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The Holodomor in Ukraine and the Asharshylyk in Kazakhstan: A Comparative Analysis of Survival Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is a comparative analysis of the survival practices during the famines of 1932–1933 in Ukraine and 1931–1933 in Kazakhstan. The new materials introduced into the scholarly circulation allowed considering the faminogenic policy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its goals. The authors' perspective on the cause-and-effect relationships of the famine in the two republics has identified the specific survival practices of the Ukrainian and Kazakh peoples. The authors focused on the analysis of behavioural reactions of the population in an extreme situation. The famine determined antisocial and destructive phenomena: child abandonment, disintegration of family and kinship ties, cannibalism, and necrophagy. Definitely, on the one hand, this is a traumatic experience, heavily perceived by the modern society; on the other hand, it is family and generic memory – a frame that preserves the story of the famine. The authors believe that the Kazakh–Ukrainian experience of the collective trauma holds the memory of forced change of lifestyle, resettlement, compulsory labour, food catastrophe and mass deaths from hunger. At the same time Kazakhstan became a homeland for kulak families, Ukraine welcomed bai families from the Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

Keywords

Holodomor, Asharshylyk, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, great famine

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Introduction

Resolution 2417 (2018), adopted by the United Nations Security Council at its 8267th meeting on 24 May 2018, strongly condemns the use of famine deliberately inflicted on civilians as a method of warfare ('Resolution 2417', 2018). This is an important step to ensure human rights in the 21st century since the era of great famines has not been left behind in the 20th century, and new threats of death from famine due to wars threaten humanity and shake its foundations. One of the initiators of the draft resolution, Alex de Waal, a representative of the World Peace Foundation, authored a report on famine, *Operation Starvation* (2017). He analysed the causes of deaths from the famine over the past 147 years and concluded that the main cause was 'political famine' (Waal, 2017). One of the 'political famines' Waal mentioned was 'the Stalinist famine of Ukraine in 1932–34 (now known as the Holodomor)' (Waal, 2017). Andrea Graziosi, referring to Waal's analysis of the relationship between genocide, famine, and mass violence, continues this idea and believes that the so-called 'Soviet famine' is more appropriately considered as separate famines, in particular Holodomor in Ukraine and Asharshylyk in Kazakhstan (Graziosi, 2022, pp. 128–129). All these famines have different causes, geography, periodization, and

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consequences. So, our attempt to compare, find common and different characteristics, as well as to identify interaction during the famine between two distant parts of the former USSR – the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (Kazakh ASSR) and the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (Ukrainian SSR), is perspective for the disclosure of the theme about famines. The authors focused on the study and comparison of survival practices during the famine: emigration, migration, new types of economic activity, and search for atypical food, as well as their socio-cultural consequences. Such a study can enrich the understanding of the socio-economic and cultural anthropology of the famines.

Historiography and Source Base

The famine of 1932–1933, both in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, has an extensive historiography. The first significant contribution to the popularization of the famine theme in 1932–1933 in the academic study of the famine was made by James Mace and Robert Conquest (Andriewsky, 2015). Mace and Conquest introduced into scholarly circulation all available material at that time including archival documents, the research achievements of their predecessors, and the materials of oral history centres. Naturally, these researchers focused their attention on the two largest famines in the USSR: in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. J. Mace pointed out that the famine in Kazakhstan began earlier than in Ukraine and had its own specificity and causes (Mace, 1983). R. Conquest was the first to analyse the causes of the famine in both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, although he paid less attention to the Kazakh famine. Nevertheless, he argued that the key factor intensifying the Kazakh tragedy was the imposition of unfamiliar and untested systems on the existing legal order, stemming from a misunderstanding of the nomadic way of life (Conquest, 1986, p. 198). By the time R. Conquest's book was published, the political situation in the USSR had significantly changed: restructuring and liberalization of public life made it possible to discuss the problem of famine in Ukraine[1] and Kazakhstan in the Soviet scholarly community and gave impetus to the development of the historiography of famines in the world.

One of the first works devoted to the 'Kazakh catastrophe' in its homeland was the publication 'Collectivization in Kazakhstan: The Tragedy of the Peasantry' by Kazakh researchers Zhuldyzbek Abylhozhin, Manash Kozybaev and Makash Tatimov in the large Soviet journal 'Questions of History' (Abylhozhin et al., 1989, pp. 53–71), which was developed into a historical essay in 1992 (Abylhozhin et al., 1992). At the same time, the no less important Soviet journal 'History of the USSR' published an article by the Ukrainian historian Stanislav Kulchytsky, 'Some Problems of the History of Total Collectivization in Ukraine' (Kulchytsky, 1989, pp. 20–36). Although the word 'famine' did not appear in the titles of either article, these articles dealt with the issue centrally.

'Archive Revolution' contributed to a quality reassessment of the historiography of the famine based on previously inaccessible archival sources. The collections of documents on the famine ('Tragediya sovetskoy derevni', 1999–2006; 'Golod v SSSR, 2011–2013', etc.) from Russian archives were published. The large-scale identification and publication of compilations was also conducted in Ukraine: 'Holodomor 1932-1933 rokiv', 2008; 'Natsionalna knyha pamiati zhertv Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini', 2008, etc. The identification and publication of documents on the famine in the archives of Kazakhstan ('Asharshylyk. Golod. 1928–1934', 2021) was conducted. The ethnographic expeditions were organized in Ukraine and Kazakhstan to record oral evidence of the famine (Maniak Collection, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University Collection, etc.). This has great potential for new research within a comparative approach and the study of the anthropological dimension of famine.

The comparative analysis would not have been possible without improving the demographic studies of the famine (Levchuk et al., 2020; 'Pres-reliz Ynstytutu demohrafii i sotsialnykh doslidzhen imeni M. V. Ptukhy', 2018; Rudnytskyi et al., 2020), creation of digital resources ('The Great Famine Project') and dissemination of research results on the Internet. In our study, we rely on the experience of the scholars of famine in Ukraine (Cameron, 2018; Hrynevych, 2021; Kindler, 2017; Kulchytskyi, 2005, 2011, 2013, 2018; Markevich et al., 2024) and Kazakhstan (Ohayon, 2006, 2013; Omarbekov, 2011; Pianciola, 2001, 2022; Sydykov, 2021).

