

Hunger and Potatoes

The 1933 Famine in Uzbekistan and Changing Foodways

MARIANNE KAMP

Why and when did Uzbeks start eating potatoes and tomatoes? It is commonly said in Uzbekistan that these foods were adopted fairly recently, and that they were brought by Russians.¹ A food history study can tell us that a product can be known and available, but that does not mean that it will be widely consumed. Oral history interviews conducted with rural Uzbeks from the collectivization generation show links between Uzbekistan's collectivization-related famine and decisions to taste potatoes for the first time, and then to begin growing them.

This article combines findings from oral history interviews with archival sources, making two arguments that emerged as repeated narratives in the stories that elderly Uzbek *dehqons* (sedentary farmers) told about their own experiences: that Uzbekistan's rural communities experienced *ocharchilik* (famine, defined below) in 1933; and that shortages of food convinced some them to eat potatoes and plant potatoes. Oral history accounts tell about drought, and subsequent grain shortfall, across most of Uzbekistan in the spring of 1933; about deaths from starvation and typhus; and about obtaining food in the short term and reevaluating previously unacceptable foods. Remembering a time when ordinary routines of Uzbek rural life were disrupted, the interviewees gave voice to and drew links between collectivization-related famine and its consequences for themselves and people in their communities.

¹ Glenn Mack and Asele Surina, *Food Culture in Russia and Central Asia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), 99.

A brief description of the oral history research project is followed by a short overview of collectivization in Uzbekistan, with a focus on Uzbekistan's quandary: how to increase cotton production while feeding the producers, in an economy dependent on grain imports. The article then defines famine, examines some archival and statistical indicators of famine for Uzbekistan in 1933, and raises Amartya Sen's question about entitlements: who eats and who starves during a famine?

The core of this article uses oral history evidence about famine from lived experience, describing drought, starvation, death, typhus, and the ways that rural Uzbeks struggled to find sustenance in famine conditions. The final section turns to potato resistance and potato adoption, pointing to common threads across many oral history accounts asserting that Uzbeks rejected the potato as a Russian thing, and only gradually accepted it as an ordinary element in Uzbek soups and stews. In the course of our interviews with elderly collective farmers, most remembered adopting the potato to grow and eat, either following the 1933 famine or in the 1940s, during wartime food scarcity. This article adds to a body of scholarship that illuminates foodways in Uzbekistan but asks the historian's core question about change over time, pointing to collectivization's dramatic impact on rural livelihoods as a catalyst for alterations in consumption.²

Oral Histories of Collectivization in Uzbekistan

Oral histories used in this article come from a 2001–4 collaborative research project, in which researchers carried out 120 oral history interviews with 130 respondents in rural communities in seven provinces of Uzbekistan.³ A team of

² K. Sh. Shaniiazov, "O traditsionnoi pishche Uzbekov," *Etnograficheskoe izuchenie byta i kul'tury uzbekov*, ed. Kh. Zieev (Tashkent: Fan, 1972), 96–118; Nancy Rosenberger, *Seeking Food Rights: Nation, Inequality, and Repression in Uzbekistan* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2012), 42–44; Russell Zanca, "Fat and All That: Good Eating the Uzbek Way," in *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, ed. Zanca and Jeff Sahadeo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 178–97; R. R. Nazarov, "Natsional'naia kukhnia Uzbekistana: Traditsii i innovatsii," in *Istoriia edy i traditsii pitaniia narodov mira*, ed. A. V. Pavlovskaiia et al. (Moscow: Tsentr po izucheniiu vzaimodeistviia kul'tur, 2016), 172–83.

³ Uzbekistan has 15 provinces; we interviewed in Namangan, Fergana, Tashkent, Navoyi, Buxoro, Qashqa Daryo, and Xorazm, in primary cotton-growing and primary grain-growing regions, and in one herding region. <MK: In the interview descriptions and text, you use Navoi and Bukhara. Should it be the same here? I've imposed Bukhara and Samarqand, throughout. If it should instead be Buxoro, Navoyi, and Samarkand, please say so, and I'll change them.>

three US and Uzbek researchers (Marianne Kamp, Russell Zanca, Elyor Karimov) worked with a Tashkent-based research group that conducted interviews.⁴ Respondents were men and women born between 1900 and 1925, who joined newly formed kolkhozes in the early 1930s or were children when their parents joined. Interviews, conducted in Uzbek or Tajik, lasted one to three hours, with audio recording. Researchers asked about family farming or farm labor before collectivization, the process of collectivization, changing production, dekulakization, and famine, and they followed up on topics that respondents raised. The oldest respondents mentioned famine in 1917 and 1920; most remembered famine in the early 1930s; and some stressed that hunger was most severe during World War II. We asked them to talk about when they first saw or tried new foods such as potatoes and tomatoes.

These oral history accounts were recorded with members of the youngest generation that lived through and could recall Soviet collectivization, a generation that now has passed away. Coming from diverse economic conditions before collectivization, the people who shared their stories with us had survived all the slings and arrows of a Soviet fortune. Some had thrived on the kolkhoz; some left the kolkhoz. Most depicted a series of hardships lasting until the 1950s, including this episode of famine. In hindsight, contextualizing *ocharchilik* within reflections on a much longer span of time that encompassed rapid collectivization and participation in World War II, they remembered the 1933 famine as a rather brief crisis, with a muted resonance of the emotional turmoil that they must have felt seven decades earlier.

This article is built from topic searches across the whole body of interview transcripts, establishing relationships between stories about famine and changing consumption. To use oral history accounts as historical sources is challenging: the stories that respondents tell today are layered with life experiences, shared narratives, changing ideologies, and official and artistic representations, so that there is no clear line between autobiographical and social or communicative memory. Individual accounts become shared, and

⁴ “Oral Histories of Collectivization in Uzbekistan,” 2001–4, supported by grants from the University of Wyoming and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and by a contract from the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER). Principal investigators Kamp, Zanca, and Karimov, working with *Yosh Olimlar Jamiyati* and with young ethnographers, historians, and sociologists in the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences. Total number of interviews: 120. Number of interviewees: 130.

may become incorporated in or suppressed by collective memories.⁵ Although remembrances of some generationally shared experiences, such as collectivization, were continually shaped by state discourses, others, such as famine, were silenced by state and Party.⁶ This did not prevent people from remembering their own stories of a particular episode of unusual hunger that led to deaths from starvation and from typhus in their communities.

In a 1984 short story, the writer O'tkir Hoshimov related his father's story of the 1933 famine. Hoshimov, as a young child, had asked his father why Uzbeks were taught to handle bread with respect. His father told of his 1933 visit to the Parkent region, where "the famine was worse in the mountains than in the city." In Parkent, Hoshimov's father had witnessed the death of a starving six-year-old boy who had been begging for bread and heard the child's father wish for his own death, saying that "now my child is released from this suffering; three days ago his mother died, and I could not find people to carry her to the cemetery, so I buried her at home." The writer, Hoshimov, commented that "I did not know whether I should believe all of this," but noted that his own visit to Leningrad's cemetery for World War II blockade victims had brought this story of famine in Uzbekistan to mind.⁷

Elderly people shared these stories with their children, but there was no official discussion of this famine in Uzbekistan in 1933 or at any time afterward. The rural people whom we interviewed in the early 2000s were not encountering post-Soviet public narratives about collectivization-related famine in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, or other parts of the Soviet Union, although knowledge of that history shaped our interviewers' questions, such as when an interviewer posed follow-up questions about cannibalism or eating cats. This collection of individual accounts from people who lived through one experience (collectivization) in different regions of one Soviet republic (Uzbekistan) allows me to draw out a thick description of an episode wherein ordinary people's voices and stories, reiterating very similar details, form an image of a widespread famine.

⁵ Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," *Social Research* 75, 1 (2008): 49–72.

⁶ On generationally shared memory, see Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 14–15.

⁷ O'tkir Hoshimov, *Non va Iymon*, 1984, republished 2013 on <http://n.ziyouz.com/portal-haqida/xarita/matbuot/sovet-davri-matbuoti/o-tkir-hoshimov-non-va-iymon-1984>.

Terms: Famine and Hunger

We included a question about ocharchilik in our interview protocol, using an Uzbek word that indicates something beyond what the economist Amartya Sen, in his seminal study of famine, called “regular starvation,” the predictable shortfall that continues to affect many Uzbek agriculturalist families when food stocks are depleted in early spring. Ocharchilik refers to a dramatic decline in food availability due to drought, war, or other unexpected circumstances. This term corresponds to Sen’s definition, relating famine most closely to “a sudden collapse in the level of food consumption,” which leads to deaths from starvation and from famine-related epidemic diseases, typhus in particular.⁸ There is no Uzbek equivalent to the Ukrainian term “Holodomor,” used to recall the collectivization famine and mass death. In talking about ocharchilik, our respondents associated a severe shortfall in their own supplies of food in 1933 with drought in grain-producing regions (Bukhara, Qashqa Daryo, Xorazm, Tashkent), and with a fall in wheat deliveries and soaring food prices in cotton-producing regions (Fergana, Namangan).

Collectivization-related famine was catastrophic in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, but the historian Viktor Kondrashin, using a wide variety of archival documents and oral histories, has convincingly demonstrated that famine was also widespread throughout the Soviet Union in 1933. Epidemic diseases that are associated with famine offer a way to document how widely famine had spread, and in April–June 1933, “an epidemic of typhus struck the industrial zones of Ukraine, the Central Black-Earth region, the lower and central Volga, the North Caucasus, the Urals, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia, as well as Gorkovskii Krai, Tataria, Bashkiria, and Yakutia.”⁹ Kondrashin also notes sharp declines in food availability and increased mortality rates in many Soviet cities and provinces.

We asked respondents questions about survival: what did they eat, and by what means did they find food? Their responses offer an intersection with Sen’s analysis of differential entitlements, an explanation as to why in famine-struck regions in the capitalist world, some people continued to have food, while others starved to death. Sen used “entitlement failure” to analyze the

⁸ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 39, 41, 50, 56.

