

# Biopolitics of Knowledgeable Neglect: The Case of Famine in Kazakhstan in 1931-1933

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## Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas kasus kelaparan bersejarah di Kazakhstan tahun 1931-1933 untuk menggambarkan bahwa 'kelaparan' atau 'krisis pangan' terjadi utamanya karena 'pengabaian berpengetahuan' oleh sistem pemerintahan Soviet dalam upayanya mengejar prioritas perkembangan modern. Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi konsep 'kelaparan' melalui Malthusianisme, 'pendekatan hak,' dan konsep 'kelaparan baru.' Kasus ini menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan politik pemerintah Soviet memperburuk kondisi masyarakat pinggiran dan terpinggirkan untuk mencapai prioritas 'kebaikan yang lebih besar' dari kepentingan nasionalnya, terutama industrialisasi dan pembangunan ekonomi modern. Kasus ini menunjukkan bahwa setiap promosi atas 'identitas' dominan, khususnya dalam bentuk pembangunan modern dianggap lebih 'beradab' sehingga secara tidak langsung memiliki kecenderungan terhadap pengucilan dan penindasan kehidupan tradisional masyarakat pinggiran. Secara keseluruhan, artikel ini secara kritis mengeksplorasi 'kelaparan' sebagai masalah biopolitik kompleks dari tindakan publik maupun ketidakadaan tindakan, kegagalan akuntabilitas yang memunculkan 'pengabaian yang berpengetahuan.'

Kata kunci: kelaparan, ketahanan pangan, biopolitik, konstruksi tentang dunia ketiga, modernisasi, industrialisasi Soviet.

## Abstract

This article examines and problematizes the historical case of famine in Kazakhstan between 1931-1933 to illustrate that 'starvation,' 'famine,' or 'food crisis' occurred primarily because of 'knowledgeable neglect' by the Soviet governance to pursue the priorities of modern development. This paper explores the concepts of 'famine' through Malthusianism, 'entitlement approach,' and 'new famine.' The case shows that particular Soviet government policies and political decisions by individual officials worsened the condition of marginalized communities on behalf of the attainment of a 'greater good' of the national government priorities. The case demonstrates that any promotion of a dominant 'identity' exposes the inclination towards exclusion and repression of 'bare life' of peripheral people. Overall, the article critically explores the 'famine' as a complex biopolitical problem of public action or inaction, failure of accountability, and therefore generating 'knowledgeable neglect' of periphery populations.

Keywords: famine, food security, biopolitics, third worldism, modernization, Soviet industrialization.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kazakhs lived at the socio-political frontier of the Russian Empire and maintained a nomadic existence according to four seasons of the harsh Eurasian continental steppe climate. The traditional Kazakhs moved at least four times in a year to 'auls' (villages) rotating to different areas—Kokteu, Zhailau, Kuzdeu, and Kystau—i.e., spring, summer, autumn, and winter pastures. This traditional nomadic practice existed for hundreds, if not thousands, of years in the steppes of Eurasia, whose environmentally sustainable husbandry and pastoralism protected the existence of several generations of

Kazakh tribes without major ethnocide-level food crises. Kazakhs are of Turkic descent speaking Kazakh language and practising a historic mix of traditional Sufi Islam and more institutionalized mosque-centred Sunni Islam of the Hanafi madhhab. Because of their nomadic lifestyle in the climatically harsh steppes of Northern Eurasia, they were unable to settle into a more institutionalized Islamic traditions of their southern neighbours such as Uzbeks and Tajiks, who since 7<sup>th</sup> century AD were Islamized by Arabs invading the Ferghana Valley (Mawarannahr) from Mesopotamia. Proto-Kazakhs had superficial exposure to Islam and persisted with their traditional beliefs and invocations which combined elements of Tengrism, Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism, who combined their Islamic belief with the nomadic proto-Turko-Mongol or Hun traditions of the “harmonious unity between humans and the surrounding world, the blue skies, and endless steppe, and in particular, the helping power of ancestral spirits and the cult of saints and batyrs” (Yemelianova, 2014: 287-289). The migration of settled Muslim Tatars from the city of Kazan in Russia to the Kazakh steppes started in the 18th century under the policy of the Catherine the Great (1762-1796) for “legalisation and management of her Muslim subjects.” Russian Imperial biopolitical governmentality disciplined Kazakhs into ‘civilized’ life with the “persistent erosion of Kazakh nomadism through the official policy of Kazakh settlement;” however, the lifeworld of Kazakhs with nomadic Sufi rituals and traditions of the steppe ended with the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union (Yemelianova, 2014: 286-289).

Kazakhs in 1920-1930s were still culturally quite distinct from the majority Russian ethnics in the west and north and the settled Uzbeks and Tajiks in the south. In the late 1920s, only 23 percent of Kazakhs were entirely sedentary (Pianciola, 2001). As a result of the 1930s collectivization policies for development of Soviet modern agriculture “approximately 38 percent of the total population” deaths in Kazakhstan were “directly attributable to the famine of 1931-1933” (Pianciola, 2001: 237). The magnitude of human suffering becomes even more disturbing as Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan were included into grand Soviet industrialization plans for agricultural expansion and modernization of grain cultivation (Pianciola, 2001). The suffering and death of traditionally nomadic and Muslim Kazakhs seemed to be necessary for the successful modernization, social transformation, and industrial progress of Soviet Union.

Historic changes in the understanding of famine had shaped current perceptions regarding international aid, humanitarianism, and government policies. Famine can be viewed as a consequence of natural disaster, a lack of food production, a disruption of food supply and distribution, a man-made economic, political, or even military instrument. In contrast, the term ‘famine’ as examined in this article refers not only to a passive state suffered by unfortunate mass of persons, but also to a condition created by an authoritative few either through direct intervention or through neglect. Thus, famine as discussed in this paper will be broader in scope than the specific World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) terms of ‘chronic undernutrition’ or ‘hidden hunger.’ FAO and WHO recommend the average energy intake for adults of 2,250 calories a day to sustain light activity. If a person continuously receives less than that amount of calories (depending on climate and physical activity) than he/she would go under the category of ‘chronic undernutrition.’ If a person does not receive the recommended daily amount of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) with the diet, than he/she would be categorized under the ‘hidden hunger’ (Paarlberg, 2010). This paper will show that the widely-held belief in the beneficence of institutional governance may not be sustainable, even if authorities of globally-capable organizations accept the validity of Grotian liberal definitions of ‘rights’ (Stumpf, 2006) and ‘justice’ (Guidance Note of the Secretary General, 2010). Cases of food crises created and worsened by state lapses continue to occur in contemporary society. These may also be linked to the practice of governments to prioritize their systems over the well-being and survival of particular, often marginalized peoples that the systems should serve.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Information from historical materials of the recently-defunct Eastern Bloc points to several issues on institutionally-induced suffering. First, it allows the problem to be located in a context where systems of governance and management other than those of the United States were considered troublesome, inferior, and undesirable particularly by American analysts (Robertson, 1980). Second, the approach allows a thematic exit from the fallacy of composition that discourse on 'identity' seems to imply (Malesevic, 2006); that is, a 'Soviet' identity may not necessarily correspond to a totalizing summary of the negative effects that Soviet governance may have had on its citizens. Third, and crucially, the belief that the passing of the Soviet Union allows the populations of the world to identify with the triumphant, peaceful, and prosperous 'new world order' of neoliberalism and free markets (Freedman, 1992) does not settle the issue that dominant 'identity,' particularly in its modernist form that include 'civilizing' function, reinforces tendencies towards exclusion and repression (Parfitt, 2002).