The conclusions of Andrea Graziosi (Graziosi, 2022) on comparing the political causes of the famine in Ukraine and Kazakhstan are important. Since the established tendency of some scholars to consider famine as an all-union phenomenon (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2011, see also Kondrashin, 2018) overlooks differences in the faminogenic policy of the individual Soviet republics, the mechanism of famine, and local experience. Thus, Graziosi, while acknowledging the merits of historians, economists, and lawyers who have made significant efforts to cover the events of the 1932–1933 famine in the Soviet Union and who have made undeniable personal contributions to the study of a topic that had been silenced and marginalized for many decades, insists on a separate study of the famine in the republics of the USSR (Graziosi, 2022, p.129). In turn, Graziosi, using a comparative method, defines the Holodomor in Ukraine as political, directed against the nation, and – in Kazakhstan – as colonial (Graziosi, 2022, p.136). Moreover, researchers of individual famines cannot resist comparing them and finding common and different features. For example, Sarah Cameron, one of the leading researchers of the famine in Kazakhstan, believes that 'In both cases, the regime used very brutal tactics, such as closing borders to prevent

starving people from fleeing. And in each case, the famine disproportionately affected one particular ethnic group. There were also many differences: The Kazakh famine began in the summer of 1930, a full year before the famine occurred in Ukraine. Population flight was much greater in the Kazakh case, as Kazakh nomads used their knowledge of seasonal migration routes to evade repression. And the environment of the Kazakh steppe was quite different from that of Ukraine: it was arid and drought-prone, with poor soils in parts' (Cameron, 2018).

We can conclude that the comparative study of famine is very promising. The so-called 'Union famine' when closely examined and compared in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, in the Urals and Kuban, differs in mechanisms, scale, and consequences. Therefore, the method of comparative analysis is considered more effective. The authors chose the socio-economic and cultural dimension of famine as an under-researched subject. The focus of the research was on the individual, the person in the conditions of famine in everyday life. The analysis of survival practices and memories within the oral and family history, as well as commemorative practices, allows us to understand the historical background of the collective traumatic experience of the Ukrainian and Kazakh people.

To implement the study, the authors use the documents from archival institutions of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation (Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan [AP RK], the Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine) [TSDAHOU], the State Archives of Kherson region [SAKhR], the State Archive of the Novosibirsk region [DANR RF], etc. Electronic collections of documents and published volumes of archival sources are used extensively. An important source for us was the published results re-edited in the ten-volume book 'Asharshylyk' in 2021, which were collected by students of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University under the leadership of Professor Kambarbek Atabaev ('Asharshylyқ', 2021a, pp. 182–183) and materials from the historical and ethnological collection of the East Kazakhstan region made by Professor Svetlana Smagulova. The authors used their own documentary data gathered during the process of collecting oral history materials, as well as fragments of oral history identified in the archival institutions of Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

The Prerequisites, Causes, and Consequences of the Famine

Being within an administrative-territorial space, Soviet peasants were hostages of the agrarian and coercive state, which mobilized agriculture for the large-scale industrial construction of giant plants and factories (Akimbekov, 2021, p. 387). Ukraine and Kazakhstan occupied a special line in the Soviet government's industrial and agricultural modernization plans. Ukraine, having a significant cluster of grain areas, supplied marketable grain, Kazakhstan had grain and livestock areas, supplied marketable grain and meat, becoming a 'strategic meat reserve' (Pianciola, 2022, p. 228, 265). The general phenomenon characterising the causes of the famine for Ukrainian peasants and Kazakh farmers became the continuous confiscation and seizure of food supplies with the inability to replenish their own needs (Kulchytsky, 2005, pp. 225–300), unrealistic procurement plans exceeding several times the capacities of the republics (Kondrashin, 2008, p. 136), the withdrawal of not only the last grain but the last seeds in 1932 (Fitzpatrick, 2008, p. 89). A peculiarity was the confiscation of cattle from nomadic Kazakhs (Omarbekov, 2011). The famine caused a greater blow to nomadic Kazakhs. This may explain the higher percentage of victims in Kazakhstan compared to Ukraine in relation to the total population. Thus, Kazakhstan's direct losses from the famine are 1.26 million people and 12.4% of its total population (In Ukraine, direct losses were 3.9 million people and 11.9%, accordingly ('Pres-reliz Ynstytutu demohrafii i sotsialnykh doslidzhen', 2018, etc.).

We can observe that until 1927 the nomadic family-hierarchical system of Kazakh society did not undergo significant alterations during the change of the state system. 'Little October', initiated by Filipp Goloshchyokin, was aimed at the Sovietization of the aul, at the destruction of traditionalism.

In contrast to Ukraine and most parts of the USSR, the year 1932 in Kazakhstan was marked by drought, which affected grain yields and grazing in 1932, especially in the Aktobe region (Uil, Shyngyrlau, Dzhambeitinsk districts (Western Kazakhstan)) ('Asharshylyk', 2021a, pp. 570–571). Furthermore, the year 1933 in Kazakhstan was also considered a poor harvest due to the drought ('Asharshylyk', 2021a, pp. 587–591, 669–670). Nevertheless, grain and meat procurements continued, despite the famine and mass deaths from starvation, although they were 'reduced'. The difference from the 'reduction' was transferred in the form of 'help', from which, as it turned out, it was still necessary to separate the inviolable sowing fund ('Asharshylyk', 2021a, pp. 711–712). The combination of many reasons of an objective and subjective nature, including natural and climatic ones, led to the 'Kazakh catastrophe'. Brutal weather events were aggravated by the faminogenic factor, the basis of which was a series of collectivization measures. There was a communalization of cattle, which died without proper care and nutrition.