⁹ Viktor Kondrashin, *Khlebozagotovitel’naia politika v gody pervoi piatiletki i ee rezul’taty (1929–1933 gg.)* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2014), 159, 161.

condition when food production fails and those who produce thus starve. He notes that “most people acquire food by trade, and their starvation can arise from failure of their trade entitlement either because of endowment loss [that is, loss of property and assets, or loss of position] or because of worse terms of trade.”¹⁰ Our interviewees included grain producers, who expected to be able to meet their own food needs, and cotton growers and other agricultural workers, who expected to meet their food needs by trading cotton, money, or labor for grain. Felix Wemheuer, counterintuitively applying Sen’s analysis to the Soviet collectivization famine and China’s Maoist famine, notes that entitlements shaped food distribution, prioritizing some workers over others, and party members over nonparty members.¹¹ In Uzbekistan endowments and entitlements changed with the formation of the kolkhoz: kulak families who always expected to eat well lost land and livelihood, while the kolkhoz chairman (*rais*), the tractor driver, and various others gained positions that allowed them to “command food through the legal means available in the society.”¹² Some interviewees pointed out that their families had better access to the most desired staple food, namely *non* (flat bread baked in a clay oven) made from wheat flour, but most described surviving by consuming things they had previously deemed inedible and by leveraging what Sen would call their “exchange entitlements,” selling off their personal goods.

Collectivization in Uzbekistan

Throughout the 1920s, the Communist Party in the USSR did not pressure Uzbekistan’s *dehqons* to collectivize, but this changed dramatically in November 1929 after Stalin’s announcement of rapid mass collectivization. Although the immediate directives for mass collectivization did not include Uzbekistan, the Uzbek SSR’s (UzSSR’s) Communist Party Executive Committee quickly made known its eagerness to initiate this economic transformation.¹³ “The UzSSR’s agriculture—which is distinguished by its high

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, “Famines,” *World Development*, no. 8 (1980): 613–21, here 617.

¹¹ Felix Wemheuer, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 151.

¹² Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 45.

¹³ Tsentral’nyi komitet Vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol’shevikov) (TsK VKP[b]), “O tempe kollektivizatsii i merakh pomoshchi gosudarstva kolkhoznomu stroitel’stvu,” 5 January 1930, does not include cotton regions in areas for immediate collectivization (http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/History/Article/temp_koll.php). The arrest of a group of Uzbek intellectuals in early November 1929 may have stimulated Uzbekistan’s leaders to

marketability/commercial nature, heavy labor costs and high costs of capital input, and production of a crop [cotton] that primarily goes straight into industrial supply—is an especially auspicious base for collectivization.” The committee called for the collective sector to produce 60 percent of Uzbekistan’s cotton crop within five years, while other sectors would wait until later for collectivization: “all the lands in regions of *mass land provision* ... will be fully utilized by kolkhozes, and kolkhozes will be founded on lands newly opened to agriculture.”¹⁴ “Regions of mass land provision” referred to districts where land reform had been conducted between 1925 and 1929, with commissions confiscating lands above a local norm from the rural wealthy (*kulak/boi*) and redistributing lands to smallholders and farm laborers. In November 1929, there were very few kolkhozes in rural Uzbekistan, but land reform created tens of thousands of beneficiaries whom the Party counted on to dispossess the kulaks and create collective farms.¹⁵

Uzbekistan’s party activists began organizing kolkhozes even before the Party officially declared which districts were targeted for “total” (*sploshnoi*) collectivization: these were primarily in the Fergana Valley, the most densely populated, irrigated, farmed, and highest cotton-producing part of Uzbekistan.¹⁶ Hastily organized kolkhozes rapidly fell apart in the spring of 1930 but then were more carefully reestablished. By late 1931, Uzbekistan had far exceeded its goals for mass collectivization. In the expanded list of mostly cotton-intensive districts slated for total collectivization, kolkhozes enrolled more than 85 percent of households.¹⁷

show such enthusiasm. See Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 373.

¹⁴ “Postanovlenie Iсполnitel’nogo biuro Tsentral’nogo komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov) Uzbekistana ‘O plane kolkhoznogo stroitel’sтва na 1929–30 g.’” 27 November 1929, in *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka: Kollektivizatsiia, raskulachivanie, sylka*, ed. D. A. Alimova and R. T. Shamsutdinov, 3 vols. (Tashkent: Sharq, 2006), 1:26–27 (Doc. 1).
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¹⁵ Beatrice Penati, “Life on the Edge: Border-Making and Agrarian Policies in the Aim District (Eastern Fergana), 1924–1929,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2014): 193–230.

¹⁶ Districts in Uzbekistan scheduled for mass collectivization are listed in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 62, op. 2, d. 2046, l. 51, in *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, 1:74 (Docs. 20–21).

¹⁷ O’zbekiston Respublikasi Markaziy Davlat Arxivi (Uzbekistan State Archive, Tashkent; UzDA) f. R-95, op. 2, d. 186, ll. 8–10, “Svodka o khode kollektivizatsii,” 10 October 1931. For all of Uzbekistan, 888,467 rural households were counted, of which 486,937 were collectivized.
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Defining what collectivization meant for most of Uzbekistan's farming population helps explain this rapidity. The majority of Uzbekistan's rural people were *dehqons*; nomadic herders were a small minority. Most *dehqon* households lived in small villages surrounded by fields and owned fewer than three hectares of land. Activists pressured *dehqons* to sign up for the *kolkhoz*, to join fields (not houses or personal garden plots), contribute draft animals, and farm the land together.¹⁸ Uzbekistan's *dehqons* stayed where they were: they were not resettled and did not lose access to such food sources as their household gardens or fruit trees or to their social networks. Collectivization made working for the *kolkhoz* a poorly paid job; thus it was a substantial change in mode of labor. It was not a substantial change in way of life, residence, or sustenance.

An image of resettlement or of forced sedentarization may dominate our understanding of collectivization in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Efforts to collectivize Kazakhs meant extracting their cattle, reducing their livelihoods, and forcing them to settle, with tragic results—the mass deaths of more than a million people.¹⁹ Khalid cites a collectivization incident in which the Red Army used “tanks, machine guns, and aerial bombardment,” to suppress nomads in Turkmenistan.²⁰ Between 1925 and 1940, forced and voluntary resettlement of highlanders and people from outside Tajikistan brought an estimated 48,000 households to create cotton *kolkhozes* in Tajikistan's river basins, making them reliant on state resources for food and housing.²¹

Collectivization violence in Uzbekistan fell heavily on those who were named as *kulaks*: the historian Rustambek Shamsutdinov estimates that between 1930 and 1933, more than 40,000 *boi* households (in a rural population of 880,000 households) were dispossessed, and most were exiled or resettled.²² Of those, about 10,000 were designated “second-category” *kulaks*

¹⁸ Marianne Kamp and Russell Zanca, “Recollections of Collectivization in Uzbekistan: Stalinism and Local Activism,” *Central Asian Survey* 36, 1 (2017): 55–72.

¹⁹ Sarah Cameron, “The Kazakh Famine of 1930–1933: Current Research and New Directions,” *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 3, 2 (2016): 117–32; Niccolò Pianciola, “Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazakh Herdsmen, 1928–1934,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 45, 1–2 (2004): 137–91.

²⁰ Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*, 364.

²¹ Botakoz Kassymbekova, “Humans as Territory: Forced Resettlement and the Making of Soviet Tajikistan, 1928–1940,” *Central Asian Survey* 30, 3–4 (2011): 349–70, here 350.

²² Rustambek Shamsutdinov, *O'zbekistonda sovetlarning quloqlashtirish siyosati va uning fojeali oqibatlari* (Tashkent: Sharq, 2001), 12.

who were exiled within Uzbekistan, forcibly resettled to undeveloped lands to create sovkhozes. The first-category kulaks were exiled to the North Caucasus or to Ukraine.²³

The vast majority of Uzbek dehqons stayed where they were and continued farming. Some of our respondents spoke of resettling to develop lands by new irrigation canals, but none of Uzbekistan's resettlements resembles, either in scale or in purpose, the accounts from Tajikistan.²⁴ Livelihoods and food supplies were not disrupted by movements of peoples or excessive extractions; rather, famine resulted from drought and from the decline in grain supplies arriving in Uzbekistan's cotton-producing regions from other parts of the USSR.

Grain Imports, Shortages, and Famine

In Uzbekistan's cotton-intensive regions, which included almost all of the Fergana Valley, plus parts of Tashkent, Samarqand, and Bukhara provinces, dehqons planted the majority of their irrigated fields in cotton and purchased most of the wheat that they consumed. In the 1920s, as cotton increased, so did grain imports to Central Asia from Kazakhstan and Russia, from 253,000 tons in 1925 to 549,000 tons in 1928.²⁵ However, a shortfall of imports in 1929 prompted Uzbekistan's leadership to seek ways to increase grain production, even as cotton planting also increased to fulfill Uzbekistan's commitment to Soviet cotton autarky.²⁶ In the 1920s, more grain was planted in irrigated fields than was planted on *lalm-i-kor* (unirrigated/rain-fed) fields. Beginning in 1930, cotton was to be planted on almost all irrigated lands, and an enormous expansion in grain planting called for plowing up previously unfarmed drylands. Unfortunately, *lalm-i-kor* wheat in Uzbekistan's arid

²³ Totals varied from 10,000 to 14,000, with the same documents also noting that at least as many of these "special resettlers" escaped as remained in their places of settlement. See, e.g., "Svedeniia o bezhavshikh i zaderzhannykh spetspereselentsakh za 1930, 1931, 1932 i 1933 gg." (Doc. 311), and "Glavnoe upravlenie lageriami OGPU Tov. Koganu, 'Spravka o kolichestve s/p po kraim i oblastiam'<|>" (Doc. 318), in *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, 2:209, 215.

²⁴ For 1930, planned voluntary resettlement moved 2,650 households to a new irrigation zone within Andijon Province and 1,840 within Xorazm (UzDA f. 430, op. 5, d. 372, ll. 5–7).

²⁵ M. Shatunovskii and S. Zashuk, "Khlebofurazhnyi balans Srednei Azii," *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Srednei Azii*, no. 1 (1929): 78–81.