This is most clearly seen in the rehabilitation of the term 'Third Worldism' to refer to a form of resistance to an American led 'imperialism' (Patel & McMichael, 2004) and to a reference to a 'third world poor' as '*homines sacri*' whose economic upliftment is the moral justification of the 'democratico-capitalist project' that has caused a global imbalance of wealth (Parfitt, 2009). In fact, the term 'Third World' was used originally to refer to a form of social existence that was in transition, rather than in opposition to the capitalist and communist blocs, in the middle of the Cold War (Sauve, 1986). Thus, it is possible to study the problems associated with famine and knowledgeable neglect in order to identify lessons for the present, without the need to create solidarity with the past or to limit the analysis to the perspectives of either the author or the reader. More positively, broadening the ways in which famine can be understood will only bring benefits to those who seek to resolve it regardless of ideological 'identity' (Malesevic, 2006) or institutional system it may represent.

In its simplest form, famine is a disaster that occurs when a "large numbers of people die quickly because they have not had enough food to eat." In these circumstances some people "die from actual starvation—acute wasting—and others die from diseases that attack them in their wasted state" (Parfitt, 2002: 46). The concept of famine has been explained and re-defined through history. The famous examples of famine are the great famine in Europe in 1315-1317, "a combination of warfare, crop failures and epidemics reduced the population by two-thirds" in France during Hundred Years War, and the crop failure due to potato disease in 1845-1849 in Ireland had killed about one million people (Parfitt, 2002: 46-47). The more recent examples in 20th century are the "Bengali famine of 1943, the Leningrad famine of 1941-44, the Chinese Great Leap Forward famine of 1959-61" (Parfitt, 2002: 47). Devereux argues that there is a chronological 'intellectual progression' about the way we think about a famine. He divided the debate into two major categories and called them 'old famine' and 'new famine.' This progression included two major shifts: (1) "from famines as failures of food availability, to failures of access to food" and (2) more recent shift of the discourse toward the "failures of accountability and response" (Devereux, 2007: 9). Malthusian (Malthus, 1798) approaches classified famines as 'acts of God' occurred as natural disasters, resource scarcities, and population growth. However, the contemporary notion of famine and its causes are leaning towards the "acts of man' (they are caused by human action or inaction)" (Devereux, 2007: 11). Even economic aspects of Amartya Sen's 'entitlement approach' (Sen, 1981) to hardship identify factors such as poverty and market failure as essential to understanding the causes of some famine cases. In contemporary times, famines could still be foreseeable and avoidable unless there is a failure of 'public transfers.' The 'new famine' notion is considered "political because they are almost always preventable" (Devereux, 2007: 11).

Thus, the primary question of this paper is, how has the definition and understanding of 'famine' changed? And the secondary question is, what was the impact of this understanding on food politics and historical revisionism of 1930s famine in Kazakhstan? This paper approaches famine as a complex biopolitical concept. The understanding and definition of 'famine' has changed from (1) the notion of 'lack of food' caused by the growing population and limited natural resources, to which the policy-making system and market can only react, to (2) the notion of the political tool for the management of populations through threats and deliberately-induced mass hunger. Correspondingly, the concept of food has also shifted from (1) the idea of a commodity to be maximized in production and to be given full distribution by state and private sector mechanisms to (2) the idea of a resource which may be manipulated by persons in authority to satisfy other political agendas, which may or may not be directly related to nutritional well-being of the population.

The first part of the paper will provide the literature review and critical reflections of 'old famine' and 'new famine' using biopolitical perspective; and the second part of the paper will examine the case of the Soviet famine in Kazakhstan. This paper will use the illustrative case analysis in order to understand and explain the famine from different conceptual perspectives. The case analysis will include the literature review and the archival research of historic documents during the period of 1920s and 1930s to assist in the attempt of social constructivism of the famine concept.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **THEORIES OF 'OLD FAMINE' AND 'NEW FAMINE'**

Among the theories explaining the 'old famine' concept, the most prominent are Malthusianism and the 'entitlement approach' (Devereux, 2007). Malthusianism describes famine as a consequence of two simultaneous events: (1) natural resource usage and food production growth in arithmetic progression and (2) population growth in geometric progression. The result is lack of food for large populations. This explanation has been recently revisited by environmental determinism and neo-Malthusianism (Willis, 2005) that emphasizes the natural resource shortage, environmental degradation, limits for industrial growth, and unsustainable development. In contrast, the 'entitlement approach' have directed the discussions towards the economic issues of underdevelopment, poverty, market failures, and food production (Sen, 1981). Thus, in spite of Devereux's 'old famine' tag, both theories can be useful to discuss the contemporary ecological, demographic, and economic characteristics of famine.

### **Malthusianism and Entitlement Approach**

One of the oldest and most famous explanations of famine was written by the English priest Thomas Malthus in the *Essay on the Principle of Population* published in 1798. Thomas Malthus argued that famine will occur "to regulate population growth and balance the demand for food with food supplies human populations" (Devereux, 2007: 5-6). In other words, the population cannot grow indefinitely and have a comfortable life due to the limited natural resources on the Earth. Thus, Thomas Malthus explained food scarcity using the two propositions about population and natural resources: first, that food is necessary for human existence and, second, population growth may exceed the resources necessary to support human populations (Malthus, 1798). For "every generation, food supply increases the same amount" that leads to the linear pattern of arithmetic growth. However, the population will grow in geometric progression "because in each generation there will be more people to have children" (Willis, 2005: 146-147). This 'mainstreamed' concept of famine (Devereux, 2007: 2) has influenced the technical/technological solutions to food crisis, such as the Green Revolution in the Philippines, Mexico, and India, the Virgin Land Campaign in the Soviet Union, and the UN projects on population

control in the Global South. Moreover, this concept of famine and its political acceptance by the mainstream public policy has improved the funding and prevalence of highly politicized biotechnological and genetic engineering approaches to solutions for food crisis.

Malthus has been criticized particularly for his assumption about the growth of food production. The context of 18th century England shows that he wrote his essay during the early stages of industrial revolution. Malthusianism was dependent on the conditions in pre-industrial agricultural England, which were “defined by the harvests and the seasons, and ruled by small political and social elite” (BBC History On-line, 2013). During the 19th century, the life in Britain dramatically changed due to technological inventions. For example, the invention of steam engine “farm workers made redundant” and caused them to migrate to towns and cities for work in the factories and fast-growing manufacturing (Robinson, 2011). Overall, the industrial revolution brought a massive productivity growth, which included agricultural production. Consequently in the next two hundred years there would be new technologies, agricultural methods, legislation, and public policies that had been developed for food production to prevent and mitigate the food crises. Nevertheless, “just because sufficient food is produced to feed a population does not mean that everyone has access to this food” (Willis, 2005: 147-148).