High mortality rates from starvation were observed earlier during the famine of the winter-spring of 1932 (more pronounced in Kazakhstan and less in Ukraine). On July 16, 1932, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) issued a Resolution, 'On the Plan of Grain Procurement by Sector and Crop', which was passed down to the leadership of the Ukrainian

SSR. In response, grain producers in Ukraine: kolkhozes (collective farms), sovkhozes (state farms), and individual farms, opposed the plan. These included open revolts, boycotts of grain procurements, and statements by representatives of local authorities in the Ukrainian SSR about the reduction of grain procurement plans. In party circles, in the materials of the archival and investigative cases of the United State Political Administration, the following events were called the 'kulak rebellion', whose aim was 'sabotage of grain procurements' (Branch archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, f. 6, inv. 1, rec. 45212 (1938)).

It would seem that the Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine 'On Measures to Strengthen Grain Procurement' of November 18, 1932, and the Instruction 'On Combating Kulak Influence in Kolkhozes', approved by the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR 'On Combating Kulak Influence in Kolkhozes' of November 20, 1932, were directed only against collective farms, collective farmers and individual farmers, whose farms and settlements were put on the 'blackboard' for not giving up their bread, that is, against 'saboteurs'. The whole of Ukraine was put on the 'blackboard' because almost all collective farms had 'debts' to the state. In addition, the state accused them in advance of large-scale harbouring bread and other provisions (Kulchytsky, 2018). Kulchytsky rightly considers this Resolution to be the trigger of the tragedy, the genocide of the Ukrainian people committed by the Soviet government.

The end of the famine in Ukraine and Kazakhstan has different reasons. In Ukraine it was the new harvest of 1933, the termination of the practice of 'winter' grain procurements, and the fixing of household plots and private livestock to the peasants. In Kazakhstan, the new harvest also played a role. However, the decisive measures, according to Niccolo Pianciola, were the purchase of livestock from China and the easing of livestock ownership (Pianciola, 2001, p. 243, see also 'Golod v SSSR', 2012, p. 639).

Subsequently, in Ukraine, the decisive attack on national culture in favour of Russification continued, and individual farming was definitively abolished in Ukraine. In Kazakhstan, the ethno-demographic picture had changed significantly, the indigenous population had declined, and the nomadic way of life of the Kazakhs had suffered a crushing blow.

Survival Practices in Times of the Famine

The famine, as a global problem, is considered by researchers as one of the destructive factors of everyday traditional life; one instantly developed new forms of survival strategies based on physiological needs. It is quite natural that the instincts of survival and self-preservation came to the fore, disrupting everyday patterns of behaviour and traditional family ties. Current research considers such survival practices as traumatic experiences (Valent, 1999). Kazakhs and Ukrainians had common and distinct famine survival practices. Their study allows us to determine the characteristics of collective trauma and its consequences.

Economic Practices (New Types of Activity Related to the Famine)

Although the USSR claimed in its basic documents to be a state that represented the interests of workers and peasants, these were declarative slogans. Honest labour meant nothing and did not save them from starvation. Even peasants who worked voluntarily in kolkhozes were not immune to starvation. One of the regional leaders, Mendel Khatayevich, a close associate of Stalin, was forced to admit that the complaints of the collective farmers about the deception of the state in the calculations and robbery were true: '...The trouble is that as a result of the careful removal of "illegally obtained" natural advance payments from collective farmers here and the massive distortions made in the process, we have a very high percentage of collective farmers among the swollen and left entirely without bread, who worked out a large number of labour days (12 March 1933)' ('Golod v SSSR', 2012, p. 171). However, the admission of state fault in M. Khatayevich's secret correspondence with J. Stalin did not change anything for the Ukrainians. Regarding Kazakhstan, Pianciola considers that in the Soviet model of public administration, nomadic peoples were marginalised (on the border of different social groups, systems, cultures and influenced by their conflicting norms of law, values etc.): 'The animals and lands were expropriated by the state, and the herdsmen were excluded as no longer productive servants from the sphere in which the state might have been interested in their survival'. (Pianciola, 2001, pp. 246–247). Forced sedentarisation finally destroyed traditional nomadic farming, threatening their existence. Therefore, the population experiencing conditions of famine chose models of economic behaviour that reality dictated. Consequently, rational adaptability to Soviet reality became a leitmotif for the development of a survival strategy.

Under the conditions of subsequent agrarian transformations, the policy of collectivization, confiscation, and escalation of violence, the rural population had formed new adaptive practices of social behaviour. One of the new forms of economic practice, which received the popular name 'the second serfdom' (Fitzpatrick, 2008, p. 11), was the work on the kolkhoz with the new social status of kolkhoznik. In Ukraine, the level of collectivization in 1934 compared to 1932 increased in areas most affected by the famine: Kyiv region – from 67.3 to 81.3% and Kharkiv region – from 72 to 83.7% (The Great Famine Project, 2014). 75% of Kazakhs continued to engage in nomadic cattle breeding in the early 1920s. In the early 1930s, only 10% of Kazakhs led a purely nomadic life; 15% of Kazakhs at that time had already settled, and the majority were part of semi-nomadic

farms (Ocherki po istorii traditsionnoy struktury kazakhov, 2022, p. 91).

The fulfilment of the government's procurement plans created protest practices such as the refusal to sow grain. 'Bread will still be taken away', said the peasants of the Dnipropetrovsk region in the spring of 1933. They refused to start sowing even though they had received a 'special seed loan' (Fitzpatrick, 2008, p. 86). In addition, the lack of material remuneration for labour caused dissatisfaction with collective farm life. The Kazakhs sold their cattle for nothing or slaughtered them, fearing that cattle would be taken away by procurement officers, or exchanged cattle for grain to fulfil the plan (Abylhozhin et al., 1989).