²⁶ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 2089, l. 74, "O pribytie khleba v Srednei Azii." In 1933, 51.8 percent of Uzbekistan's cultivated land was planted with grain crops, and 38.8 percent with "technical" crops, meaning cotton. See *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo SSSR: Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: TsUNKhU Gosplana SSR, 1934), 178–79 (Table 35).

climate offered only about 40 percent of the productivity of irrigated wheat.²⁷ Expanded grain planting did not mean that Uzbekistan could fulfill its own needs for grain: per capita annual grain consumption in Uzbekistan was estimated at about 186 kilos, and with a population of about 5 million in 1930, Uzbekistan would have required about 930,000 metric tons, a target not consistently met from within Uzbekistan, where wheat was produced largely in Qashqa Daryo, Bukhara, and Samarqand provinces.²⁸

The 1932 and 1933 grain harvests in Uzbekistan were considerably lower than usual; Gosplan stated the harvest was 72 percent of the multiyear average.²⁹ Data on grain harvests for Uzbekistan show unusually low per hectare productivity for grain in 1932 (5.7 ts. per ha.) <MK: what is ts? tons?> and in 1933 (6 ts. per ha.), and problems affected both winter wheat and spring wheat. On about the same amount of unirrigated land, Uzbekistan produced 670,000 tons of grain in 1932; 700,000 in 1933; and 1,400,000 tons (11 ts. per ha.) in 1934.³⁰ Precipitation data from weather stations in Uzbekistan showed lower than average precipitation, especially in the late fall of 1932 and winter of 1933, at Guzar and Shahrisabz in Qashqa Daryo, in Kokand, Urgench, and Tashkent.³¹ While production went down in grain-growing regions in 1932 and 1933, Uzbekistan's cotton-growing regions also

²⁷ Specific data for Sharisabz decline in 1933. See Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AP RF) f. 3, op. 40, d. 88, ll. 96–98, in Viktor Kondrashin, *Golod v SSSR 1929–1934*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Fond “Demokratiia,” 2013), 3:95–96 (Doc. 43). Ikramov pointed to this reduced productivity in an appeal to Stalin for additional grain: “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodstva Uzbekistana I. V. Stalinu,” 30 November 1933 or later, AP RF f. 3, op. 40, d. 90, ll. 122–23, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:217–19 (Doc. 156). G. N. Vinogradov (“Irrigatsiia v doline Kashka-dar’i,” *Trudy Sredneaziatskogo nauchno-issledovatel’skogo instituta irrigatsii*, no. 29 [1935]) points out that some districts significantly decreased grain cultivation and increased cotton (47–48) but supports the decrease in per hectare productivity of grain in 1932 and 1933 (50).

²⁸ On these estimates, see Shatunovskii and Zashuk, “Khlebofurazhnyi balans Srednei Azii,” 79.

²⁹ *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel’stvo SSSR*, 204–5 (Table 45), and 206–7 (Table 46).

³⁰ “Posevnaia ploshchad’, urozhainost’ i obshchie razmery urozhaiia vsekh zernovykh kul’tur po vsem kategoriiam khoziaistv v 1913, 1928, 1932–1944 gg.,” *Istoricheskie materialy* (<http://istmat.info/node/46315>): tables for grain production in 1930s Central Asia from Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE) f. 1562, op. 329, d. 1409, ll. 1–193, here 11.

³¹ M. W. Williams and V. G. Konovalov, “Central Asian Temperature and Precipitation Data, 1879–2003,” *USA National Snow and Ice Data*, 2008 (ftp://sidads.colorado.edu/pub/DATASETS/NOAA/G02174/Appendix_7_1.txt). Precipitation timing and form, not indicated in the database, are important. Winter mountain precipitation that falls as rain, not snow, leads to irrigation shortfalls in spring and summer.

experienced shortfalls in grain imports. The Central Asian organizations such as Aziikhleb that were responsible for purchasing grain and sending it to grain-deficit regions could not guarantee delivery; after collectivization began some of the grain loaded onto trains in Russia was diverted before reaching Central Asia.³²

Another way to feed Uzbekistan was to produce other food crops for local consumption. Uzbekistan's party leader Akmal Ikramov sent a telegram to Iosif Stalin in April 1931, discussing Uzbekistan's plan to ban exports of vegetables: "The Central Asia bureau and the Uzbekistan Central Committee are consciously expanding food plantings with the goal of expanding cotton planting. We consider that in the conditions of intensifying cotton, cabbage and potatoes are essential."³³ Ikramov's attention to potatoes, a crop that until collectivization was raised only in Tashkent Province, merits further discussion below.

From 1930 through 1932, most of the Uzbek leadership's complaints to Moscow regarding shortfalls in grain imports stressed economic consequences: grain had been promised to kolkhoz members, and if it could not be delivered, kolkhozes would fail to produce the desired cotton. In May 1932, Uzbekistan's first year of falling grain production, Moscow made a large purchase of grain from Persia, and from May through July there were rapid exchanges of requests for that Persian wheat, including proposals for taking wheat from areas of Central Asia to provide to Kazakhstan, then replacing the Central Asian shortfalls with the Persian wheat.³⁴ But in 1933, the tenor of missives from Uzbekistan's leadership changed when Uzbekistan experienced a springtime famine. In March, Ikramov sent Stalin a telegram asking for seed wheat: "In those regions that did not meet harvest goals due to drought ... the condition of kolkhoz members and individual farmers is extremely bad, and there are cases of death from starvation."³⁵

³² RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 2013, l. 93.

³³ Ibid., d. 2157, l. 285, 19 April 1931.

³⁴ Kondrashin, *Golod v SSSR*, 2:193–98, 250, 257, 262, 267–68.

³⁵ "Shifrotelegramma sekretaria TsK KP(b) Uzbekistana A. I. Ikramova I. V. Stalinu o prodovol'stvennoi pomoshchi neurozhainym raionam," 6 March 1933, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:463 (Doc. 379).

Official Accountings: Histories of Uzbekistan's Collectivization and Statistical Records

In studies of collectivization, there has been little attention to famine in Uzbekistan. Rakhima Aminova did not include famine in her multivolume Soviet-period comprehensive history of agricultural transformation and collectivization in Uzbekistan, but in 1989 she mentioned it: "A direct result of collectivization in Central Asia was the mass hunger [*golod*] of 1933."³⁶ The leading post-Soviet historian of Uzbekistan's collectivization, Rustam Shamsutdinov, writes, "it should be remembered that in 1933, due to crop loss and famine, thousands or hundreds of thousands of people perished from hunger."³⁷ Shamsutdinov exhaustively researched dekulakization, which he calls the tragedy of collectivization, but did not focus on the sorts of documents that reveal conditions on kolkhozes, productivity, food supply, or the ways in which collectivization affected the lives of the majority of Uzbek *dehqons*.

Direct statistical evidence on population growth or excess deaths is lacking for Uzbekistan for the famine year. The Soviet Statistical Commission (TsUNKhU), in a secret report on the USSR's population losses for 1932–33, explicitly excluded Uzbekistan because they had no foundational data, as city registry (ZAGS) offices were opening in rural communities for the first time in 1933.³⁸ The Statistical Directorate complained that "there is no recording of births and deaths in villages in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Kara-kalpakia: that is, in those regions where in 1933 matters with births and deaths were more positive than in Ukraine and the North Caucasus."³⁹ Kondrashin's review of mortality data, which exists only for Uzbekistan's largest cities, shows a substantially higher death rate in 1933, at

³⁶ R. Kh. Aminova, "Agrarnye preobrazovaniia v Uzbekistane 20-kh godov," *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, no. 9 (1989): 32–39, here 38. Aminova's *Pobeda kolkhoznogo stroia v Uzbekistane (1933–1941 gg.)* (Tashkent: Fan, 1981) makes no mention at all of food shortages, and neither does her edited volume *Istoriia kolkhozov i sovkhovov Uzbekistana: Istoricheskie ocherki* (Tashkent: Mekhnat, 1989).

³⁷ Shamsutdinov, *O'zbekistonda sovetlarning*, 7. Shamsutdinov and Alimova, *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, maintains a laser-like focus on dekulakization and exile, as do his related monographs.

³⁸ "Spravka nachal'nika Sektora naseleniia...", 31 March 1934, RGAE f. 1562, op. 329, d. 132, ll. 56–66, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:594–608 (Doc. 499).

³⁹ "Dokladnaia zapiska zamestitel' nachal'nika Otdel naseleniia...", 14 March 1937, AP RF f. 3, op. 56, d. 15, ll. 62–68, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:646 (Doc. 514).

22.8 per thousand, than the 16 to 18 per thousand that might have been expected in a nonfamine year.⁴⁰

While the kind of direct data on famine-related deaths that can be produced for other parts of the USSR did not exist for rural Uzbekistan, indirect measures show that famine had no noticeable impact on population, other than, perhaps, on very young children. The 1939 census indicates that Uzbekistan's total population had grown significantly since the 1926 census. (See Table 1.)⁴¹ During that period, there were known, recorded decreases in Uzbekistan's rural Uzbek and Tajik population: tens of thousands left for Afghanistan; at least 30,000 kulak family members were exiled to Ukraine and the North Caucasus; and tens of thousands resettled to Tajikistan voluntarily and to flee dekulakization. Even considering those losses, which may have amounted to several hundred thousand, the rural Uzbek population increased.

<TABLE 1 NEAR HERE>

A different indicator for famine-related mortality is data on age cohorts for Uzbekistan from the 1939 census, wherein household heads were asked the ages of their living children (Table 2).

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This cohort data is retrospective, based on a parent's report, in a society where birthdays were not celebrated; and any child born in this cohort who died before the year 1939 was not reported. The data, showing substantial declines in cohorts for 1933 and 1934, suggests a correlation between the famine period and reduced live births and/or reduced infant survival rates.⁴²

⁴⁰ Viktor Kondrashin, "Pokazateli demograficheskogo krizisa v period goloda," in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:751.

⁴¹ *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda Uzbekskoi SSR* (Moscow: Gosizdat 1962; repr. Nendeln: Kraus Reprints, 1975), 11 (Table 1: Historical Figures); "Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1926 goda," *Demoskop Weekly* (http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_26.php); "Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 g.," Table f. 15a, *Demoskop Weekly* (http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php).

⁴² "Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 g.," table showing rural population in Uzbekistan. Immigration increased urban populations more than rural ones in the 1930s, though urban populations also show a nadir at age five. Previous censuses in Central Asia show "clustering," meaning overrepresentation, at ages five and ten, making the low number at age five here more striking (http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_age_39.php). Stephen G. Wheatcroft uses similar data from Saratov to point toward a "natality crisis" related to famine in 1921 ("Famine and Epidemic Crises in Russia, 1918–1922: The Case of Saratov," *Annales de démographie historique: Mères et nourrissons* [1983]: 329–52).

