the topic of the famine became prominent in Kazakhstan—especially after Putin’s dismissive statements in 2014 about Kazakhstan’s independence. Hence, Sarah Cameron’s first book has propelled this American professor to prominence in Kazakhstani mainstream and social media.

However, Cameron is a reluctant builder of national memory. Rather than claiming that Stalinist collectivization crushed the Kazakh people by destroying their traditional nomadic lifestyle, she argues that the modern notions of ethnicity and national territory became established in Kazakhstan precisely after the famine and its population’s forced sedentarization. Cameron sees the wider significance of her research for the field of Soviet history in demonstrating that the Ukrainian famine was not exceptional and that the

all-Union collectivization famines were more than just a war against the peasantry because the Soviet authorities were trying to make Kazakhs precisely into peasants. However, Kulchytsky's book shows that Ukrainian historians today acknowledge the Kazakhstan and Lower Volga famines as distinct murderous outgrowths of the all-Union collectivization famine that can also be considered genocidal. Cameron herself concludes that, according to Raphael Lemkin's original definition of genocide, which includes the political, social, and cultural destruction of a nation or a part of it and which is now widely used by the historians of Ukraine, "the Kazakh famine probably would be considered a genocide" (178).

These books complement each other in many ways. Kulchytsky's starting point is the revolution in Ukraine, which established for the Bolshevik leadership a link between the existence of Ukrainian national governments and the peasantry's staunch resistance to the early attempts at collectivization in 1919. Kulchytsky, who is familiar with Terry Martin's work on *korenizatsiia* (indigenization), sees this Janus-faced policy as both granting Ukrainians certain rights as the titular nationality in their republic and holding them responsible as a group for any resistance, even economic in nature—what he calls the "principle of politicizing ethnicity" (9).

Kulchytsky's first major research question is why there was already a famine in Ukraine in early 1932, when Soviet regions other than Kazakhstan had not experienced any yet. He explains the early onset of starvation as a direct consequence of extremely high quotas for grain requisitioning—higher for Ukraine than for four other major grain-producing areas of the Soviet Union, even though the republic had never produced as much grain as those four taken together. By way of explanation, Kulchytsky points out the one criterion in which Ukraine did outnumber these four regions in 1930: the total number of peasant disturbances. The secret police presented most of them as aimed at the restoration of the Ukrainian People's Republic from the revolutionary period.

Of course, the Kremlin "overestimated rather than underestimated the threat of Ukrainian separatism" (95), but the falseness of Stalin's premise did not make his policies any less harsh. With the all-Union famine underway in the fall of 1932, the dictator blamed it on the victims. Stalin spoke of delivering a "crushing blow" to alleged saboteurs on collective farms, but his attention focused on Ukraine and the North Caucasus, where he replaced the chiefs of the secret police and sent high-profile political emissaries. He also summoned the Ukrainian leadership to the Kremlin for a dressing down. Kulchytsky writes that the Ukrainian Holodomor began in November 1932 with two party and state decrees in the Ukrainian republic both entitled "On the Intensification of Grain Procurements." They established the peasants' obligation to compensate for their failure to deliver the grain with other products, in particular meat or potatoes. On the ground, this soon translated into blanket searches and confiscation of all food—essentially a "punitive campaign" (110) with accompanying political rhetoric often featuring the motif of "education by famine" (113).

Elsewhere, Kulchytsky states that it was Stalin's telegram of January 1, 1933, that "initiated the Ukrainian Holodomor" (115, 143). The Soviet leader demanded that the Ukrainian republic locate the "previously stolen and hidden" grain and apply "the harshest punitive measures" (115) to the farmers. That winter, the excess rural mortality in Ukraine increased fourteen-fold, escalating into the millions. The historian never claims that only Ukraine experienced the confiscation of all food, a blockade of its borders, and the "black-listing" of districts failing to meet the targets. He acknowledges that the North Caucasus and the Lower Volga region, both politically troublesome during the revolution—the latter including the German autonomous republic—experienced most of the same measures, and very high mortality rates (132–33). He even suggests that Russian historians might one day be able to speak openly about a genocide there.

Cameron's optics are wider; she begins with the Russian imperial colonization of what would become Kazakhstan and the early attempts to encourage sedentarization. Her work is also informed by the environmental aspect, which helps the reader understand why, in the unstable environment of arid and semiarid zones with a sharp continental climate, the forcible destruction of nomadic pastoralism was bound to produce a catastrophe.

For much of the 1920s the Bolsheviks seemed to accept pastoral nomadism. Yet, the allegedly high grain prices in Kazakhstan appeared on Stalin's radar during his infamous trip to Siberia in January 1928, which marked the return to forced requisitions, as practiced during the Civil War. Cameron does not connect Stalin's angry telegram to the party bosses in Kazakhstan, with the early start there of a radical transformation in the countryside, but the attack on the "malicious *bais*" there, much like the later one against the kulaks elsewhere in the Soviet Union, wreaked havoc on the traditional economy. The greatest damage came from the conscious decision "to settle and collectivize Kazakh nomads simultaneously" (97). The Soviet leadership saw Kazakhstan as a source of both grain and meat; the region served as the principal supplier of meat to Moscow and Leningrad. The campaign to settle and collectivize the population coincided with the effort to requisition the maximum amount of grain to produce a disaster. The Kazakhs either lost their animal herds to the collective farms or slaughtered them in order to acquire more grain to be delivered to the state.

With the famine beginning in the summer of 1930, the population first rebelled then started fleeing to southern Siberia, from where the authorities forcibly expelled them. The bodies of dying Kazakhs lined the roads to the new mining town of Karaganda, which was being constructed on the lands requisitioned from them. Although the builders of Karaganda came from a nearby Gulag camp, Karlag, and the ranks of "special settlers" exiled from other parts of the Soviet Union, at least they had some food. Beginning in the winter of 1930–31, as many as 200,000 Kazakhs escaped through the barren steppes into the Chinese region of Xinjiang. The Soviet authorities intentionally used brutal force at the border, including mass shootings of refugees, in order to prevent this flight. They also organized raids into Xinjiang, then an unstable region run by warlords.

The authorities have only acknowledged the fact of the famine in the summer of 1932, by which time some 1.5 million of the 6.5 million Kazakhs had died (175). In September, the Kremlin freed—in theory—the nomads from the grain and meat deliveries, but at Stalin's personal urging the requisitioning of grain continued regardless, as did the blacklisting (blockade) of districts that were falling behind—the practice already tried in Ukraine. The slow recovery did not begin until 1934.

In the end, Moscow used the famine "as a means of incorporating the Kazakhs into the party-state" (6). The Soviets celebrated the victory over nomadism as the creation of a modern Kazakh nation—the angle that Cameron privileges. But she also points out that the victory was ambiguous, and not just because of the horrendous loss of human life and some 70 percent of the livestock in the republic. Collective farms often consisted of a single tribal subdivision, and the authorities embraced the seasonal migration of cattle as economically advantageous. The clan system in Kazakhstan outlived the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the Ukrainian and Kazakh cases were not so different after all. In Ukraine, too, the Kremlin attacked a "backward" social group, individual farmers, and used the famine to construct a new nation in a safe ethnographic mode. Kulchytsky's and Cameron's excellent books will be of interest to the general public as well as specialists in Stalinist economic transformations, state violence, and genocide.

SERHY YEKELCHYK

University of Victoria