The change of social status, moving from peasant to worker, from the rural to the industrial sphere, was one of the lifelines of economic practice. Kazakhstan and Ukraine were centres for large-scale industrial plans in coal, mechanical industries, etc. Industrialisation needed manpower, which fled in droves to the cities, but in January 1933, a blockade was established on Ukrainian peasants, who were not allowed to leave their places of residence (TSDAHOU, fund 1, inv. 16, rec. 19, p. 19–21). Refugees from auls and villages fleeing the famine tried to get to industrial and transport facilities. While for Ukrainians, seasonal work at industrial enterprises and construction sites was a common practice, for most Kazakhs, it was a completely new form of social relations, industrial labour cooperation, and a new format of survival. For them, it meant the collapse of the traditional institutional relations of an aul, the atomization of family ties. In both cases, it was not ordinary seasonal work. The reality was that for many of them getting to work in a mine was an opportunity to save their families from starvation. Receiving a ration, a card like a miner's brown bread, which they carried home to their parents and children, gave them hope for the future. In addition to mining work, Kazakhs and Ukrainians worked as labourers on the construction of many industrial facilities, mostly doing primitive hard work in the absence of qualified skills. The population during famine chose models of economic behaviour, which reality dictated.

Starving refugees were employed in jobs that, because of the difficult, unhealthy, and often poorly paid working conditions, always had a shortage of workers and a high turnover of staff. For the most part, the Kazakhs, having no working profession and not knowing the Russian language, were engaged in 'lake salt mining, mowing reeds, removing sewage, etc'. And they were hired for temporary work such as sowing, haymaking, and harvesting (Malysheva & Poznanskij, 1999, p. 176).

In a foreign land, the strong ones survived: those who adapted quickly, or who found new sources of income, food, or changed habits, etc. Local inhabitants of Russian cities in Siberia were astonished by Kazakh women who went out every day to sell milk and small items. They bought milk for two rubles 50 kopecks (the monetary units in the USSR), added 50 kopecks, and sold it for three rubles; the profit as a result from the sale of milk was 50 kopecks (DANR RF, f. II-3, inv. 2, rec. 205, p. 72). Ukrainian women baked korzhyks for sale made from bran, oilcake, and wild cereals, inventing new recipes without flour or butter. These seemingly primitive and energy-consuming practices, which did not bring significant material benefits, were crucial in terms of mobilisation and socialisation. In the terrible conditions of hunger, they helped people to persevere and survive, both for themselves and to save the lives of their children. Those who gave up stopped going outside, were ashamed of their emaciated bodies, ceased to heat the stove, and neglected the care of children and the elderly would die, even if they had reserves of food and firewood. In the memories of children who survived the famine, these practices were highly valued as an expression of love and care.

For those who had kept their family heirlooms of gold and silver, it was time to part with them. The Torgsin store system worked for this purpose, where products and manufactures could be bought at the height of the famine. 'The whole city looked at it with greed. I saw Kirgiz people [as the Kazakhs were called at that time] and Russian peasants bringing to the coveted counter ancient Persian necklaces, and frames of minted silver icons, and for these works of art, rare coins bought by weight, they were paid with flour, chintz, leather', – Victor Serzh wrote about the Orenburg Torgsin[2] (Serzh, 2001, p. 370). In Ukraine, where the main punishment for the non-fulfilment of grain procurements was the prohibition of trade and importation of goods, Torgsins became the last hope to buy the necessary items. One had to make a difficult choice between family memory and death by starvation. However, the unfair prices of the Torgsins also took away such an opportunity for the sake of enriching the state (Kulchytsky, 2018, pp. 120–121).

Migration and Emigration as a Practice of Survival in Times of the Famine

In the 1920s and 1930s, active movements of Soviet citizens, caused both by coercive state evictions of 'unreliable' persons and by forced displacements, were determined by many circumstances. In our case, internal migration and emigration were a survival practice of the Kazakhs and Ukrainians, as an escape for salvation. Kazakh nomads and Ukrainian peasants moving to cities and large industrial centres faced significant difficulties. The first of these was the requirement for documents from the village council of their place of residence, as well as a departure certificate. Such certificates were issued to those wishing to work at Soviet enterprises that were in need of labour. However, during the planting season, preparations for which began in early spring, obtaining such a document and leaving the village was almost impossible. Secondly, the passport system, introduced in December 1932, virtually restricted

the mobility of the rural population. Thirdly, the rationing system, in the absence of work, condemned people to death in urban conditions. Fourthly, departure was strictly regulated and even prohibited. Ukrainians were blocked by a special government decree (Kulchytsky, 2018, pp. 123–124). Paradoxical as it may sound, the Kazakhs, due to their traditional nomadic way of life, fled in auls, families, and groups. Despite the border obstacles and losses in the process of escape, they managed to do the impossible.

The Kazakh intelligentsia wrote about the beginning of the Kazakh exodus and their flight, reporting on their escape to the border regions of the Central Asian republics, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The routes chosen by nomads considered the proximity of the proposed territory and the possibilities for its transit. The nearest areas to Russia and Mongolia were the Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, and Ural regions. People moved to China through the eastern, south-eastern, and southern borders. From the territory of Western and Southern Kazakhstan, they left for Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and further beyond the USSR border lines. To get to external routes, nomads reached railway stations, road routes, and mountain paths. According to eyewitnesses, all roads along which they sought to leave were lined with their bones. During the years of the disaster, 1,030,000 people left Kazakhstan, and subsequently 414,000 returned (Abylhozhin et al., 1989, pp. 53–71). Cameron explains the success of the Kazakhs in nomadism by the geographical location of Kazakhstan: the border with China, and the skills of the Kazakhs – experienced nomads who knew hidden ways. For Ukrainians, the path to Crimea, which at that time was part of the RSFSR and was almost unaffected by the famine, and the path to Western Ukraine, which was part of Poland, were lifesaving. However, only residents of the territories surrounding the borders could take these routes, overcoming considerable difficulties (police raids, border posts). The necessary conditions for success were the availability of transport, provisions for the road, knowledge of the area, and relatives willing to accept and help the emigrants.