To sum up the statistical data, while increased mortality can be shown for Uzbekistan's cities in 1933, and there may have been a famine-related decline in infant survival rates, there is no glaring trace of famine-related death in Uzbekistan's population statistics. A famine that did not produce mass deaths nonetheless remains in memory and may have other physical impacts on populations, as studies of the Netherlands' "Hunger Winter" of 1944 have demonstrated.⁴³

Eyewitnesses to Famine Deaths

While historical studies have been silent on famine in Uzbekistan, and searches in archives reveal only scattered indications of food scarcity, oral histories with those who were alive during this time of hardship offer visceral glimpses of famine-related deaths in communities across Uzbekistan.

Respondents recalled that the first indication of trouble was that many Kazakhs were arriving in their communities, fleeing hunger. Xurram X., from Qashqa Daryo, said, "I remember that in 1933 there was famine, and a number of Kazakhs came to our kolkhoz and stayed because they had nothing to eat. They stayed five or six months and then returned to their homes."⁴⁴ Abdullo F.'s recollections were similar: "In the famine ... it began with Kazakhs coming. Their land had all dried up, so they came to Uzbekistan, driving herds of cattle."⁴⁵ A Bukhara Province dehqon, Faizi S., said: "In 1933 a lot of people came from Kazakhstan, because of famine. Between *vabo* (typhus) and ocharchilik, many of them died in our villages."⁴⁶ A. K., from Tashkent Province, noted: "The famine started in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs then came here, to our streets. The more that came, the worse it got, and many of them died."⁴⁷ Other respondents mentioned desperate Kazakhs selling their

⁴³ The "Hunger Winter" of 1944, when Dutch food supplies were suddenly reduced by war, may have killed 20,000 people directly from starvation, in a population of 12,000,000, but it also left other long-lasting physical effects. See L. H. Lumey and F. W. A. Van Poppel, "The Dutch Famine of 1944–45: Mortality and Morbidity in Past and Present Generations," *Social History of Medicine* 7, 2 (1994): 229–46.

⁴⁴ Xurram X., b. 1920, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 8. All respondents are cited by their real given name and surname initial. Most translations from Uzbek are by Marianne Kamp; some are by Donoxon Abdugafurova.

⁴⁵ Abdullo F., b. 1919, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 18.

⁴⁶ Faizi S., b. 1915, Bukhara interview no. 11.

⁴⁷ A. K., b. 1907, Tashkent interview no. 22.

daughters for food or abandoning children.⁴⁸ The Swiss traveler Ella Maillert, taking a mail train in Xorazm late in 1932, saw “tattered Kazakhs” camped on goods wagons, one with a baby who “supports itself on thin sticks of legs ... there is no flesh on its little backside.” She wrote: “Have they escaped from some totally abandoned region? Will they perish from hunger?”⁴⁹ Archival sources document that some Kazakhs went to Uzbekistan to seek aid during Kazakhstan’s famine years.⁵⁰

While it is clear that Kazakh refugees from hunger fled to Uzbekistan, our interviews show that Uzbeks from farming regions also died in the famine. Six of our 130 respondents mentioned members of their families dying of either hunger or typhus in 1933. Halil A. spoke of drought in his Bustonliq grain-growing kolkhoz: “The famine lasted a long time. My father was a victim of it; he died here. He told me to care for the family, so I would bring home bread or *zo’gora* [cornbread].” He noted that they started planting potatoes the next season, in 1934, a point I return to later.⁵¹ Narzi A. remembered that in her grain-growing village there was “nothing to eat, so we were forced to eat unripe apples and apricots. People died in that famine. One of my younger brothers died; he became ill, and there was no remedy.”⁵² Fayzullo R., who had joined the local kolkhoz in wheat-growing Qashqa Daryo Province, said, “My father was in Samarqand, and he died of starvation.”⁵³ Nemat, from a grain kolkhoz in Bukhara Province, said: “There was not enough to eat, and they gave out bread in exchange for work. People ate *kunjara* (cotton seed hulls)

⁴⁸ Umrqul X., b. 1919, Tashkent interview no. 14. For a similar story, see Guljanat K. Ercilsun, “Famine in Kyrgyzstan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan: Life and Politics during the Soviet Era*, ed. Timur Dadabaev and Hisao Komatsu (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 34–52.

⁴⁹ Ella Maillert, *Turkestan Solo: One Woman’s Expedition from the Tien Shan to the Kizil Kum* (London: William Heinemann, 1938), 268–70.

⁵⁰ On Kazakhs migrating to “Central Asia” or Uzbekistan, see “Spetssvodka sekretno politicheskogo ordela OGPU SSSR o khode khlebozagotovok i otkochevkakh v Kazakhstane,” 7 December 1932, in *Golod v SSSR*, 2:PAGE (Doc. 151); and “Spetssvodka GPU Aktiubinskoi oblasti o prodovol’svennykh zatrudneniiakh,” in *Golod v SSSR*, 1:PAGE (Doc. 526). **<MK: until now you have given volume and page numbers for this source. Please supply page numbers here>**

⁵¹ Xalil A., b. 1917, Tashkent interview no. 10. His region, Bustonliq, was transferred from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan in 1952.

⁵² Narzi A., b. 1921, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 19, near Qarshi.

⁵³ Fayzullo R., b. 1909, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 20.

and died. My younger brother Pazil died.”⁵⁴ In a grain-growing kolkhoz in Xorazm, Rajab Q. said: “In the famine, my father had an older brother. Nothing could be done; he died. My mother took kunjara, some bark, and made a paste out of them to feed to him.”⁵⁵

Several respondents who lived in or near a city remembered watching corpses of those who died being collected from the streets. Muqimjon A., who was working at a teahouse in Margilon in 1933, recalled: “On the way to the station we saw 10–12 corpses. Behind the teahouse we saw so many people’s dead bodies. They put the corpses onto carts.”⁵⁶ Hidoyatxon S., also of Margilon, remembered, “I myself saw the dead; there were times when I went out onto the street to stare at those who were left there, dead.”⁵⁷ Sharofutdin Q., from a village near Fergana city, said: “Many people would go to the oil factory and dig out kunjara, eat it and swell up, and many of them died. . . . Ten people would load them on carts and take them away to bury them. . . . We were young kids, and we would go out to stare at this.”⁵⁸ These eyewitness accounts from cities suggest that starving people went to cities in Central Asia, just as they did across the Soviet Union. Some were Kazakh famine refugees, and some were local people, such as Fayzullo R.’s father who died of starvation in Samarqand or the many victims of an epidemic of *vabo*.⁵⁹

Epidemic diseases often accompany famine and may be spread when famine refugees move to seek aid. Typhus accompanied the 1932–33 Soviet famine, as recorded for Uzbekistan in archival documents and in memory.⁶⁰ Tojivoy D., from Parkent in Tashkent Province said: “While I was in school, in 1933, on one hand there was famine, and on the other vabo sickness

⁵⁴ Nemat B., b. 1916, Bukhara interview no. 2.

⁵⁵ Rajab Q., b. 1921, Xorazm interview no. 8.

⁵⁶ Muqimjon A., b. 1902, Margilon, Fergana interview no. 8, translation 2.

⁵⁷ Hidoyatxon S., b. 1919, Margilon, Fergana interview no. 9, transcript 3. Saidalixon M., age 12 at the time, also from Margilon, told a similar story, Fergana interview no. 3, transcript 5. So did Rajab Q., b. 1921, Xorazm interview no. 8, 9.

⁵⁸ Sharofutdin Q., b. about 1917, Fergana interview no. 20, transcript 10.

⁵⁹ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System*, 8:3, Schedule B, Case 252. An interview with an Uzbek, b. 1914, who deserted the Soviet Army during World War II and was living in Germany in 1951 tells a similar story about Kazakhs dying on the streets in Stalinabad, Tajikistan, in 1932 (<http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/hpsss/index.html>).

⁶⁰ A secret report of 27 July 1933 included 306 cases of typhus and 86 of typhoid for Uzbekistan. See Kondrashin, *Golod v SSSR*, 2:434 (Doc. 325).

happened. It was an epidemic.”⁶¹ *Vabo* can mean plague in its loose sense, a rapidly spreading disease that kills many people, and is often defined as cholera, but several of our Bukhara respondents defined it as typhus. One of them, Ahmad U., from G’ijduvon in Bukhara Province, said: “During that famine a lot of people died from hunger, and on top of that vabo came.<hr>... It was so bad that when typhus came, there were not enough men to carry the bodies of those who had starved, and women carried the dead to the cemetery. Women.”⁶² Every respondent from Shofirkon District in Bukhara, when asked about famine, immediately mentioned vabo, telling similar stories of so many deaths and not enough healthy men to bury the corpses.⁶³ Typhus is spread by lice, and an outbreak in the Ivanovo textile-producing region, near Moscow, in the spring of 1933 led the People’s Commissariat of Health to ban the use of two tons of cotton fiber from Kokand, Uzbekistan, indicating that the commissariat knew of the typhus outbreaks in Uzbekistan.⁶⁴

Memories can only be “spontaneously enlivened” while their bearers are themselves alive. Those in Uzbekistan who remembered the 1933 famine were by definition those who survived it, and their accounts here are both “memories encoded in language” that have been repeated within families and communities, and “sensory memories,” that are shaped by affect, pain, or shock.⁶⁵ Those who stared at the bodies of the dead as they were carted away told those stories stressing their youth, as a way of explaining to themselves and to their listeners their macabre fascination. Others recalled their own and their community’s sense of shame at being unable to handle the dead with customary honor.

Views from Below: Why Was There Famine?

One might guess that famine in Uzbekistan was linked to cotton monoculture, but those who came from grain-intensive regions mostly blamed their 1933 hunger on drought and the failure of their wheat crop. Oral histories offering community perspectives do not contradict but rather add complexity to

⁶¹ Tojivoy D., b. 1917, Tashkent interview no. 2, 3.

⁶² Ahmed U., b. 1921, Bukhara interview no. 3, 16–17.