In 1981, poverty and famines introduced the notion of ‘entitlement to food’. Sen proved through his research of 1974 famine in Bangladesh that famine can occur without food shortage or harvest failures. Even though the harvest might be officially satisfactory on the national and regional level, some individuals and households might not be able to source the food. Famine might happen because of the ‘exchange entitlement decline’ among vulnerable groups in the society (Sen, 1981). The cases of famine in Bangladesh in 1974 and Great Bengal Famine in 1943 showed that “inflation caused by expectations of harvest failure made food unaffordable for market-dependent landless labourers, because wealthy people and traders hoarded rice in anticipation of a shortage.” This speculation and inflation-induced famine resulted in 1.5 million deaths in spite of the availability of food on the national level (Devereux, 2007: 5-6). Sen identified the main factors that determine a person's capacity for ‘exchange entitlement’ during possible famine: (1) if a person can find a job; (2) what a person can earn by selling his non-labour assets, and what food is possible to buy for the amount received from sale; (3) if a person is capable of producing food or related goods (for which food is exchangeable) with his/her own labour power and resources; (4) the cost of purchasing resources and the value of the products a person can sell; (5) the social security benefits a person is legally entitled to and taxes a person must pay (Sen, 1981: 3). The entitlement approach provides a “general framework for analysing famines” with an emphasis on food crisis that occurs on the household levels during positive economic trends on the national and regional level. And most importantly, this framework of analysis provides a conceptual difference between the “decline of food availability and that of direct entitlement to food.” The direct entitlement is focused on the identification of vulnerable households or individuals in the society that maybe at risk of starvation due to the combination of depressing market forces and limited/no support by the public social security system. Thus, the ‘entitlement approach emphasizes the rights of vulnerable population during the time of localized food crisis. Moreover some market forces can only be activated and permitted “through a system of legal relations (ownership rights, contractual obligations, legal exchanges, etc.)” Hence, the law and governance system mediates between food availability and food entitlement (Sen, 1981: 159-162).

When Sen wrote about the famine “most theorists were preoccupied with explaining failures of food supply” and used Malthusian assumptions, which required technical solutions to famine (Devereux, 2007: 9). Thus, this work of Sen was an academic breakthrough for the new ‘development economics’ discourse of famine concept. The criticism of ‘entitlement approach’ to explain famines is limited by the

assumption that government system and regime is to resolve the food crisis, where market failure and consequent 'negative externalities' can be internalized through government intervention and laws/regulations. However, the famines that were "triggered by catastrophic government policies or failures of the humanitarian relief" and often happen in fragile or failed states are beyond the scope of 'entitlement approach' explanation. The entitlement approach fundamentally emphasises the development/welfare economic analysis of famine as a dependent variable of entitlement failure such as "lack of purchasing power" or failures of markets (Devereux, 2007: 10). This approach directed the studies of famines prevention and resolution towards development economics, which analysed the disruption of the food market in terms of the 'supply failure' or 'demand failure' (Devereux, 2007). It has also influenced the mainstream international development initiatives for the improvement of transportation, communications infrastructure for rural communities, and peripheral regions, as well as government regulations and response mechanism to food crisis. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) uses this approach for risk management among vulnerable individuals and households to starvation during food crises in developing countries. The UNDP 'human security' includes the legitimate concerns of ordinary people, such as starvation, disease, and repressions, as well as other sudden and damaging disruptions of daily life. This expanded definition includes seven categories of disruption of human security: economy, food, health, environment, personal safety, community, and politics (UNDP, 1994). The main criticism of this was that the vast scope of categories, including 'food security' (rather than 'famine') may include almost "any kind of unexpected or irregular discomfort could conceivably constitute a threat to one's human security" (Paris, 2001: 89). Despite its limitations, 'human security' institutionalized 'food security' as part of its definition. Thus, the multi-dimensional aspect of 'food security' has been particularly influenced by the theory and practice of development studies (Shaw, 2007).

### **'New Famine'**

The 'new famine' concept has come from the school of thought that could also be called 'critical development studies.' The main criticism of the school was directed towards liberal institutionalist and realist explanations of the failure of peace, development, human security, and other initiatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and governments. In the post-World War II period institutional liberals accepted that the occurrence of market failure results in uneven development, poverty, and environmental degradation. In order to prevent the possible crisis and state failure mostly in the developing countries there should be "some outside involvement... to supplement the market" (Cohn, 2008: 71). This outside involvement is usually in the form of international institutions. The 'institutions' can correspond to international organizations such as UNDP, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN Food and Agriculture (FAO), and World Bank, international NGOs such as Red Cross and Oxfam, or to international regimes often associated with these organizations (Cohn, 2008). On the one hand, liberal institutionalist critique had questioned the realist assumption of the centrality of states, national interests, military, and economic development rather proposing the international institutional setting for cooperation. On the other hand, critical development studies questioned the hidden assumptions and benefits of the donor countries policies with their own national interests. Therefore, the 'new famine' concept has been increasingly focused on the politics of famine prevention and response to food crisis by governments and international organizations. The emphases of the studies have been particularly on "building accountability through democratization, the development of 'social contracts' between governments and citizens, and strengthening the 'right to food' in international law, including

the criminalization of famine” (Devereux, 2007: 2). There are two main characteristics that are unique about ‘new famine’ thinking: (1) an emphasis on the political analysis “as central to explanations of famine causation” and (2) a methodical emphasis on the accountability failures “to prevent famine, rather than on the triggers of food shortage or disrupted access to food” (Devereux, 2007: 7). There are three contemporary authors - Mark Duffield (Duffield, 2007), David Keen (Keen, 2008), Alex de Waal (de Waal, 1997) - who provided the major criticism of the ‘old’ famine’ notions, as well as the international response to government failure according to the mainstream liberal institutionalist discourse of the humanitarian assistance, development, aid politics, and human security. They are often called ‘complex emergencies theorists,’ who developed an alternative way to analyze and explain the vulnerability of people to famine. The main propositions of this framework are that all disasters have winners and losers, and that famine results from the conscious exercise of power in pursuit of gain or advantage (Devereux, 2007). All three ‘complex emergency’ theorists use biopolitics of Foucault to explain the limitations of neo-liberal practice of governments, international organizations and NGOs particularly during the humanitarian disasters, such as famine. For example, Duffield discusses the concept of biopolitics in the context of fragile and failed states (Duffield, 2007). He distinguishes life in the developed and undeveloped worlds as ‘insured’ and ‘uninsured,’ which is protected by government or ‘exposed by it.’ The nature and implication of this biopolitical relationship between states, territories, and populations has been neglected by mainstream academe. He argues that, since the beginning of the twentieth century, different groups, communities, and peoples were made to change their economic and social systems in order “to support and promote collective life.” This brought a biopolitical hierarchy between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ species-life that is determined not only by the wealth but by the welfare governance mechanisms of support for the ‘survival’ of particular population.