The total number of Ukrainians who crossed the border during the 1932–1933 famine is unknown. According to Serhii Humennyi: 'Between 1931 and 1933, along the border section of four intelligence departments (Placówek Wywiadowczych) of the KOP (Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza, Border Guard Corps) in Rakytne, Rivne, Tarnopol, and Chortkiv (under the Lviv Intelligence Exposition), 1,894 refugees and deserters were detained'. (Humennyi, 2021, p. 47). Mr Stronskyi describes the increased control from the Soviet side on the Ukrainian–Polish border, the rise in patrols, and the horrific incidents that occurred with those who attempted to cross the border. Despite some successful practices, refugees and residents of the border regions faced violence and risked their lives when encountering border guards who opened fire on the fugitives (Stronskyi, 2017, pp. 109–110).

Therefore, the number of refugees from Ukraine was significant but still less than in Kazakhstan. Thus, in the territory of the USSR in January 1933, security authorities detained more than 11,000 fugitives from Ukraine, the North Caucasus region, and Kuban (mostly Ukrainians) during a 3-day raid ('Golod v SSSR', 2012, pp. 382–383).

However, not everyone left their homeland voluntarily; this category included the forcibly evicted 'kulaks' (see Kulchytsky, 2018, p. 153) and bai. A Ukrainian diaspora has always lived in Kazakhstan, but repressions conducted in the USSR[3] increased the Ukrainian population in Kazakhstan due to the expelled 'kulaks' (Kuzovova, 2024; Zhanbossinova, 2024). And regarding the plans of the Soviet government to develop cotton growing in Ukraine, natives of Central Asia, including Kazakhs, were exiled to the South of Ukraine for special settlements on state farms to grow cotton ('Spetspereselentsi', 2019). In the photo of the confiscation of bread by employees of the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) (see Kulchytsky, 2018, p. 159) from the workers of Skadovsk cotton farm № 1[4] during the famine of 1932–1933, Ukrainians and Kazakhs can be seen forcibly and sadly posing near the bags with the confiscated bread ('Holodomor, 1932–1933. Kherson Chronicle', Foto 2). During the period of the confiscation of the bai households, divorces initiated by Kazakh women were observed. This was explained not by the Soviet policy of women's emancipation in the East but by the practice of survival and the attempt to remain in the aul among relatives. The disintegration of the clan structure in Kazakh society and the atomisation of the family left women to fend for themselves in matters of survival (Sailaubay & Zhanbossinova, 2024).

Evictions within Ukraine were also used against Ukrainian peasants. Although the authorities were concerned about peasants escaping from their collective farms, they found it useful to expel 'non-beneficial' families to intimidate others. This eviction was often accompanied by the arrest of men who were heads of families and the confiscation of all family property. Women, the elderly, and children left without a breadwinner were victims of starvation. An effective survival practice for peasants threatened with expulsion or exile with confiscation was to suddenly flee to a new place where they could transport their family and valuables by cart to start a new life. Corruption was widespread among Soviet officials, and it was possible to buy the right certificate and save the family ('Holodomor 1932–1933 Rokiv: Zlochyn Vlady – Trahediia Narodu', 2008, pp. 523, 539, 541, 571).

Sometimes men went to the city for work and never returned. They were arrested at train stations and sent to forced labour houses, prisons, and concentration camps, where they starved to death, died on the way, or found new families. Disabled family members left without a

breadwinner also turned to internal migration in search of food. In both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, begging and child homelessness became widespread. Train stations became a place of death for many Ukrainians and Kazakhs who came there hoping to leave or get food. The mobilisation due to migration and emigration gave people self-confidence but did not always have good consequences in the brutal conditions of mass artificial famine.

Food and the Faminogenic Policy of the State

The forced confiscation of all food supplies in the form of fines in kind for failure to fulfil grain procurement plans became 'the calling cards of the Ukrainian Holodomor' (Kulchytsky, 2018, pp. 106–108). The aul and village became hostages to the anti-people policy of the state, which, by confiscating bread and livestock, doomed them to starvation and death. The scale of the famine was the logical result of the destruction of the agricultural market and the peasant community, the elimination of the bai and the kulak. The centralised authority was the only potential source of salvation from the famine. However, the state leadership continued to demand the confiscation of provisions instead of helping. Moreover, local authorities tried to solve problems by providing for the starving. But under the centralised system, the final decision belonged to the central government. The hierarchy of authority and discipline was of greater concern to the central government than the famine (Kindler, 2017, p. 268). There was no specially designed state program to save the starving. Commissions set up under the auspices and supervision of the CC of the AUCPB and the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) of the USSR, after many approvals, were late in providing help, which was often given on a residual principle.

The starving population turned to grazing lands in search of food. The search for food and the consumption of atypical foods became a means of survival during the famine. But it also was a cause of death due to poisonous plants and substances, insufficient heat treatment of food, consumption of surrogates (e.g. molasses), and meat of dead animals infected with cadaveric poison. The mass deaths of young children were caused by the loss of lactation in mothers due to malnutrition, consumption of animal milk, and food mixtures appropriate for babies ('Kis', 2018).

Many children's memories of famine have been preserved. Most of them contain stories of participating in the search for food and 'starvation gatherings'. Like primitive people, they scoured the surroundings of aul or village in search of prey. The common phenomenon in Ukraine and Kazakhstan was catching small rodents and gophers, which children 'poured out' of their burrows (Perga, 2025), beating sparrows with slingshots, and collecting river mollusks. Nearby river channels and lakes were a significant help, where children as well as adults secretly caught gobies and other small fish, set nets, etc. Officially, only fishermen's artels were allowed to catch fish, and they handed over their products to the state.