⁶³ Sa’dullo R., b. 1921 Bukhara interview no. 5, 6; Baraka R., b. 1921, Bukhara interview no. 7, 17–18; Ravshan H., b. 1920, Bukhara interview no. 8, 8; Narziya J., b. 1921, Bukhara interview no. 10, 10; Fayzi S., b. 1915, Bukhara interview no. 11, 16.

⁶⁴ Document from 22 May 1933, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:605–6 (Doc. 488).

⁶⁵ Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*, 16, 106–7.

scholarly analyses of collectivization and its consequences. Ravshon H., born in 1920, remembered famine in Bukhara Province this way: “In 1932–33 there was ocharchilik, but it was short—only a few months until the wheat ripened. The first year, the wheat did not get enough water; people’s land had been taken; they did not know what to do. The second year, there was a brief time of hunger before the wheat ripened.”⁶⁶ Fayzullo R., b. 1909 in Qashqa Daryo, said: “The reason for the famine was that it didn’t rain, and so the wheat farming failed. For wheat, we depend on rain. People died.”⁶⁷ Those who previously had planted some wheat in irrigated fields were now supposed to plant wheat only on rain-watered lands (*lalm-i-kor*). In 1933, harsh weather conditions in Qashqa Daryo meant that the winter wheat crop failed. Xurram X., who was about 13 during the famine, said: “Ocharchilik was because the water failed. We planted wheat on rain-fed lands, and it dried up.”⁶⁸ Abdurasul E. saw the lack of water for wheat fields not as inevitable but as indication of kolkhoz organization problems. He was about ten at the time, so it is likely that this was his parents’ explanation for their hardships: “The kolkhoz did not work well. It had not extended water to the wheat fields, and there was a dry spell, and the wheat dried up and did not produce, so wheat became very expensive.”⁶⁹

In the same year, grain-planting districts in Tashkent Province also experienced drought and crop failure. Abdullo Q., a 30-year-old member of a kolkhoz in Parkent, recalled: “there was little snow or rain, so the fields dried, and there was no harvest. There was no wheat or barley.” Abdullo’s grandson then added the story that Abdullo had apparently told them many times, that he had dismantled his house bit by bit, selling the wood to get food for the family.⁷⁰ Yusupboy H., who lived in a district north of Tashkent, remembered: “There was not a good crop; it got dried out, and at that time we did not have irrigated lands to plant; we planted in the mountains. When the Lord did not give rain, and the wheat had no water, then there was no harvest ... then there

⁶⁶ Ravshan H., b. 1920, Shofirqon District, Bukhara interview no. 8, 8.

⁶⁷ Fayzullo R., b. 1909, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 20.

⁶⁸ Xurram X., b. 1920, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 8, 10.

⁶⁹ Abdurasul E., b. 1922, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 2, 13.

⁷⁰ Abdullo Q., b. 1902, Parkent, Tashkent interview no. 7, 10, 15.

was hunger, really severe, and in the village area it was hard to find any food.”⁷¹

In Xorazm, as well, *dehqons* remembered a lack of water in the famine year. Ibroyim K., a teenaged *kolkhoz* member at the time, said: “Well, if there is no rain and not enough water, this happens. There was no water. We worked one or two months to dig a water channel and bring water.”⁷² Madqurbon explained that famine happened “because others took our water. They used it and none of it remained to water our land.”⁷³ Abdullo S., who at age 12 was working outdoors as a *kolkhoz* herder, said, “The crops had dried out, and the government did not have anything to give us.”⁷⁴

Uzbekistan’s cotton sector underwent high-speed collectivization, but individual farmers were still raising 34 percent of Uzbekistan’s grain in 1932. Lutfullo U., whose elder brother inherited their father’s eight hectares, told of forcible collectivization in Shahrissabz, with his family land taken into a *kolkhoz*. His explanation for the 1933 famine differed from others in his region: “We had everything, but many fled when the regional party committee seized the lands where wheat had been planted ... and because they left, a harsh famine started.” In his region, the Unified State Political Directorate (OGPU) reported seizing hidden grain in the summer and fall of 1933, and finding several thousand kilos in pits in the ground.⁷⁵

In June 1933, Uzbekistan’s Central Committee announced a temporary suspension of taxes on land that *kolkhozes* brought into new production, such as the new *lalm-i-kor* wheat fields, as well as for all *kolkhozes* in regions experiencing “natural disaster,” but at the same time raised tax rates up to 70 percent for remaining “kulak” farms. Not surprisingly, individual wheat farming decreased rapidly.⁷⁶ Regardless of whether they were farming individually or for a *kolkhoz*, grain-region *dehqons* experienced Sen’s “entitlement failure” in 1933 as both nature and the state policy that

⁷¹ Yusupboy H., b. 1917, Xo’jakent (a district transferred from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan in the 1950s), Tashkent interview no. 12, transcript 23.

⁷² Ibroyim K., b. 1917, Xorazm interview no. 5, 10.

⁷³ Madqurbon J., b. 1914, Xorazm interview no. 13, 9.

⁷⁴ Abdullo S., b. 1921, Xorazm interview no. 12, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Lutfullo U., b. 1919, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 3, 16; “Zapiska po primomu provodu nachal’nika Ekonomicheskogo otdela...,” 27 September 1933, totally secret, in *Golod v SSSR*, 3:158–60, here 158 (Doc. 158).

⁷⁶ UzDA f. 86, op. 10, d. 118, ll. 195–227, esp. 196–97, 201, 218. On the decrease in grain planting by individual farmers, see *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel’stvo SSSR*, 180–85 (Tables 36–38).

prioritized cotton planting in irrigated fields severely diminished their staple food crop.

Trade Entitlements and Lack of Entitlement

Those who raised grain knew that their crops had failed, but those who did not raise grain saw only the results in their own lives, when grain supplies did not arrive, and when prices soared, and they called this period *qimmatchilik*, inflation, a time when the price of bread and other foods soared. This inflation is borne out in archival records: grain and other foods in Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, showed a tripling of prices: for example, a kilo of rice cost 8.8 rubles in a Tashkent market in March 1931, but it cost 25 rubles in the summer of 1933; other foods, from beef to oil and milk showed a similar rise in prices.⁷⁷ Those who normally purchased staple foods such as wheat flour and bread experienced what Sen would call "trade entitlement failure."

Respondents recalled extraordinary efforts to obtain food, selling their worldly goods. The Soviet state established Torgsin stores to obtain gold from its own citizens, to fund its purchase abroad of industrial technology. Several respondents, such as Sharofutdin Q., who lived near Fergana city, remembered selling gold for food at the Torgsin store: "There was a store here and my grandmother had one gold ring. She was given a lot for that ring at the store: rice, oil, flour."⁷⁸ M. T. said he was a 13-year-old boy during the famine in the Parkent region, and he went to the bazaar to sell salt "from here in exchange for flour. I made a lot of money selling salt, bought a good osh [a meat and rice dish], and then brought flour home. There were days when in the bazaar, if a bread seller dropped bread in the dirt, people would fall on it and fight each other for it."⁷⁹ A. K., from a kolkhoz near Tashkent, said: "Many people died from hunger. If you had money, it was hard to find things [to eat]. We had four cows, and I would take their milk to the [kolkhoz station] ... but in that direction there were Russians, all of them working to build the railroad. ... I would pay a lot of money to enter, carrying two containers.

⁷⁷ TsUNKhU dynamic tables on prices, 1913–36, from RGAE f. 1562, op. 2, d. 1918, ll. 31–61, *Istoricheskie materialy* (http://istmat.info/files/uploads/48622/rgae_1562.12.1918_ceny_na_rynkah_1921-1936.pdf).

Maillert witnessed the lack of bread and high market prices in Bukhara in the fall of 1932 but saw much greater abundance and cheap prices in Turt Köl (*Turkestan Solo*, 256–57, 284–85).

⁷⁸ Sharafutdin Q., b. 1911, Fergana interview no. 20, 10–11; Elena Osokina, *Zoloto dlia industrializatsii: TORGSIN* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009).

⁷⁹ M. T., b. 1921, Parkent, Tashkent interview no. 6.

‘How much?’ ‘Don’t give me money, give me bread.’<|>” The bread was Russian loaf-style. “I tell myself, ‘get what you can.’ I was glad to get bread.”⁸⁰ Narziya J. recalled the lack of bread and inflation in her Bukhara Province community: “If we heard in the evening that we could get one kilo of flour, we would sleep outside the store on a shirt or a robe.<hr>... We sold all our things—quilts, chests—to buy food.”⁸¹

During a period when most of our respondents were struggling to find food, some recalled that their family had enough to eat, and sometimes enough to share. Most were entitled to better food supplies because they worked for the Soviet system. Umriniso N., whose father had organized a Fergana region kolkhoz and was serving as director, said, “My father would bring wheat from the factory, and we had enough to eat and he fed our livestock, but the people of the kolkhoz had nothing and he would feed them porridge.” She continued with lengthy stories of kolkhoz members turning to her father to beg him for bread, and of one who abandoned an infant child to her father’s care.⁸² Saidalixon M., a 12-year-old living in Margilon city, who witnessed people dying of starvation, said: “My father was working on a construction project. I realized later that as long as they wrote down that the number of workers was increasing, they would get a larger supply of bread, and thus we did not really feel the effect of that bread famine ... but my uncle, who came to our house daily to ask for part of our bread, died right across the street, poisoned by something he had managed to find.”⁸³ Qurbon B., who was from Galla-Osio, a wheat-growing center that failed to produce in 1933, noted that he knew people from home were eating cornbread and cotton seed hulls, but that he himself had gone to the city to work and he had enough to eat.⁸⁴ Madqurbon J., a tractor driver, grew up on a rice-growing kolkhoz that produced poorly in 1933 due to lack of water: “My family lived well [during the famine]. I worked in mechanization, and I had both money and wheat.”⁸⁵ Zulayho A., whose father worked as a driver on their kolkhoz, said that “our family ate rather well ... and my father kept giving wheat to our neighbors, who were left with

⁸⁰ A. K., b. 1907, Tashkent interview no. 22, 23.

⁸¹ Narziya J., b. 1921, Bukhara interview no. 10, 9–10.

⁸² Umriniso N., b. 1914, Fergana interview no. 15, 20–21.

⁸³ Saidalikhon M., b. 1921, Margilon city, Fergana interview no. 3, 5.