For Foucault (2008), the biopolitics is about the transformation from the classical age to the modern age where ‘modern life’ with its systems is discovered and governed. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were two major types of powers: (1) an authoritarian ‘sovereign power’ of kings and queens that allows and disallows life and (2) a ‘disciplinary power’ that trains ‘human-as-machine’ through establishment of institutions for medicine, education, military, and prisons. However from the middle of the eighteenth century there is a new type of power that unleashed on human life - (3) ‘biopower,’ which normatively regulates and improves biological and physiological characteristics of ‘human bodies’ from birth to death on the collective level of population. The biopower expresses itself through institutions of health, sanitation, hygiene, education, and other institutions of population surveillance, safety, and overall security allowing, improving and “managing life rather than threatening to take it away” (Taylor, 2011: 41-54). The arrival of modernity with its technologies, industries, and factory-models had given political powers to ‘civilize,’ ‘discipline,’ and ‘improve’ those human beings left ‘behind’ in the inefficient traditional lifestyles. Therefore, the biopolitics and its governmentality is about the “promotion of the productivity and potentiality of species life” as whole that is “susceptible to historical transformations” in particular geographic locations in order to regulate and administer the life of population to the necessities of ‘biopolitical economy of security’ (Drillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2008: 270-271, 273). Thus, Duffield depicts the ‘complex malfunctioning’ of fragile or failed states that expressed in humanitarian disasters. He argues that the ‘life-form’ in developed world, particularly in Europe, is different from life of people in underdeveloped world by “the degree to which life is supported by a comprehensive mixture of remedial and supportive measures, including public and private insurance-based safety nets, that cover birth, education, employment, health, and pensions” (Duffield, 2007: 5-6). The life of people is consistently managed by the state through the provision of social welfare system to protect the vulnerable or marginalized population. Hence, the effective modern states are assumed to be progressively expanding the knowledge and ability to support life of

population. To realize their population's optimal productive potential, a modern state needs to exercise its biopower by preventing infectious and chronic diseases, by recording the movements of people for their safety, by educating and disciplining for preventative measures, and by insuring all possible risks that cannot be prevented. Keen however shows how 'famine' can be used as a mechanism for political, military, and economic gain of the government or particular rebel/political groups during protracted conflicts, natural calamities, or other humanitarian disasters. He argues it is critical to pay attention to the 'politics of famine' in order to understand the complexities of famine. He uses the example of Ethiopian famine of 1983-1984, where the government of Ethiopia had officially stated that the causes of famine were drought, environmental decline, and overpopulation. However the government decision for militias and army to block the humanitarian relief for famine to communities that supported rebel groups had been a crucial factor for humanitarian disaster (Keen, 2008). Thus, in this case famine was used as a political and military measure for counter-insurgency operation. Some modern famines are therefore were caused by public governance failures or collapses. The environmental factors such as droughts, floods, storms, or political/military factors such as conflicts can be triggers for the food shortage. However, it is the failure of appropriate action or conscious inaction of local, national and international response to food crisis that allows the food shortage to turn into a 'famine' (Devereux, 2007). Moreover, even though the notion of 'right to food' has been part of the international declarations there are still limits to how much accountability can be enforced. Thus, the understanding of the 'new famine' concept provides the recognition of 'famines as a political notion,' which often influence the marginalized societies within the state. Famine can become biopolitical when the regime, regulations, and accountability of the authority fail to prevent or respond to the food crisis rationalizing it as biopolitical 'collateral damage' necessary for national development of the 'majority.' Moreover, the biopolitics of famine becomes international when local, sub-national, or national welfare safety nets and response mechanisms are not able or not willing to handle the food crisis, which escalates it to the involvement of powerful international multilateral institutions and foreign governments.

## **RESULT AND ANALYSES**

### **SOVIET FAMINE OF 1931-1933 IN KAZAKHSTAN**

Famine was one of the major concerns that the Soviet system pledged to resolve because food shortage had been politicized through the very beginning of the USSR creation (Filtzer, 2010). Food shortage was an issue in the World War I, the February and October Revolutions of 1917, and Civil War of 1918-1921. By 1921 the economy of the new country was nearly completely ruined (Peet & Hartwick, 2009). To recover the economy, the state initiated industrialization reforms that had to be financed by the 'primitive capital accumulation' from the agrarian sector of the economy and invested in the greater socialist modernization drive. The rural population nonetheless had only partially supported the industrial agenda and had a limited understanding of the government initiatives. In particular, many herders in Kazakhstan lived nomadic and semi-nomadic lives and were mostly involved in 'qoja-related Sufism' traditions as well as with the more formalized "mosque-centred Sunni Islam of the Hanafi madhhab" practices, which were being introduced by Tatar mullas since 18th century (Yemelianova, 2014: 288-289). The "main bearers of Kazakh Sufi Islam were qojas (Sufi shaykhs) who initially belonged to those *aq suyek* (white bone) who claimed their descent from Muslim saints, from the Four Righteous Caliphs, or even from the Prophet Muhammad himself." The most prominent example of Sufism in Southern Kazakhstan was "Qoja Ahmad Yasawi (1093-1166), the founder of the Yasawiyya," a native of the present day Turkistan city in Southern Kazakhstan (Yemelianova, 2014: 288). Traditional Islamic rituals and nomadic traditions of herdsmen of the Eurasian steppe became