The memories of descendants describe how their grandfathers and fathers, when they were still small children, used to wander every day in the area near the aul in search of food. They constructed special traps from wild-growing grass and made bows and arrows. To catch hares, rabbits, jerboas, and lizards, traps were constructed. Using the means at hand, they caught mice, birds, and snakes, gathered eggs from nests, and in the mountains, picked wild garlic, spinach, rhubarb, and various herbs ('Asharshylyқ', 2021b, p. 126).

Many respondents were informed about plant food, talking about seeds, bran, and willow branches. Young willow sprouts were cut in spring, finely chopped, and roasted in a cauldron for a long time, which tasted like overcooked seeds from a tree. This food was used to feed the family ('Personal fund of A.S. Zhanbosinova', 2022). Considering that the main diet of the nomadic Kazakhs consisted of meat and dairy products, not all of them were knowledgeable about edible plants, especially those who had migrated to new areas. In Western Siberia, observing the Russian population, they attempted to gather herbs, tasted them, and sometimes suffered poisoning or fell ill with dysentery. Eating '... spikelets of cereals overwintered in the fields under the snow...' people fell ill with '... malignant (or septic) sore throat' (Malysheva, 1996, p. 155).

Although plant food was consumed by Ukrainians, exhaustion forced them to experiment with plants not previously eaten, leading to poisonings, especially among children, unable to process even conditionally non-poisonous plants ('Golod v SSSR', 2012, pp. 662–665). Another deadly effect on children weakened by starvation was the excessive consumption of green leaves from trees and grass, which caused indigestion, dysentery, dehydration, and led to death.

Bread and bread products had become rare 'My father used to get half a cup of wheat because he worked for the government. When I brought it (wheat – author) home, my mother dripped oil, fried it in a cauldron, and gave it to us. Oh, such delicious food... We ate it, mellowing with a sense of taste. When there was no frying fat, my father scattered some wheat on the sheep skin, and we picked and ate the wheat as if looking for lice among the wool' ('Asharshylyқ', 2021b, p. 253).

The analysis of the texts of the respondents interviewed, both in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, allows us to state that people used the meat from dead cattle, sometimes fallen from epidemics, as food. There were even cases when people dug up corpses from cattle graves, caught dogs, ate the waste thrown away by the meat-processing plant, and surrogates. According to J. Krauklis' report, along with surrogates, the Ukrainian population ate the meat of cats and dogs already in February on a large scale. The meat of dead horses was also used for food, which the population takes

apart immediately after death, or it is dug out of cattle graves ('Golod v SSSR', 2012, pp. 662–665). In the process of fleeing, nomads gathered pieces and bits of bread for themselves and their children, as well as bones from fallen animals. They boiled them and ate this broth by gnawing on the bones (Malysheva & Poznanskij, 1999, p. 195). As Iryna Skubii rightly emphasizes, 'Being resourceful, the starving expanded the boundaries of their everyday landscapes and foodway networks into less emotionally but often psychologically uncomfortable areas that challenged the very notion of their humanity, cultural taboos, and social and food norms' (Skubii, 2023, p. 18). For the Kazakhs, the eating of plant food was not typical, and the eating of pork and pork fat was in addition haram (sin). However, at the time of the famine, this became an occasion for racial discrimination: 'Meanwhile, the situation of the European kolkhozes is better than that of the Kazakhs'. Bread, fats, milk, etc., are available there. For example, the kolkhoz 'Eastern Way' in the village of Georgievka in Lenger district has 32 Kazakh, 12 Uzbek, and more than 200 Russian farms; during the fieldwork in brigades, only Russians are provided with fats (pork fat). People do not provide other kinds of fats (instead of pork fat) to the Kazakhs and Uzbeks and do not think about them, despite their demands. In brigades № 3 and 4, where Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Russians work, only the Ukrainians eat semolina soup and porridge for the second meal, while the Kazakhs and Uzbeks eat porridge with water" (DARF, f.1235, inv.141, rec. 1349, p. 1-7). The provision of the 'European' population was several times better, which Graziosi rightly emphasizes as one of the reasons for the high mortality rate among the Kazakh population and reinforces his conclusions about the colonial nature of the famine in Kazakhstan (Graziosi, 2022, p. 136).

Since the famine was concealed by the Soviet government in every possible way, we cannot speak about systematic, permanent assistance to the starving people. If, during the famine of 1921–1923, international organizations assisted in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, then in this case, it was out of the question. In Kazakhstan, at the national and regional levels, aid posts were organized in places of concentration of starving people, in educational institutions, on the outskirts, and at railway stations. In the city of Semipalatinsk, the school building on Uchilischnaya Street was provided for the starving; many of them were unable to move. Every day hot food was delivered here in large cauldrons; soup was served with a slice of brown bread. Starving people lined up, holding tins, glass cans, bowls for soup, that is, whatever they could find. Naturally, they were not satiated with this food and went to beg for more; however, the one-time daily help saved lives ('Sary qıtap', 2020, pp. 71–79).

In rural areas, kinship, tribal, and hierarchical ties played an important role. In the territory of the Aral settlements, people formed brigades of hunters for shooting wild animals, delivering them to the starving population. The names, and personalities of those hunters Bokash Bokayev, Ali Atambekov, and the Bektemisov family of Sara and Katipa, who freely helped and saved the starving on an ongoing basis, have been preserved in the grateful memory of the people ('Sary qıtap', 2020, pp. 86–93). The government explained the ineffectiveness of assistance to the Kazakhs far from the cities by the fact that they were nomadic. The meagre assistance quickly ran out and was immediately distributed predominantly among the settled population, who were engaged in farming. Thus, it could not guarantee survival ('Asharshylyқ', 2021b, pp. 709–711).