⁸⁴ Qurbon B., b. 1906, Galla-osio, Bukhara interview no. 19.

⁸⁵ Madqurbon J., b. 1914, Xorazm interview no. 13, 9.

nothing.”⁸⁶ Lutfullo F., whose family land had been seized, and who was attending school in Shahrīsabz, said that in the 1933 famine, “bread was divided out with a ration card. My older brother was the education inspector, and I would go and get bread from him; he was reliable in giving me bread.”⁸⁷ The Soviet system, as Wemheuer pointed out, created its own set of entitlements, and in 1933 these meant that the available wheat supplies went to kolkhoz chairmen, administrators, workers in favored industries, and to agricultural specialists, such as tractor drivers.

It Used to Be That We Didn’t Eat That

We asked people what they usually ate, and what they ate during the famine. Narziya J., from Bukhara Province, said that during the famine, “People would eat *kunjara* [fodder] and die ... People would eat other things—make porridge [*atala*] out of barley or cook tiny wheat grains.” Narziya’s mention of *kunjara* was common to all regions of Uzbekistan.⁸⁸ Uzbekistan’s cotton factories separated cotton fiber from seeds, which were then taken to the oil press, where oil was extracted and used to pay kolkhoz members. The seed hulls, or *kunjara*, were fed to livestock. Most respondents said that eating *kunjara* led to swelling up and meant death was certain, but one explanation may be that only people who were already on the brink of death would resort to eating inedible *kunjara*.

Respondents mentioned eating a wide variety of things during the famine, especially in the spring of 1933: new leaves of native plants, especially *ismaloq* (*spinacea oleracea*), other grasses, unripe fruit, mulberry paste and mulberry flour, melon seeds, mung beans, tiny turnips, porridge made of flour, cornbread. Some relied entirely on their cows for milk and yogurt. “People would go to the fields and tear off wheat and barley by hand.”⁸⁹ Boltaboy K., living on a Xorazm kolkhoz, said that his aunt “would get up early, pick leaves, cook them, chop them up, add some flour and make bread.”⁹⁰ Saidalixon M. mentioned people gathering at the silkworm factory, pulling caterpillars from

⁸⁶ Zulayho A., b. 1916, Xorazm interview no. 9, 12.

⁸⁷ Lutfullo U., b. 1919, Qashqa Daryo interview no. 3, 15–16.

⁸⁸ Narziya J., b. 1921, Bukhara interview no. 10, 9–10. *Kunjara* or *Kunjala* appears in the discussion of famine in 52 of 120 interviews—everywhere except Nurota, which was a grain and herding region that had no cotton gins in 1933.

⁸⁹ Bozorjon U., b. 1913, Tashkent interview no. 1.

⁹⁰ Boltaboy K., b. 1914, Xorazm interview no. 4.

cocoons and eating them, and others remembered mixing kunjara into yogurt.⁹¹ Ashurboy P., who was a child at the time of the famine, said: “Up until [the 1933 famine], people would say ‘cabbage is Russian’ and would not eat it. People called tomatoes eggplants and said they were Russian, feared them, and did not eat them. Before then they were used to eating only *non* [tandır-baked wheat bread], but during the famine, *buhonka* [Russian loaf bread] showed up, and people were in serious hardship.<hr>... During the famine year we drank tea and ate cornbread. We took dried apples, heated them, made them into a jam, and drank that.”⁹²

Although Uzbeks had raised maize since before the Russian conquest, our respondents regarded eating cornbread as a sign of hard times. Maize was raised as a fodder crop, and people resorted to eating it as a grain only when their preferred wheat flour was not available.⁹³ Ismoyiljon N. said that during the famine: “I was in the second grade, and a girl was studying in the second grade.<hr>... They arranged a wedding for her ... [and] they gave about 300 grams of cornmeal, including a bit of meat and oil.<hr>... Then they called in two men, and they didn’t even have any *plov*. They had that 300 grams of cornbread.<hr>... Her father agreed to give her for that.”⁹⁴ Ismoyiljon was ten years old at the time, and he highlighted both the girl’s youth and the serving of cornbread to emphasize the father’s utter poverty and desperation for food.

⁹¹ Silkworm story from Saidalixon M., b. 1921, Margilon city, Fergana interview no. 3.

⁹² Ashurboy P., b. 1923, Tashkent interview no. 24, 10, 13. Uzbeks use the borrowed Russian term for loaf, *bukhanka*, for Russian bread (*khleb*). Russians call Uzbek bread (*non*) *lepeshka*, using a Russian word that means “flat cake.” <MK: should it be “a variation on the Russian term for loaf,” since they say *buhonka*, not *bukhanka*?>

⁹³ Qumriniso R., b. 1920, Fergana interview no. 14, 8; Muqumjon J., b. 1902, Fergana interview no. 8. Arturo Warman points out that cornbread was the bread of poverty in parts of Europe (*Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance*, trans. Nancy L. Westrate [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003], 129, 135). Unless treated with lime, cornmeal lacks niacin; niacin deficiency causes pellagra. The United States experienced a pellagra epidemic due to overdependence on cornbread (A. J. Bollet, “Politics and Pellagra: The Epidemic of Pellagra in the U.S. in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 65, 3 [1992]: 211–21). On cornbread and wheat-bread preference, see Shaniiazov, “O traditsionnoi pishche Uzbekov,” 97–99. The word used for Uzbek maize, *makka juhori* (the sorghum of Mecca), is the same (*makka*) as Urdu and Hindi, suggesting its path of diffusion was from the south.

⁹⁴ Ismoyiljon N., b. 1923, Namangan interview no. 7, 21. *Plov*, a rice and meat dish, was the standard for festive occasions: “In the past, *plov* was the food of the wealthy. Ordinary people prepared it only as a festive dish” (Shaniiazov, “O traditsionnoi pishche Uzbekov,” 105).

Our interviewers sometimes asked whether people committed cannibalism or ate meat from animals that Islam considers unclean. Roziya A., whose father abandoned his family in the midst of the famine, and whose mother took out a loan from a neighbor and started baking bread to sell, explained that those who had nothing to eat would try making bread from clover. She was asked, “Did people eat dog, cat, frog or snakes?” She responded, “Our people did not eat such things ... maybe Russian and Koreans would eat that in a time of hunger, but Uzbek people would not.”⁹⁵ But eventually, hunger pushed many of our respondents into eating Russian foods that they previously never tried, such as potatoes and loaves of rye bread.

On Potatoes and Maize and Their Worldwide Diffusion

In the 1930s, most Uzbeks had never seen or eaten a potato or a tomato, New World crops that diffused throughout the world rather slowly.⁹⁶ Across the Old World, people had to be convinced to eat potatoes. Although European botanists started experimenting with potatoes in the late 1500s, potatoes became food for humans, as opposed to animal fodder, in the German states and France in the late 18th century.⁹⁷ Botanists and heads of state were persuaded of the potato’s virtues: it could take the place of grain-based foods, and it was not subject to the same weather, pest, disease, or military plagues that periodically destroyed grains and created famine. A rampaging army could destroy grain by trampling, burning, or rapid harvesting and theft; but potatoes were impervious to all these. Hence Frederick the Great of Prussia ordered his subjects to eat potatoes. The historian Jenny Leigh Smith points out that Ukrainians, and then the Soviet agricultural leadership more generally, increased potato planting after World War II in part because experience with wartime grain loss contrasted with the security offered by the potato, both before harvest and when stored in potato cellars.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Roziya A., b. 1921, Xorazm interview no. 11, 9.

⁹⁶ William MacNeill, “How the Potato Changed the World’s History,” *Social Research* 66, 1 (1999): 67–83; Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1973); John Reader, *Propitious Esculent: The Potato in World History* (London: Heinemann, 2008).

⁹⁷ Berthold Laufer and C. Martin Wilbur, “The American Plant Migration, Part I: The Potato,” *Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History: Anthropological Series* 28, 1 (1909): 1–132, here 63, 67.

⁹⁸ Jenny Leigh Smith, *Works in Progress: Plans and Realities on Soviet Farms, 1930–1963* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 80.

It took work to convince Russians to adopt the potato. As the historian Alison Smith explains, Catherine the Great decreed the planting of potatoes, but they did not become a staple food in Russia until Nicholas I ordered state peasants to plant them after a food shortage in the 1830s. Smith notes that in provinces that lacked food diversity, such as Kostroma, potatoes filled a need. But some Russian peasants refused to eat potatoes, regardless of circumstance: Old Believers held that potatoes were not mentioned in the Bible, so eating them was a sin.⁹⁹ The account of Old Believers versus potatoes demonstrates that adoption of new foods is not based solely on need, knowledge, or taste; there are also cultural and religious dimensions. In Uzbekistan, many of our interview respondents indicated that potatoes were known before the 1930s, but that Uzbeks did not eat them. Nor did they eat other foods that they associated with Russians. When we asked about potatoes, we repeatedly heard this: “The old people never ate tomatoes or potatoes; they called them Russian food. . . . Only later [after the kolkhoz started planting them] they tried eating potatoes and saw that it would be good to eat them in addition to bread.”¹⁰⁰

Uzbeks use the same term for potatoes as Russians, *kartoshka*, and it is assumed that potatoes reached this part of Central Asia with Russian conquest. A group of Tatars from the Volga region who moved to the Kokand Khanate in the 1820s and established a village, Nogai-Kurgan, near Tashkent, may have been Turkestan’s original potato growers; in 1867, two years after Russia’s capture of Tashkent, an observer noted that Nogai-Kurgan was the only place in the new territory producing potatoes.¹⁰¹ Russian and Volga German colonists brought potatoes as they settled across Central Asia; a group of Mennonites who established a colony in the Khiva Khanate in 1883 raised potatoes.¹⁰² Russians and other European colonists established numerous agricultural settlements in Tashkent Province, which was where most of the

⁹⁹ Alison K. Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 26, 27, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ismoyiljon N., b. 1923, Namangan interview no. 7, 15.

¹⁰¹ Rinat Shigabdinov, “Nogai-Kurgan—pervyi Tatarskii aul v Uzbekistane,” *Idel-Idel*, no. 5 (2018): 100–3 (<http://idel-rus.ru/nogaj-kurgan-pervyj-tatarskij-aul-v-uzbekistane/>). Nazarov (“Natsional’naia kuchnia Uzbekistana”) points out when certain foods first appeared but not whether or when Uzbeks began to eat them.