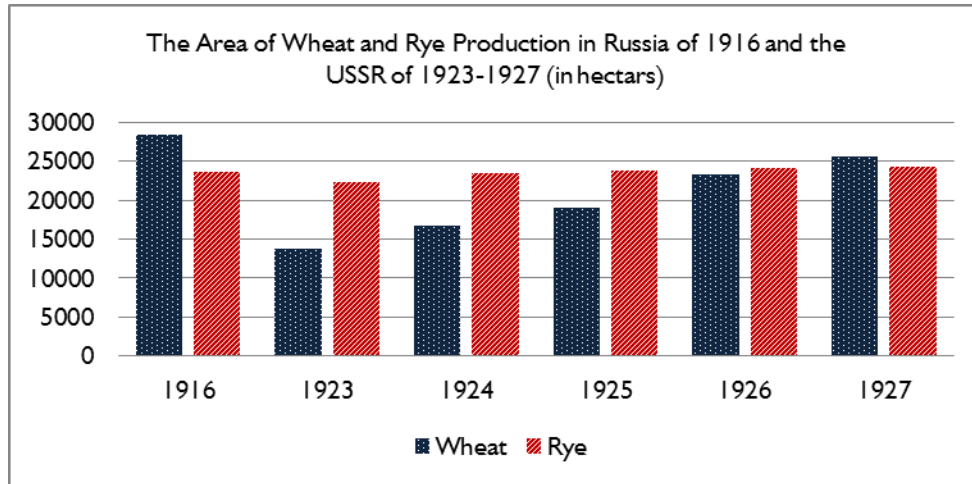


part of the 'Kazakh' identity for several hundred years and are distinct from the identities of other Central Asians and Russians. And "up until the early 1930s, people were not familiar with the Soviet ideology" and the government plans for social modernization and industrialization (Nurtazina, 2011: 105). The prosperous middle-class rural population was formally announced as 'enemy of the Soviet state' and were designated as derogatory 'Kulak' class. The subsequent famine, however, affected not only the Kulak class, but also the large populations in regions of Ukraine, Volga, Ural, Siberia, and in Kazakhstan. The forced economic mobilization and rural collectivization policies resulted in the disastrous famine of 1931-1933 (Filtzer, 2010: 167-168). Foucault's discourse on biopolitics (Foucault, 2008) appears to be appropriate to frame the biopolitical interaction between the central authorities and the peripheral regions of Soviet Union. Devereux wrote that the Soviet famines of the 1920s to the 1940s were "largely attributable to the malevolent or incompetent exercise of state power by authoritarian and unaccountable regimes." The move to 'collectivized farming' included the appropriation of peasant property, the ban of trade and other private enterprises, as well as the lack of responsiveness "to signals of food crisis." Ukraine had politicized the issue of Soviet famine to redefine it as "Stalin's genocidal policies against the Ukraine in the 1930s, [where] famine conditions were deliberately constructed by the state" (Devereux, 2007: 4). However, other regions of the Soviet periphery consider this unfortunate period of collectivization, peasant rebellion (Viola, 1996) and famine (Ivnitskiy, 2009) as a start of Stalinism as a whole, in which socio-economic system of repression (Gregory, 2004) and labour camps (Gregory & Lazarev, 2003) became the norm.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SOVIET FAMINE

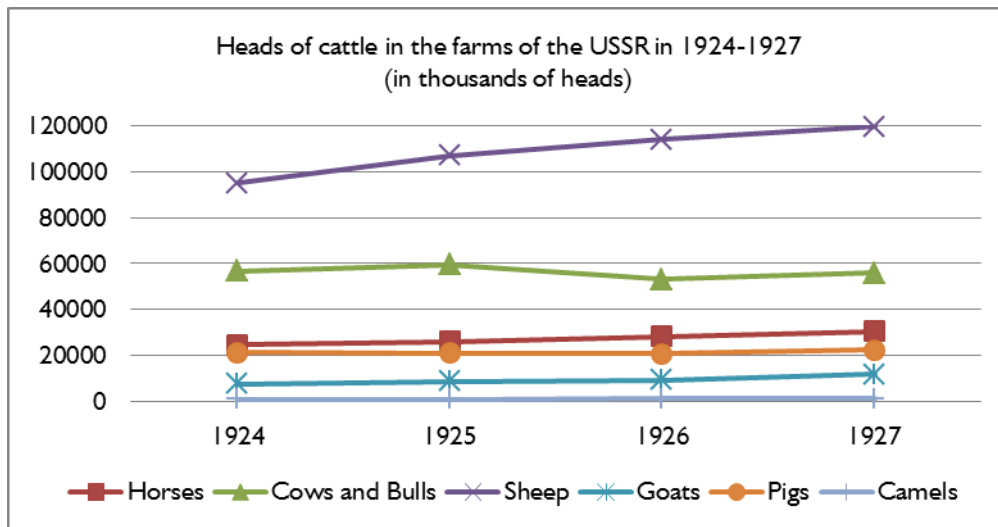
In 1929, the 16th Party Congress made a critical decision "to abandon the New Economic Policy (NEP) for a never-before-tried feat of social engineering." The new initiative was called the Great Breakthrough. This social engineering was about the new Soviet political, social, and economic system of management that included the "complete state ownership and elimination of private economic activities" (Hughes, 1991: 1-2). This change marked a start for the more authoritarian regime, radical economic, and social policies and highly controversial disciplining measures of labour camp system that is now associated with the notion of Stalinism. In contrast, NEP introduced by Lenin with the support of Bukharin was characterized by the mixed economy of private ownership with small and medium enterprises, while the state still controlled banks, international trade, and large industries. If the agricultural production statistics for the period between 1921 and 1927 are compared to the pre-revolutionary production of 1916, then there is a considerable improvement in the food production (Figures 1, 2). The staple foods in the temperate climate are predominantly wheat for bread production and meat. The wheat production drastically fell in 1923 compared to 1916 levels (Figure 1) due to the Revolution and Civil War. However, from the start of NEP until 1927 there was a considerable increase in the area for wheat sowing and in sheep production (Figures 1, 2). The decision to move to a new economic order was the combination of at least three factors that influenced Stalin: (1) Soviet grain crisis of 1927-1928, (2) Stalin's experiences during the trip to Siberia in 1928, and (3) the Capital Accumulation doctrine that was developed by Trotsky and later by Preobrazhensky for rapid industrialization. The grain crisis of 1927-1928 conforms to what may be called a classic Sen 'entitlement approach' crisis. The food crisis occurred because of the combination of government regulation on ceiling price, taxation, and the lack of manufactured goods while oversupply of agricultural goods in the market. The emphasis was on the "practice of compulsory extraction of agricultural production from the peasants" wherein the government purchases agricultural products such as grain from the peasants at artificially low prices (Ertz, 2005: 1-14).

Figure 1. The Area used for wheat and rye production in 1916 in Russia and in 1923-1927 in the USSR



Source: State Statistical Publisher (1930)

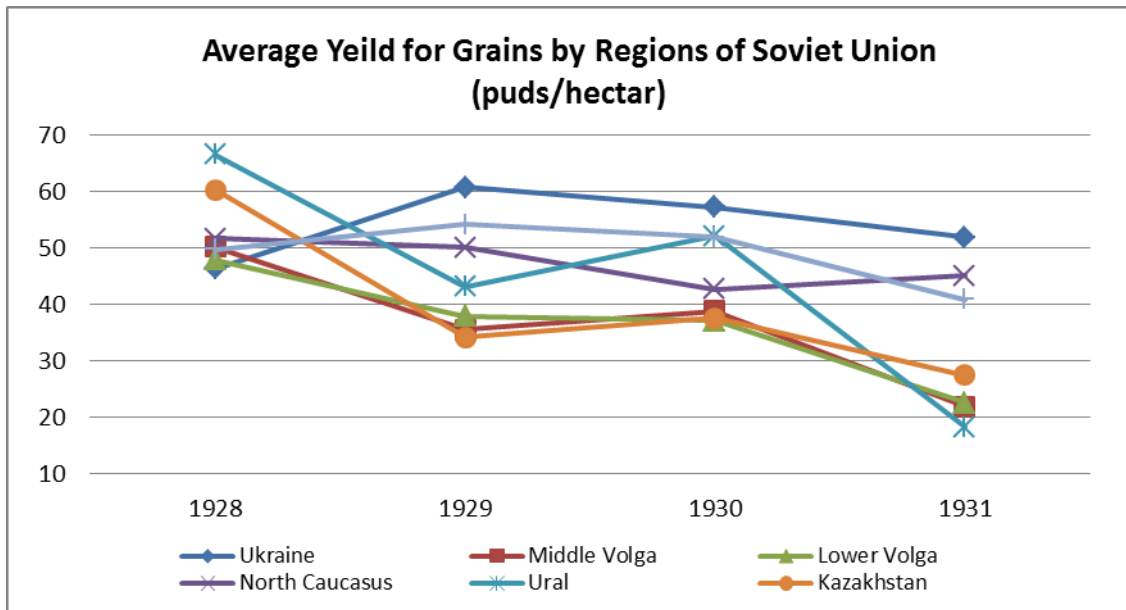
Figure 2. Heads of cattle in the farms of the USSR in 1924-1927 (in thousands of heads)