For Ukrainians, the only way to get help was to start field work since kitchens were set up on site where collective farmers were given a bowl of 'mash' – wheat or corn flour brewed in water. For children working on the collective farm, children's playgrounds (as kolkhoz and sovkhoz nurseries and kindergartens were called) could be given milk, soup, and small slices of bread. It was not free of charge; the food loan had to be paid back from the new harvest. Most of this help was given to the southern regions of Ukraine. To receive it, people needed to have labour days and survive a search of the whole yard to make the government officials sure that bread was not hidden somewhere. The families of Red Army soldiers also received assistance, but the distribution was carried out slowly and not everyone lived to see it. Thus, through the famine, the state established control over the population's way of life. For people who disagreed or were unable to show such flexibility, there was only one way out – to die.

Children and Family Memory of the Famines

The life and fate of children during the famine, the role of the family, and the practice of family survival can be revealed through the prism of family history. Especially helpful are oral history materials and their analysis based on archival sources. They allow us to show the social and cultural consequences of the famine for Ukrainian and Kazakh families. Numerous eyewitness accounts reflect typical events during the famine and contain value judgments of the children who survived the famine. There are also interdisciplinary studies that identify intergenerational trauma due to the famine (Bezo & Maggi, 2015).

The first level of memory about the events of the famine is the family frame, which consists of structures of generational knowledge. The visualization of the famine was so strong that eyewitnesses carried it through their entire lives. Considering that even in such a tragic situation, as well as in the transition period, children remained children, although their toys were often bones. Human bones, whitened by the sun, are a distinctive feature of the memories of the famine in Kazakhstan and symbolize the Kazakhs who died during the wanderings. The content analysis of the memories of the Kazakhs consists of key expressions: flight, night, moon, exhausted people, and twisted corpses.

The fear of child theft can be considered part of the traumatic memory due to widespread cannibalism ('Map of the Holodomor', 2024) and kidnappings. Children were strictly warned not to leave the yard; they were smeared with clay mixed with dung and kerosene and shaved bald. Our grandmothers probably looked ugly, as they said, but this saved their lives ('Personal fund of A.S. Zhanbosinova', 2022). This fear is characteristic of both Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Cannibalism and necrophagy became a widespread phenomenon; for example, in the Kharkiv region (Ukraine), as of 10.04.1933, 245 cases of cannibalism and necrophagy were recorded (TSDAHOU, f. 1, inv. 20, rec. 6276, p. 47). Children were often the object of such crimes: in the Kyiv region in February 1933, out of 14 cases of cannibalism and necrophagy, 10 victims were children and teenagers (TSDAHOU, f. 1, inv. 20, rec. 6274, p. 104).

The extremely traumatic memories are those of parental choice. The famous Kazakh literary critic Mekemtas Myrzakhmetov first told Mr Mikhailov about the difficult choice a mother had to make between saving her son or daughter. In the spring of 1933, to escape a starvation death, Mr Myrzakhmetov's mother, taking her two small children, her son and daughter, decided to move to an aul closer to her relatives. With her daughter in her arms and leading her son by the hand, she started on her way, but a pack of wolves appeared. They faced the choice of either all dying or leaving one child behind to save the other. The kinship principle inherent in the Kazakh mentality, which prioritizes the salvation of the family through a son, compelled the mother to leave her daughter behind (Kaşıkçı, 2024). This story Mr Myrzakhmetov heard when he was 15 years old ('Asharshylyk', 2021b, p. 114). The girls may also have been sold for food for the family during their migration to China, according to local traditions, a similar story was told by Nŭrziya Qajïbaeva (Kazhibaeva) (Nurtazina, 2012, p. 126).

In both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, most respondents mention that parents were forced to leave their children behind, realizing that in an orphanage, they had a chance to survive. However, orphanages did not guarantee survival, neither in Ukraine nor in Kazakhstan: the documents show that '... in the Semipalatinsk district when examined by a commission, 20 decomposed bodies of children were found in one orphanage in the basement, which were not removed in time due to lack of transportation... From one station, Ayagoz, 300 children were gathered; a Kazakh woman there threw her two children under a train, and in Semipalatinsk, a Kazakh woman threw two children into an ice-hole' ('Istoriya Kazahstana', 1991, p. 216). 'As of June 1, an orphanage with 700 children, including 84 infants, and a children's collector with a capacity of 130 people were organized in the city of Henichesk... The care of sick children is extremely poor, sick children are placed in rooms exposed to draught. Healthy children are together with sick children... Not only the healthy but also the sick children are given raw water. Children are placed on the floor, on mattresses for 4–5 people together. The outerwear is not taken off at night, which contributes to the presence of lice, and clothes are not disinfected. Due to this condition of the orphanage and the collector, 7 children died during the 3 days – May 30, May 31, and June 1. The collector was organized on May 25. On May 27, after the organization of the collector, due to the influx of homeless in the city of Henichesk, a brigade of Komsomol members raided the city to remove all the homeless children, as a result of which 63 homeless children were picked up in one night'. (Natsionalna knyha pamiati, 2008, pp. 499–500).

With no property, no living conditions, and no ability to feed them, the Kazakhs abandoned their children to fate. Unable to bear the cries of their starving children, mothers threw them into the street to freeze to death (DANR RF, f.P-47, inv. 2, rec. 389, p. 14–15, 28–29). In the same situation, there were weak old people who had lost their children and grandchildren and sometimes abandoned to their fate. The age of the older people and children limited their ability to move, and they were forced to scavenge around canteens and stations, picking up scraps. A canteen worker from the village of Glubokoe reported: '... she took the waste from the lunch to the cesspit, met 10 Kazakhs near the pit, who took the waste from her and immediately ate it in front of her eyes...' (GAVKO RK, f. 1, inv.1, rec. 78, p. 100). Orphanages became a home for children of various nationalities, in addition to mastering the Russian language, abandoned children received new names and surnames, quite interesting sounded, such as Tanya Bekzhan, Katya Mukhamet (Malysheva & Poznanskij, 1999, p. 315). The famine had reduced demands on the standard of living; children who had survived the famine were indifferent to the conditions in which they lived. The policy of collectivization ceased to provoke outrage, as the hard, thankless work of parents in individual farming was not only unrewarded but could also serve as a pretext for repression (Kuzovova, 2022, pp. 59–77). To avoid the social stigma of being a kulak or an enemy of the Soviet government, young people continued to avoid their parents and their memories of them. This is how the new 'Soviet' person was constructed: without nationality and a past.