¹⁰² Fred Belk, *The Great Trek of Russian Mennonites to Central Asia, 1880–1884* (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 1976), 161. Belk writes about those who left the colony, but according to Maillert, several hundred remained in 1932 (*Turkestan Solo*, 295–301).

potato growing took place. Outside Tashkent Province, there were only a few thousand scattered Russians in rural communities in Uzbekistan; both Russians and their preferred staple foods remained quite foreign to most rural Uzbeks until the 1930s.¹⁰³

In 1928, the area planted in potatoes was minuscule: 2,900 desiatinas out of 1.7 million planted desiatinas, but politics, economic planning, and science converged to increase this.¹⁰⁴ In the early 1930s, following the declaration of mass collectivization, and the head of Uzbekistan's Communist Party Akmal Ikramov's statement of interest in increasing Uzbekistan's potato crop, the Ak-Kavak Experimental Planting Station in Tashkent Province began working on selecting and improving potato strains in the context of Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁵ In the mid-1930s, one of Nikolai Vavilov's Applied Botanical Research stations in the Pamirs in Tajikistan was carrying out selection experiments on high-altitude potatoes, while Lysenko was working near Odessa with breeds appropriate to hot, arid planting zones, testing strains that could be planted as a second crop midsummer.¹⁰⁶

Akmal Ikramov had grown up in Tashkent, the province with the most rural Russians and the most potato cultivation in Uzbekistan, and he married a Russian woman. Ikramov was probably a potato eater in 1930, but few other Uzbeks were. But at his initiative, Uzbekistan's potato planting increased in official measures from 3,000 ha. in 1931 to 10,800 ha. in 1932, and to 23,500 ha. in 1940, at which point potatoes equaled the planted area of all other vegetable crops combined.¹⁰⁷ The tsarist administration had set Turkestan's

¹⁰³ R. R. Alieva explains the very low number of Russian settlers outside Syr Darya Province ("Iz istorii obrazovaniia russkikh posolkov v Khodzhenstvom uezde," *Nomai Donishgoh*, no. 3 (52) (2017): 15–22.

¹⁰⁴ Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie SSSR (TsSU SSSR), *Osnovnye elementy i produktiia sel'skogo khoziaistva SSR* (Moscow: Izdanie TsSU SSSR, 1928), 36–37, 55. In 1925, potato production in the RSFSR provided 19 poods (304 kilos) per capita as human food, and 606 kilos per head of livestock as fodder. For Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the equivalent figures were 6.5 kilos per capita and 16 kilos per head of livestock.

¹⁰⁵ V. S. Sudorgin, "Tsvetite, sady," in *Istoria kolkhozov i sovkhovov Uzbekistana*, 409.

¹⁰⁶ S. M. Busakov. "The Problems of Potato Breeding," *American Potato Journal* 13, 9 (1939): 235–52, with Pamir potatoes on 236 and Lysenko on 241.

¹⁰⁷ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSR: Ezhegodnik 1935*, Part B: *Rastenovodstvo* (Moscow: Selkhozgiz, 1936), 469 (Table 331), *Istoricheskie materialy* (<http://istmat.info/node/22433>); *Posevnye ploshchadi SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe statisticheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1957), 1:52–53. This was not a lasting pattern. After World War II, Uzbekistan grew fewer potatoes and greatly expanded the cultivation of other vegetables.

taxation rates for cotton equal to those for grain, to stimulate cotton planting, and both were traditionally taxed at lower rates than most other crops.¹⁰⁸ In 1933, in a policy designed to stimulate potato planting, potato tax rates for the collective sector were set as equal to the cotton rate, much lower than for fruits, vegetables, pulses, or rice.¹⁰⁹ Still, the stimulation of potato production did not mean that it became a staple food in everyone's diet, but rather that it went from very rare to available.¹¹⁰

Many of the Uzbek respondents from the Tashkent region noted that their parents grew potatoes before collectivization. Those from all other regions remarked that they first encountered potatoes after collectivization. Some had never seen potatoes before; others knew about them but regarded them as "Russian food," alien and potentially "haram," meaning forbidden by Islamic moral guidance. One man from a Fergana village told a story that his community used to illustrate their rejection of potatoes: "The tomato came later and the potato, too. So much misunderstanding. For example, if a soldier who was fighting against the basmachis asked to use someone's cooking pot, then that person would ask, 'What will you cook?' If the soldier said, 'Potatoes,' the pot's owner would shout, '*Haram*,' and throw it at him. Potatoes and tomatoes were started only later."¹¹¹

Most respondents did not call potatoes *haram* but used a different way of expressing rejection: the potato and tomato were Russian. One respondent made the connection between "Russian" and "haram" more explicit. Ashurboy P., from a Tashkent province village, connected those ideas when remembering distribution of Russian bread during the famine: "People said, 'Russians bake those,' but after they looked, they recognized that they had come to them through Muslim hands, and they could be eaten. And then they got used to cabbage, too, and to tomatoes and to cars and whatever else there was."¹¹² People in Ashurboy's community were willing to eat foods raised or made by Muslim hands; such foods were not haram, even if they were new.

¹⁰⁸ Beatrice Penati, "The Cotton Boom and the Land Tax in Russian Turkestan," *Kritika* 14, 4 (2013): 741–74.

¹⁰⁹ Tax tables for kolkhozes, 1933, UzDA f. 86, op. 10, d. 118, ll. 226–28.

¹¹⁰ Uzbekistan's 1940 production would have equaled about 22 kilos per capita, but much of that may have been used as fodder (TsSU SSSR, *Osnovnye elementy i produktiia*, 36–37, 55).

¹¹¹ Yoqubjon B., b. 1919, Vodil, Fergana interview no. 11, 5.

¹¹² Ashurboy P., b. 1923, near Tashkent, Tashkent interview no. 24, 2. Others also said tomatoes were Russian food (Saidalixon M., b. 1921, Margilon interview no. 3, 14).

Foods that came from Russians, meaning that Russians produced and delivered them, were suspect, and one could not be certain that they were *halal* (religiously acceptable). That concern disappeared when Uzbeks began to raise their own potatoes.

Many of the regions of Uzbekistan where we conducted our interviews were very fertile farming regions that usually had no food shortages. But in 1933 collectivization-related famine persuaded some communities to eat things that they had previously rejected as “Russian” food. Xalil A. noted that his kolkhoz began producing potatoes the year after the famine, 1934.¹¹³ Others said they began planting them within the next two or three years, but first they had to become acquainted with this new plant.

In many regions of Uzbekistan, our respondents said that they were entirely unfamiliar with potatoes until after kolkhozes were founded in the early 1930s. Abdullo S., from Xorazm, illustrated his unfamiliarity: “When I was young, potatoes came to Xiva, and we guessed they were egg yolks. We cooked them in an outdoor fire, on the ground and called them egg yolks. . . . Then tomatoes came, and cucumbers.”¹¹⁴ Berdiquil B., from Nurota, said that in his area, “People learned about potatoes and tomatoes later from the people who came from the cities. Before they did not know about those things. Even rich people did not know how to produce them. There were some people who did not want to eat them, because people called those vegetables Russian food.”¹¹⁵ A woman whose family had been exiled to Ukraine as kulaks and returned to Uzbekistan in the 1930s discussed the adoption of foreign foods in considerable detail. In Ukraine, her mother worked in a restaurant that served cabbages and potatoes. Back in Uzbekistan, she noticed that Uzbeks were not eating potatoes or cabbage. She said, “Potatoes grew under the ground and the people did not know them. They learned about the potato in botany class, and when the potato bloomed they ate the flower and it was sour and they did not like it. . . . It was Russian food.”¹¹⁶ Several respondents pointed out that they had no idea how to plant

¹¹³ Xalil A., b. 1917, Tashkent interview no. 10, 2.

¹¹⁴ Abdullo S., b. 1921, Xorazm interview no. 12, 8.

¹¹⁵ Berdiquil B., b. 1920, Nurota, Navoi interview no. 2; Eminjon H., b. 1920, Fergana interview no. 18, 3.

¹¹⁶ Wife of Qudratillo R., b. 1924, Tashkent interview no. 18, 5–6. Many kulaks who were exiled to Ukraine in the early 1930s returned home by the late 1930s. See Bakhtiar Babadjanov, “The Economic and Religious History of a Kolkhoz Village,” in *Allah’s Kolkhozes*, ed. Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noack (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2011), 210–11.

potatoes or what part to eat. Ibodat N., from a newly settled Namangan area kolkhoz, said: “Someone brought potatoes from some city ... planted them, the stems, and they couldn’t be eaten. But then later these full grown potatoes came out, and then people started cooking them and found out they were good to eat. I don’t know when that was, 1937 or 1938.”¹¹⁷

Outsiders introduced rural Uzbeks to potatoes. In several Xorazm villages, the outsiders were Germans, rather than Russians. Olmojon X. mentioned that “some Germans settled over there, and then tomatoes and potatoes appeared, and now they are in every garden.”¹¹⁸ Ruzim I., who lived in a nearby village in Xorazm, made the transition more explicit: “At first people said that tomatoes and potatoes are Russian, and there was propaganda to get people to eat them, but we are not Germans. Gradually they were accepted.”¹¹⁹ Ruzim emphasized propaganda driving the planting of potatoes, by which he may have meant agronomist and school efforts to convince Uzbeks of the potato’s virtues.

Bobo E., from the Margilon region, pinned the new appearance of potatoes to a specific year: “In 1937, for the first time potato was planted in this village. I think the government provided it. The kolkhoz planted it. Then the tomato came, but nobody knew about it and they did not eat it.<hr>... Later eggplant ... a special brigade leader was assigned to plant them on separate land.”¹²⁰ The most common story told was that previously potatoes were unknown, but when kolkhoz members were shown how to raise and eat them, then they were willing to adopt them within their own diet. Muhammadjon I., from Margilon, remembered: “When they said they would plant potato for us, they did only once. Then we figured it out ourselves. Then everybody started using potatoes.”¹²¹

The kolkhoz controlled what was planted in kolkhoz fields, so if kolkhoz members were to adopt the potato as a hedge against food shortages and plant it in their private plots, that demanded individual knowledge and decisions. Qumriniso R., born in 1920 and raised in a village in Fergana Province, explained that “people from the Caucasus” were resettled in her village when

¹¹⁷ Ibodat N., b. 1925, Namangan interview no. 4, 11; Boltaboy K., b. 1914, Xiva District, Xorazm interview no. 4, 6.