Source: State Statistical Publisher (1930)

On December 1927, the 15th Party Congress introduced the notion of planned economy. The endorsement of the first five-year plan required the government to accumulate capital for industrialization. In order to lower the level of government spending for centralized grain procurement, the purchasing price was lowered. The recollection of hardship conditions similar to this during World War I resulted in the widespread war scare in late 1927. The war scare and overall negative expectations about the economy caused people to hoard food. To protect the rural communities from further crisis “peasants made the choice to eat more and sell less” (Viola, 1996: 21-22). Despite good harvest and reliable meat production, the outcome was a disastrous underperformance in the national grain procurement. The food crisis was severe in the urbanized industrial centres of the Volga, the Urals, and the Western Siberia even though the harvest had been excellent in these areas. This was because wealthier peasants withheld grain from the market with the expectations that the prices will rise in the next years (Ivnitskiy, 2009).

Figure 3. Average yield for grains (pud/ha)



Source: Ivnitskiy (2009: 68-69)

However the years following 1928 (see Figure 3) would only be worse for the staple food. The food crisis of 1927-1928 was only the beginning of the greater domino-effect of the complex political emergency. Starting from 1929 there were changes in the agricultural system that affected the lives of rural populations more than the events of October Revolution of 1917. The crucial factor for the decision to abandon NEP was Stalin's tour of Siberia in January 1928. Stalin had toured the Siberian region in "search of a quick breakthrough in the crisis." However the overall experience of this trip had made a "negative effect on his outlook towards the (Leninist) program of socialism 'at a snail's pace.'" The trip proved essential to validate his suspicion that the Kulaks in the periphery were withholding food supplies from the market in order to sabotage his regime. The central authorities in Moscow were concerned about the political aspect of the 1927 'entitlement problem' of emergent market failure and increasing inflation for food. Hence, from the Marxist perspective the class struggle had been intensifying into possible political predicament. The livelihood of Siberian rural population was quite satisfactory: NEP had brought "the growth of peasant income in real terms." Hence, there was an increased demand for the industrially manufactured goods among peasants "adding to peasant income, further depleting goods stocks and causing a price inflation spiral" for manufactured and agricultural goods (Hughes, 1991: 98).

Stalin was not content with the combination of issues in Siberia. The prosperity of capitalist entrepreneurship among rural population, the growing real income among agricultural producers and inflation was disruptive for the system. Crucially, there was a lack of industrial development associated with the workers' class. To change this complex trend required a radical reform that could only be implemented rapidly through enforced conformity to a centralized collective 'factory-like' system of agriculture. After all, the Revolution and Civil War had been supported by the industrial factory workers and weary World War I soldiers, but not by peasants who were the majority in the wide Steppes and in Siberia. Hence, Stalin realized that peasants and their life need to be transformed into a new system of 'classless society' with 'depeasantization' of the village (Viola, 1996: 3). Stalin's tour of Siberia had proved that the emergency measures to expropriate the grains and other food from the unruly

peasantry were of a political necessity to maintain a regime and promote industrialization. As a result, there was an agreement for new radicalism and “enthusiastic advocacy of the use of emergency coercive measures against peasants” who failed to conform to the policies. This new radicalism of rapid industrialization had been named as “the second revolution of late 1929” in the Soviet Union (Hughes, 1991: 1-2). Historically, pre-industrial England was able to accumulate the large amount of capital quickly by colonization and gun-boat diplomacy. Therefore, there was a historic precedent of first successful capitalists, who “accumulated capital by stealing from weaker elements of society or as wartime booty” (Gregory, 2004: 29). Thus, Soviet farmers’ agricultural surplus had to be appropriated for investment into the industry. Preobrazhensky clearly identified the source of ‘primitive capital accumulation,’ but he failed to explain the transfer mechanism. His solution was that the state monopolized the purchasing of grains with the low ceiling prices to reduce the peasant income. The state was then to resell the food at higher prices using the profit to fund industrialization (Gregory, 2004). The result was the Great Breakthrough policy approved at the 16th Party Congress. The Five-Year Plan provided the advisory for implementation called ‘On Grain Procurements’ with the “principle of compulsory agricultural deliveries” and the “declaration of war against the more prosperous peasants, the Kulaks” on January 5, 1930. The policy intention was “liquidating” the Kulak as a class. This was the start of colossal industrialization drive of Stalinism through the help of collectivization, labour camps, and prisons (Gregory & Lazarev, 2003: 22-23). It was essential not only for the survival of economic system and political regime, but also for the emerging modernist Soviet citizenship “as the area defining Soviet identity” (Clark, 2011: 9).

## FAMINE IN KAZAKHSTAN

For hundreds of years, the Kazakhs, a people of Turkic origin, maintained a traditional livestock-based economy, a distinct culture, and agricultural practices suited to nomadic lifestyle on the vast pasture lands of Eurasia. The ruthless collectivization program imposed by the Soviet Union on the Kazakh people significantly altered their traditional lifestyle. There are many personal accounts for this traumatic social transformation; one of the most popular is the autobiography *Silent Steppe* (Shayakhmetov, 2007). The forced appropriation of livestock and the aggressive ‘cynical campaign’ for continuous collection of meat from already impoverished herders in the harsh climatic conditions of winter left them with no other options for sustenance (Nurtazina, 2011). The collectivization was implemented by the young urban activists who had limited knowledge about Kazakh indigenous agricultural practices for livestock production. Collectivization proceeded nonetheless, and resulted in slaughter of livestock, suffering, and death among people whose subsistence depended on livestock-raising (Wilber, 1969). The revised ‘Soviet way of living’ obligated Kazakhs to contribute to the development of the ‘New Lands’ under the collective farms systems, namely ‘kolkhoz’ (collective farm) and ‘sovkhoz’ (Soviet farm) systems, and promoted the propaganda of the desirable ‘collective farm worker.’ The socio-economic systems of the predominantly Islamic nomads were regarded as “incompatible with modern materialism and progress” promoted by the Soviet Union (Wheeler, 1957). There are no agreed estimates of how many people died in the famine of 1931-1933 in the Soviet Union and in Kazakhstan. It is even more difficult to estimate how many people died directly because of starvation or associated causes such as diseases and political repressions associated with the subversion of Kazakhs to the Soviet policies.