As a result, the generation that survived the Holodomor of 1932–1933, the repressions of 1937–1938, and the Second World War was undemanding of the quality of food, living conditions, and pay conditions. For modern youth, such an experience is morally challenging: knowing that their ancestors endured terrible violence in the past can be deeply traumatic. However, today people try to recreate their family's history. The growing interest in genealogical searches for one's family and roots makes it impossible to forget about the tragedy of the famine.

Conclusions

This article is devoted to a comparative analysis of survival practices during the famines of 1932–1933 in Ukraine and 1931–1933 in Kazakhstan. The new materials introduced into scholarly circulation have made it possible to consider the faminogenic policy in the USSR.

The causes, main events, and consequences of the famines in Ukraine and Kazakhstan were analysed, revealing that each famine had its own peculiarities. In particular, the catastrophic famine in Kazakhstan did not have short periods of stabilization in the summer period. It did not depend on the agricultural season but was caused by the death of cattle, whose number could not be restored in one successful harvest year.

In Ukraine, we can observe the political motive for creating a faminogenic situation: the suppression of resistance to grain procurements, which were recognized as a counter-revolution through the forcible confiscation of bread. In Kazakhstan, the famine is characterised by using the resources of the autochthonous population to achieve external purposes. The traditional nomadic way of the Kazakhs, which did not fit into the Soviet economic system, was destroyed.

The peculiarities of the famines in Ukraine and Kazakhstan determined the success of one or another survival practice. The main survival practices have common and different features. For the Kazakhs, it required migrating to safe regions, while for the Ukrainians, it resulted in leaving the country – though in some cases, their resettlement was forbidden. At the same time, the authorities tried to limit the Kazakhs' possibilities to migrate, however, their nomadic experience helped them to overcome these obstacles. The successful survival practice was internal migration: to industrial enterprises and mines. The experience of the famine forced them to abandon their traditional way of life: the Kazakhs transitioned from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one, while the Ukrainians gave up individual commercial farming and joined collective and state farms.

In conditions of the famine, Ukrainians and Kazakhs were also forced to seek alternative sources of food. The food of starvation – atypical food – for the Kazakhs consisted of vegetable-based food, as both Ukrainians and Kazakhs ate surrogates, including the meat of dead animals. The lack of maternal milk due to lactation loss was fatal for small children, which helps explain the high child mortality during the famine. Hunting skills and the ability to recognize edible and inedible plants helped them to survive. The famine gave rise to asocial and destructive phenomena – abandonment of children, family breakdown, cannibalism, and necrophagy. This is a traumatic experience, which is still hard to perceive.

Kazakhstan and Ukraine share a common experience of surviving the famine. Exiled 'kulaks' from Ukraine arrived in Kazakhstan and exiled bai from Kazakhstan arrived in Ukraine. The former were used for forced labour in agriculture and industry, while the latter were employed in cotton farms. During the famine, they had to endure hardships not only due to the general catastrophic food situation but also to survive as prisoners, whose supply was never a priority.

The way out of the famine in Kazakhstan was linked to a successful harvest, as in Ukraine, but it mainly depended on the purchase of livestock from China. This issue was addressed at the government level. Just as in Ukraine, the Soviet government made forced and temporary concessions regarding grain and meat procurement, ownership of livestock, and use of land plots. Eventually, the Ukrainians' individual farming was limited to homestead plots. While in Kazakhstan, after the destruction of nomadic culture traditions, the ground was prepared for the 'raising of virgin lands'. This has changed both the ethnic and demographic, as well as the ecological image of the countries.

There are also similar and different moments in the collective memory of the famine in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. It is a traumatic experience associated with millions of victims of the famine. Violation of moral norms (abandonment of children and family) and traditional ways of life (transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one for Kazakhs, from individual farming to collective farming for Kazakhs and Ukrainians) for the sake of survival aggravated the trauma. As a result, traumatic images and fears associated with hunger, starvation, cannibalism, and necrophagy were formed. A type of 'new,' 'Soviet man', was formed: people who survived hunger and deprivation became unpretentious, were content with little, tried not to remember their past life, and 'to be like everyone else'. The peculiarity of the traumatic experience for Kazakhstan is seen in the focus on clan-hierarchical connections. Considering the traditional nature of the nomadic culture of the Kazakh people and the important knowledge of generational connections up to the seventh generation. The frame of family memory was destroyed, which was facilitated by mass migrations outside the territory of Kazakhstan. The departure or tragic death of the older generation disrupted the transmission algorithm of the family history. The problem is not only the absence of a source for transferring ancestral memory but also the lack of a recipient, as children who ended up in orphanages lost their roots. Memoirs and oral history are dominated by facts that reflect the cultural trauma associated with the loss of loved ones and the loss of ancestral ties.

New generations of Ukrainians and Kazakhs are seeking a way to heal from collective trauma by restoring family memory and exploring their roots. The current trend of the Ukrainian and Kazakh peoples is the acquisition and restoration of historical memory, learning from the traumatic experiences of the past.

For Ukraine, the famine of 1932–1933 is considered the Holodomor genocide. In Kazakhstan, it is Asharshylyk,

which occupies a special place in the national memory of the Kazakh people.

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Notes

1. Ivan Drach used the word 'Holodomor' for the first time at a congress of Ukrainian writers in 1986 (Shytiuk & Nazarova, 2012, p. 26).
2. Until mid-1925, Orenburg was the capital of the Kazakh ASSR, then it was included in the RSFSR.
3. In 1932, 40 thousand people were arrested just for 'grain procurement' cases, 55% more than in 1930 and 35% in 1931 for similar cases (TSDAHOU, f. 1, inv. 20, rec. 5399, p. 23–24).
4. Modern Kherson region, Ukraine.

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