¹¹⁸ Olmojon X., b. 1903, Xorazm interview no. 17, 4.

¹¹⁹ Ruzim I., b. 1919, Xorazm interview no. 15, 7. Ruzim lived in Yangiariq District, where the Mennonite colony Oq Machit was located.

¹²⁰ Bobo E., b. 1925, Navoi interview no. 7, 4.

¹²¹ Muhammadjon I., b. 1922, Fergana interview no. 17, 1–2.

she was in her 20s, during World War II: “Before or after the war they were exiled. People were asked door to door to take those Caucasus people into their homes.” These outsiders brought with them larger breeds of maize, and they also planted potatoes. “Potatoes came from Russia. We did not eat them, but in the war, there were lots of potatoes, and we would eat them. It was hard to find non, and we would eat cornbread.”¹²² Like others, she implied that had there been enough wheat-based non, people in her community might not have tried eating potatoes, but the fact that their new neighbors brought potatoes, and that wartime created food shortages, convinced members of her kolkhoz that they could raise and eat potatoes.

Another Fergana Valley man, Yuldashev, noted that he began eating potatoes when he was a soldier in World War II, and after he came back, Uzbeks in his village in the Namangan region also started eating potatoes: “They called it Russian food. Now we eat it. Half of our food is potatoes. That started after the war, after I returned. I really ate a lot of them in the war. In Russia, the only food was potatoes. But now potatoes are our living.”¹²³ Anyone who knows Uzbek cuisine might notice that while potatoes appear regularly in *shorpa* (soup), *dimlama* (steamed meat stew), and various other dishes, potatoes do not appear at a festive meal, nor are they popular street or snack foods. Unlike Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia, where potatoes became the central dietary starch, in Uzbekistan bread and wheat-dough products remained the primary dietary starch, followed by rice.¹²⁴ When our interlocutors emphasized how much they depend on potatoes now, they highlighted the potato’s shift from rejected Russian thing to an item that they included in ordinary consumption.

Respondents remembered adopting tomatoes around the same time, either following the 1933 famine or during World War II food shortages. Ahmadjon T., from Margilon Province, recalled his first encounter with tomatoes: “My father and grandfather were sitting here on the porch, and someone brought tomatoes. Not just one, but a kilo or so. What is this, they asked. This is a tomato. ‘Take that *kafir* [infidel] thing away and throw it onto the street,’ they said, and they sent him off with blows. . . . They said, ‘Did this grow from the ground?’ They called it a *kafir* thing and would not eat it, would not try

¹²² Qumriniso R., b 1920, Fergana interview no. 14, 2.

¹²³ Yuldashev, <MK: no initial?> b. 1923, Namangan interview no. 1, 8–9.

¹²⁴ Smith, *Works in Progress*, 79–80; Shaniiazov, “O traditsionnoi pishche Uzbekov,” 99–102.

it.”¹²⁵ Not everyone was as direct in labeling tomatoes as infidel food, but some stressed their strangeness. Zumrat Sh., from Nurota, said, “One day my father came home from work and said that a thing called tomato had come to the MTS [machine tractor station]. We wondered what that thing was.”¹²⁶ Others remarked that eggplant and tomatoes were introduced at about the same time, and they mixed up the names, calling tomatoes *patinjon* (sort of like *patlijon*, eggplant) rather than *pomilador*.¹²⁷

A kolkhoz could plant tomatoes, but that did not mean that its members would accept them. For example, in Tursunboy Y.’s words: “After the kolkhoz was established there were tomatoes and eggplants, but I wouldn’t eat them. The eggplants were tiny.<hr>... We didn’t eat them because we did not have them before. People were not afraid of them, but they were not used to them. Now if you go to the bazaar, it is full of tomatoes.”¹²⁸ Yolchivoy A., from a Namangan kolkhoz, recalled: “Even when they came, people did not eat them and considered them haram. They fed tomatoes to their cows. Later people tasted them and liked them.”¹²⁹

Hunger had driven many Uzbeks to try potatoes, and then to make them an ordinary element in their cuisine. Familiarization, and the recognition that they themselves could raise these plants, made trying a Russian, and potentially haram, food more acceptable. The adoption of potatoes was closely related to food shortage, a factor that drove the expansion of potato planting in other parts of the Soviet Union after World War II. As Jenny Leigh Smith notes, potatoes had many attractions for kolkhoz members both as collective crops and for garden plots: they were easy to store and long-lasting; there was no state system for refrigerating or transporting them, and they were not subject to systematic collections, so they remained for local consumption.¹³⁰ In Uzbekistan, strains of potato appropriate to hot, arid summers could be planted after winter wheat or rice were harvested. Collectivization had taken away dehqons’ endowments in land and entitlements to most of the fruits of

¹²⁵ Ahmadjon T., b. 1920, Margilon interview no. 5, 3.

¹²⁶ Zumrat Sh., b. 1921, Nurota, Navoi interview no. 6, 3.

¹²⁷ Ibodat N., b. 1925, Namangan interview no. 4, 12; Turdiboy T., b. 1921, Namangan interview no. 12. The Russian and official Uzbek word for tomato is *pomidor*, from the Italian *pomodoro*. Across Uzbekistan, elderly people pronounced the word *pomilador* (it has pink coloring).

¹²⁸ Tursunboy Y., b. 1921, Margilon interview no. 7, 6.

¹²⁹ Yolchivoy A., b. 1922, Namangan interview no. 6, 3.

¹³⁰ Smith, *Works in Progress*, 81–83.

their labor, but potato growing offered rural Uzbeks some control over a food plant that they could include in their own diet, raise to sell at market, or feed to domestic livestock.

Most of those we interviewed told us that in the 1930s, following collectivization, they incorporated tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, strawberries, and other newly introduced fruits and vegetables into their ordinary foods because they were tasty, not because these items fulfilled some need. Their stories offer an interesting duality in explanations for changing foodways: collectivization-related food supply problems drove people to try the unfamiliar potato, but one of collectivization's middle-term results as agronomists spread new kinds of food plants was that life became tastier (to rephrase Stalin's proclamation).

Conclusion

In the early 1930s, people in some regions of the USSR, most notably Ukraine and Kazakhstan, experienced a viciously cruel famine, resulting in many millions starving to death. To point out that other regions of the USSR, such as Uzbekistan, did not experience that same degree of tragedy may seem either unimportant or thoroughly insensitive. The economist Amartya Sen highlighted famine's political dimensions in his seminal work on the topic: "starvation ... is a function of entitlements and not of food availability as such."¹³¹ When food availability declines, he notes, the effects are uneven, with some people being able to command access to food and others shut out. In the cases he examined, impoverished people living in areas where natural causes decreased food production were far more likely to starve than better-off people, because they could not purchase expensive food when prices increased due to shortages. Entitlement worked differently in the USSR, where party activists hounded grain growers and herders with unsustainable requisitions, while the government continued to export grain to Europe and support food supplies for industrial workers and party members. A state that had the means to move grain from surplus to shortfall regions but did not do that did not act as though all its citizens were equally entitled to food and to life.

Oral histories recalling famine and the adoption of new foods enrich a historical reconstruction of the lives of ordinary Uzbek dehqons during the Uzbek SSR's collectivization of agriculture, with details reflecting widely shared experiences that were neither the focus of government data collection,

¹³¹ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, chap. 1. <MK: Page number for quotation?>

nor, in conditions of censorship and low literacy, of public or personal writing. Soviet collectivization policies did not produce famine in Uzbekistan in 1930, 1931, or 1932, but in 1933, in the words of people who lived through that time, there was widespread hunger, and there were deaths due to starvation and typhus. There were more entitled people, often tractor drivers or collective-farm chairmen, who did not go hungry. Respondents from those sorts of households often recalled parents who shared their more abundant supplies with starving neighbors. Those who lived in grain-growing regions, and who traditionally had depended on their own wheat production to provide their basic food, shared vivid stories of desperation, and they almost all noted that drought was the fundamental cause of their food shortage. Those who lived in cotton-intensive regions and in cities found their food sources, the grain imports they depended on, reduced not just because of drought in Uzbekistan, but of Union-wide problems caused by a command economy that could plan and order but could not make real food materialize.

Faced with hunger, our respondents ate things they normally would have avoided, and in some cases, this meant trying Russian foods, including the potato and Russian-style bread. Newcomers to Central Asia, soldiers and kulaks who spent time outside Uzbekistan and returned, and agronomists on kolkhozes all participated in spreading new food crops. Some of those new foods, such as cucumbers and tomatoes, moved into almost ubiquitous preference, but the potato was adopted and accepted in Uzbekistan, as it has been in many other parts of the world, as a hedge against famine, a cheap and filling staple to eat when bread, wheat, or rice is expensive or unavailable.

Dept. of Central Eurasian Studies
Global and International Studies Bldg., 3024
East Building, 3rd floor
Indiana University
355 North Jordan Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47405-1105 USA
mkamp@indiana.edu

Table 1: Uzbekistan and Tajikistan Populations in 1926 and 1939

Population by major ethnic group	1926 Census Uzbek SSR including Tajik ASSR	1939 Tajik SSR	1939 Uzbek SSR	Reasons for increase/decrease in Uzbekistan
Total	5,267,658	1,484,440	6,271,269	
Uzbeks	3,475,340	353,478	4,081,096	Natural increase
Tajiks	967,728	883,966	317,560	Tajikistan separated, many Tajiks moved there
Russians/Europeans Of these, rural	303,508 47,000	175,738	987,069	Immigration
Kazakhs	106,898	12,712	305,416	Immigration
Koreans	0	43	72,944	Forced resettlement
Karakalpaks	26,563		181,420	Karakalpak ASSR joined UzSSR in 1936
Kyrgyz	90,703	27,968	89,044	Tajikistan separated

Table 2: Uzbekistan population by age group (1939 census, Uzbekistan's rural population)

Year of birth	1930 (age 9)	1931 (8)	1932 (7)	1933 (6)	1934 (5)	1935 (4)	1936 (3)
Cohort size	105,171	130,616	122,313	112,890	103,850	111,847	131,262