Zh. Abylkhozhin, M. Kozybaev, and M. Tatimov in their article published on the pages of the All-Soviet-Union journal *Voprosy istorii* in 1989, in which the loss of the Kazakh population was estimated to be about 2 million people, or 49 percent of the population, and the “direct victims of hunger,” in their opinion, comprised 1,750,000 people that made up 42 percent of the Kazakh

ethnic group. B. Tolepbaev and V. Osipov claimed that the number of Kazakhs who died from starvation was between about 1,050,000 and 1,100,000 people; of other ethnic groups of the republic, the figure was between 200,000 and 250,000... V. Mikhailov, the author of the documentary narrative Chronicle of Great Jut in his interview with Radio Azattyq on December 9, 2008, gave a figure of 40 percent. The latest estimation made by the Kazakh demographer M. Tatimov was that 2,137,500 Kazakhs died of hunger and disease, and that the number of refugees from Kazakhstan leaving the country forever was 616,000 people (about 205,000 people left for China, Afghanistan, and Iran). Thus, the loss of the indigenous population in Kazakhstan was 2,635,000 people or 64 percent of the ethnic group (Nurtazina, 2011: 107-108).

Similarly as in Kazakhstan, there is no agreement of how many people died in the famine in Ukraine, Russia, and other parts of the Soviet Union in early 1930s. Kharkova from the Russian Academy of Science published a remarkable comparison of evaluation of famine victims by different authors in the USSR (see Table 1). The list of authors she included in her research did not agree on the number of famine victims. There is also no agreement in the estimates of famine victims in Kazakhstan presented by Nurtazina (2011) in the passage above.

**Table 1. The evaluation of victims of famine in 1931-1933 in the USSR**

Authors	Number of victims, in million people
Lorimer, F., 1946	4,8
Urlanis, B. 1974	2,7
Wheatcroft, S.C., 1981	3-4
Anderson, B. A. and Silver, B.D. ,1985	2-3
Konkvest, R, 1986	8
Maksudov, S., 1982	9,8 ± 3
Tsaplin, V., 1989	3,8
Andreev, E. et al., 1993	7,3
Ivnitskiy, N., 1995	7,5

Source: Kharkova (2003)

Demographic data in the Soviet Union of 1930s had been politicized and most of the openly available information at a time was introduced through the formal speeches of Stalin. The information in the speeches was not consistent and most certainly unreliable. It was only in 1959, six years after the death of Stalin that the Soviet Union completed a comprehensive national census and established a more objective institution for population studies. Vishnevskiy provided an analysis of Stalin's speeches that mentioned demographic data in 1930s. It showed that there was no consistent, complete, and scientific basis for the information that was made available on the exact number of people, mortality, and birth estimates in the state. Below are the examples of the speeches made by Stalin on population.

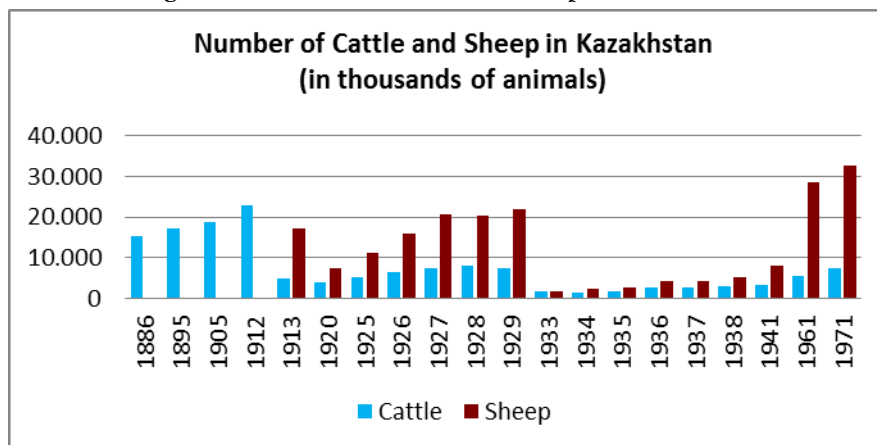
Workers and peasants live here in general not bad, mortality of population decreased in comparison to the pre-war period on 26 percent for adults and on 42.5 percent for children, and annual growth of population here is more than 3 million souls.

What we have for the report period: Population growth of Soviet Union from 160.5 million people in the end of 1930 to 168 million in the end of 1933. Here everyone talks that material conditions of

labourers have considerably improved, that living became better, happier. This is, of course, correct. But this leads to the fact that the population began to multiply much faster than in old time. There are fewer deaths, more fertility, and the net increase is comparatively more (Vishnevskiy, 2003).

Olcott, who published extensively on politics in Kazakhstan, used the mortality estimates of Jasny for 1930s, which show that there were over 1.5 million deaths of Kazakh people. However there were no specifications about the causes of these deaths: either by natural causes, or by starvation or by other causes linked to repressive sanction under the collectivization program (Olcott, 1981). Olcott also estimated that around 80 percent of Kazakh cattle and sheep herds were destroyed in the collectivization campaign between 1928 and 1932. She had also provided data on the number of cattle and sheep that she collected from at least three different sources from late 19th century to mid 20th century with the gaps in information for some years. However, it still provided an overall picture for the tragedy of late 1920s and early 1930s for the predominantly nomadic economy that was dependent on the livestock for subsistence (Olcott, 1981). The information on the cattle and sheep ownership in Kazakhstan with the data gaps as published by Olcott shows that there was a large reduction in livestock numbers in 1933 comparatively to 1929 (Figure 4). The livestock production of traditionally nomadic population had not increased through all 1930s (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Number of cattle and sheep in Kazakhstan



Source: Olcott (1981)

This trend was most certainly linked to the famine and the restrictions that were implemented by the policies of collectivization. People's Commissariat of Agriculture report in 1935 showed a reduction in the number of horses in Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), as well as in Western Siberia, Sverdlovskaya oblast (the Urals), Saratovskiy krai and Stalingradskiy krai (the Volga region). People of Kazakh ASSR and the neighbouring regions of the Urals, the Volga, and Western Siberia historically (former area of Tatar-Mongol 'Golden Horde') placed an enormous emphasis for traditional horse breeding. The drastic reduction of horses in the households meant the economic decline and crisis in the society.

The same report states that "the enormous losses of horses in the farms are caused by sharp class struggle in the period of the socialist reconstruction of agriculture. The Kulak top of the village destroyed not only its own livestock, but also it harmfully encouraged individual peasant farmers by its counterrevolutionary agitation for destruction" (People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the USSR, 1935). However it is doubtful that local people who traditionally valued horses as a symbol of prosperity would consciously destroy them and encourage other peasants to do the same. Most probably, the

reduction was caused by famine. The reason for this 'counterrevolutionary agitation,' 'sabotage' and the destruction of traditionally valued horses was not only famine, but also the collectivization campaign.

