

Sarah Cameron

The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Mass Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan

While in residence at the Rachel Carson Center, I will be working on a book manuscript, currently entitled *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Mass Violence and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*. This study, which is based upon my recently defended dissertation, examines the causes and consequences of a little-known episode in the history of Stalinist mass violence, the Kazakh famine of 1930–33.

This famine radically altered the demographic and environmental profile of Kazakhstan: Approximately 1.5 million people perished in the Kazakh famine, more than a quarter of the republic's population. The vast majority of the dead were Kazakhs, a Muslim, Turkic-speaking group that practiced pastoral nomadism. Those Kazakhs who survived were forced to settle, or abandon their nomadic way of life for a sedentary one. The disaster thus violently transformed the Kazakh steppe, once populated by nomads and their animal herds, into a Soviet industrial and agrarian landscape.

My study reveals that changes to Kazakhs' pastoral nomadic economy, first begun in the 1870s when the steppe was under Russian imperial rule and then dramatically intensified in the late 1920s under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, led to the Kazakh famine. In the Soviet period, I pay particular attention to the nature of the regime's local-level policy implementation. I find that the Stalinist regime's collaboration with local cadres, many of whom were Kazakhs, shaped both the character and scale of the Kazakh disaster.

During my fellowship term, I plan to expand and revise an existing chapter on the Russian imperial period. This chapter explores how massive peasant colonization of the Kazakh steppe during the nineteenth century provoked important shifts in nomads' consumption habits and trading patterns, making Kazakhs far more vulnerable to famine. I plan to add two new chapters to my book manuscript as well, clarifying the particular nature of the regime's transformation of Kazakh society. One chapter will examine the small number of educated, Russian-speaking Kazakhs who entered the top ranks of the republic's bureaucracy, while the other chapter scrutinizes popular rebellion during the disaster. More generally, I will also be integrating additional secondary literature into my book manuscript, including studies on borderland colonization, the relationship between agrarian and non-agrarian peoples, and comparative famines.