For peasants in Kazakhstan the policy of collectivization included the introduction of four different types of collective farms: (1) Communes was an entirely communal collective farm with all land, animals, and capital owned by the farm commune, which did not allow any individual private ownership. (2) Artel was the system when the principle land, animals, and capital were under the control of the collective farm, but the families and households were allowed to have a small private plot and a few animals for personal use. (3) TOZ or Partnership for the public land work was a society for the collective land cultivation, but private ownership of livestock by households was permitted (Male, 1971). (4) State farm or Soviet farm or Sovkhoz, was of "limited importance in the collectivization drive in Kazakhstan and in spring 1930 there were only sixty-two sovkhos in the whole of the republic, and most were in Russian populated regions" (Olcott, 1981: 122). Those farmers who resisted these categories of collective farms were considered 'enemies of State.' Furthermore, the farmers who had to surrender their agricultural produce to the State could only exchange it for the manufactured consumer goods that were not vital during the time of famine.

According to the telegram of Goloshchekin, a Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan to Stalin in October 1932, "...the regional commodity fund for the grain appropriation comprised mainly of the unmarketable goods. Predominantly, there are the summer raincoats, children's shoes, varnished lady's shoes, men's shirts, silk ties." Moreover, in the Akkermirskiy and Nurinskiy regions of Kazakhstan there were "8 boxes of plates, 4 boxes of ash trays, cotton balls, face powder" and other consumer goods that were available by state provision for farmers in exchange for meat and grains in the time of starvation. The telegram explains that these goods were coming from Moscow in exchange for the grain and meat procurements for the Soviet capital. However Goloshchekin complained that "goods lie in the storages" but farmers who surrendered the grain and meat rejected these consumer goods (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2012: 205).

The other telegram to Stalin showed the difficulties with the collectivization reforms in the Southern Kazakhstan and required the permission for the use of repressive measures to settled population with exceptions for the nomadic or semi-nomadic people. There was a disagreement in the regional committees about "methods and repressive measures" used for nomadic population that was "analogous to the accepted [repressive measures] on the directives in the Kuban regions." By November 1932 "there were 19 whole regions and some collective farms in 16 other regions" of Kazakhstan, which were included into the disciplinary 'black board' (Famine in the USSR 1929-1934, Ministry of Internal Affairs 2012: 218-219, 1932)." The disciplinary measures included death penalties, arrests, forced labour, and fines. Stalin replied the next day with another coded telegram, where he considered that the evaluation of Comrade Kakhiani on punishing only settled rural population was "completely incorrect with the given conditions." Apparently, Comrade Kakhiani did not consider that in the recent weeks of grain supply in Kazakhstan "there was irregularly, and this despite the fact that the plan of grain supply is maximally reduced, but debt according to the plan of the procurement is 10 million puds." With such conditions there was a need for punishing all the Communists in the regions, "who are in the captivity of petty-bourgeois elements and Kulaks who sabotage grain provisions." Therefore repressive measures were permitted for the nomadic and semi-nomadic population. Stalin also added that "of course, the matter cannot be limited by repressions, since it is also necessary in parallel to provide the widespread and systematic explanatory work." In other words, there was also the need for the appropriate publicity of the collectivization policy so that rural population would be educated into the Soviet ideology and system (Famine in the USSR 1929-1934, Ministry of Internal Affairs 2012: 220-221, 1932).

The instructions of Stalin demonstrate that famine was not merely an incidental consequence of repressive policies. Mass starvation and hardship were calculated effects that, technically, were aids to socio-economic redistribution and reconstruction in areas where moderate policies would not have brought the desired effects within short time. In this case, there were no natural disruptions in the biosphere or purely market forces disruptions, which would have allowed the use of Malthusian physical/natural or Sen's economic constraints as the key factors for explaining famine. The case of Kazakhstan's famine in the 1930s are most viably explained by the complex political factors attributed to the willingness of Stalin and the Soviet government to risk the construction of a massive and wholly unprecedented socio-economic system, regardless of the cruelty and suffering it entailed on the peripheral population. The biopolitics involved the transformation of the village to a new modernized system of collective agriculture. Those people who rejected the system were punished by death, labour camps, fines, and other repressive measures that included famine.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus, there is a clear distinction between (1) the Malthusian famine related to natural or physical factors (such as population growth, environmental disturbances, lack of natural resources), (2) 'entitlement' famine related to socio-economic and distributive factors (such as market failure, economic, social, or infrastructural obstacles in food supply), and (3) famine related to complex political factors. The case analysis of the Soviet famine in 1931-1933 demonstrated that the cause of famine was largely political even though there were natural (harsh winter conditions in Kazakhstan) and economic factors (underdeveloped infrastructure and government regulation of retail prices) that further aggravated the food crisis. The food insecurity was mainly attributed to the incompetent exercise of biopower by the state with the mission to rapidly industrialize the Soviet economy and society. Also, the regime of Stalin exercised the sovereign power to 'disallow life' and disciplinary power towards peasants who failed to follow the prescribed policies of collectivization. And most importantly, there was an apparent lack of responsiveness and accountability to resolve the consequent food crisis that resulted in famine. Moreover, the telegram communication between Stalin and the supervisors of collectivization in Kazakhstan had shown that there was an approval to use disciplinary repressive measures to those peasants who did not pursue or resisted the collectivization instructions. Thus, famine and associated hardship were deliberate political actions. These actions were necessary in order to appropriate peasants' agricultural production by local authorities to generate and accumulate the financial capital for industrialization drive on the national level. Because there were no obvious catastrophic natural disturbances in the biosphere or devastating market forces disruptions at a time in Kazakhstan, it has not been viable to analyse the famine of 1931-1933 using Malthusian physical or Sen's economic constraints as the key explanatory factors. The case of Soviet famine in the 1930s in Kazakhstan is most clearly explained by the complex biopolitical factors of industrialization and collectivization policies. It was exceptional that the Soviet government and leaders on national, sub-national, and local levels were eager to continue with the industrialization program to build a new socio-economic system in a short period despite the immense suffering that gripped the peripheral rural population.

Hence, collectivization reforms entailed the visible exercise of biopower and disciplinary power by the central and local authorities of the Soviet Union. The biopolitical dynamics involved the conversion of mostly illiterate peasants and their traditional livelihood to a new modernized system of collective agriculture. The collectivized agricultural system was intended to eventually improve the standards of living as well as economic system for the Soviet 'agricultural workers.' However, those farmers who disobeyed the new system were punished by death or disciplined by labour camps, expropriation of all property, large fines, and other repressive measures. Thus, the political controversy included the positive



improvement in urban living conditions and technological development of industrialization on one hand, and the horrendous deterioration of agrarian production and suffering of peasants in the periphery regions on the other hand. There was a convergence of an inherent biopower of the reforms introduced for the population with the disciplinary power used for those peasants who resisted the new system. Furthermore, the government continued the modernization notwithstanding the issues of public accountability, impoverishment of rural population, and deliberate development in 'key regions' at the expense of the 'other regions.' Therefore, the Soviet famine of 1931-1933 can be considered as a complex biopolitical issue of the well-informed leaders, who nonetheless neglected the 'minority' in the periphery in order to build a new and unprecedented modern system according to the agreed government priorities and plans. This new system would support the welfare of the 'majority' population, sustain the country during World War II, and provide an ideational or normative power in the Soviet foreign relations with the rest of 'struggling proletariat,' at the cost of the nearly-forgotten suffering of the Kazakhs just decades before.

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