Kyrgyzstan and the Legacies of Collectivisation

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Under the Soviet Shadow

By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4644-6
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4644-8

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank City, University of London for granting me sabbatical leave to research and write this book, and to the American University of Central Asia for hosting me in Bishkek. I am grateful to the staff at the Central Archives of Kyrgyzstan for directing me towards, and guiding my reading of material vital for this study. Thanks also to the Bishkek police officer who twice stopped my wife and I for being out on the streets without proper identification, but on neither occasion formally arrested us. I am grateful also to the excellent editorial and publishing team at Cambridge Scholars who made the whole process remarkably painless, and to John Wiley and Sons for granting me permission to reuse material from an article previously published in *Anthropology Today* (vol 26, no.3, 2012). Finally, thank you, Amanda, for everything.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DOSAAF	Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MCC	Machine Hay-Stations
MTS	Machine Tractor Station
NDC	National Decentralisation Strategy
NEP	New Economic Policy
TOZ	Society for the Joint Cultivation of Land
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

GLOSSARY

Aiyl Aimak (K)	Rural municipality area (village)
Aiyl Okmotu (K)	Local (village) government of *Aiyl Aimak*
Aiyl Kenesh (K)	Local (village) council of *Aiyl Aimak*
Bai (K)	"Wealthy" cattle owner
Bii (K)	Judge
Boz yü (K)	Felt yurtas
Dekhan (R)	Peasant farmer
Dekulakisation	Purge of "wealthy peasants" or "traditionalists'
Djhut (K)	Prolonged and intense winter frosts
Kolkhoz (R)	Collective farm
Kolkhozniks (R)	Members and workers on a collective farm
Komsomol (R)	Youth division of the Communist Party
Korojai	Household plots
Kulak (R)	"Wealthy", usually land-owning peasant
Kombedy (R)	Peasant committees
Kyrgyzchylyk (K)	Kyrgyzness
Lishentsy (R)	A person deprived of the right to vote having been classed as an enemy of the working people
Makhora (R)	A coarse and low-grade tobacco
Manap (R)	Traditional elites/Leader or ruler of an *uruu*
Mir/Obschina (R)	Peasant village communities
Narodnost (R)	Sub-nationality
Natsiia (R)	Nation
Oblast (R)	Region
Politodels (R)	Political offices/sections.
Raion (R)	District or city
Raion Akim (R/K)	Head, city local government
Selsovet (R)	Rural council
Sovkhoz (R)	State/Soviet farm
Trakorizatsiia (R)	Tractorisation
Trudoden (R)	Unit of value and type of accounting of quantity and quality of labour in collective farms
Uyezd (R)	District level administrative unit
Uruk (K)	Clan
Uruu (K)	Tribe

(K) Kyrgyz
(R) Russian

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union failed to bring the people of Kyrgyzstan on to the streets of Bishkek, Talas or Osh in either elation or remorse. While Poland and Czechoslovakia celebrated the freedom for which they had fought, the Kyrgyz contemplated their future having had independence thrust upon them some fifty-five years after the country's leaders proudly asserted their status as a full republic within the Soviet Union. At that historic moment, Kyrgyzstan took its seat at the main table in Moscow enjoying parity with other larger republics, and safe in the knowledge that, in theory at least, it was free to leave the Union if it chose to do so. The inauguration of the Supreme Soviet in 1936, in a newly-constructed and understated, solid modernist building close to Ala Too square, should have marked the coming of age for a nation-state that had no fixed territorial identity prior to the Soviet national border making (delimitation) of the 1920s (Haugen, 2003). However, a celebration of political maturity was brought to a brutal and abrupt end, when, only two years into its inaugural term, 156 senior and junior party officials in the local Central Committee, branded "enemies of the people" and "bourgeois nationalists", were rounded up, and with their hands tied behind their backs executed in a field only a stone's throw from the current President's official Bishkek residence. The directing of Stalin's "Great Terror" against Kyrgyzstan's political class cleansed the party, and reminded the people of Kyrgyzstan that any flexibility in independent action would not be tolerated.

Against the background of control from Moscow, and with its origins in the intensely faction ridden infighting that was an inevitable part of the politics of delimitation, it was inevitable that forming a Kyrgyz national identity would be a faltering process. However, by the late-Soviet period the Kyrgyz had largely come to terms with the borders of the Republic, the composition of its population, and its place and status in both the Central Asian region, in its relationship with Moscow, and in the project and history of the Soviet Union. The realisation, however, in the first months of the 1990s that the Union, one of the world's great empires, may never reappear,

and that its successors, a rouble zone modelled on the EU or the Commonwealth of Independent States (both dependent on Russian generosity), could never take its place, brought both a sense of abandonment and an immediate incoherence to a unifying national story.

This study explores the roots of this incoherence, and the country's contemporary anxieties. It does so by re-evaluating the purpose, impacts and legacies of Soviet colonisation. With a focus on the re-ordering and eventual control of Kyrgyz society achieved through collectivisation, itself enabled by forcible population displacement, confiscation and resettlement.

Research included interviews with individuals directly involved in the Sovietisation project, they were drawn from both rural and urban Kyrgyzstan, and included different nationalities. What united them was that their lives were fundamentally changed by a series of upheavals, most significantly, expulsions and deportations, displacement and forced resettlement. When asked to reflect on the Soviet years their responses were ambivalent.

On the one hand, there was nostalgia. The Soviet Union, it was conceded, rescued Kyrgyzstan from Russian Imperialist oppression, and protected its people from external aggression, where the main threats came from China, instability elsewhere in the region, but also from the West. The Soviets were further credited for giving the "Kyrgyz people" a written language, a shared history, and an internationally recognised political status. The stability offered by the Soviets was frequently contrasted with the political and physical insecurity of the past three decades marked by a series of coloured revolutions, and fear of further chaos to come. Today's short-lived coalition governments, internal repression, economic weakness, violent border disputes and ousted presidents, compared unfavourably with the stolidness of the Supreme Soviet.

However, what also came through in the interviews was an acknowledgement that nostalgia shielded a more general fear of confronting too closely the extreme circumstances of Soviet occupation and rule. Even the most nostalgic and loyal former Party cadre or government official agreed that the Kyrgyz did not submit voluntarily to collectivisation, or welcome its "revolutionary agents" with open arms. They discussed the violence and coercion required to ensure political, religious and social compliance, to enforce land and asset seizures, and to achieve the imposition of a largely non-Kyrgyz bureaucratic leadership. This volume explores these tensions and what they expose about Kyrgyzstan's contemporary insecurities. It does so by re-visiting and re-evaluating

Kyrgyzstan's Soviet past, and the mechanisms and societal legacies of Sovietisation. It considers the long shadow cast over the country's politics and society in the name of Socialist modernisation, spearheaded by collectivisation, and its unravelling in the context of liberal reforms.

The following chapters describe how newly-acquired land was colonised with involuntary and voluntary migrants drawn from across the Soviet territory providing labour and leadership for collectivised land, consolidating power over new structures created to satisfy production demands, and as a means to rebuild Kyrgyzstan as a Soviet State. In the absence of consent, persuasion, frequently leading to force, was required to suppress opposition, and deprive landowners and people of status as well as ordinary people, of their land, livestock and influence. Direct violence as well as more subtle forms of control and coercion, was frequently met with resistance, both active and passive. Such resistance was seen throughout the Kyrgyzstan population, certainly from the Kyrgyz and other indigenous groups resident in Central Asia who suffered as a result of the repression of the 1930s, but resistance emerged also from Russian, Ukrainian and other European settlers, who themselves were victims of earlier village resettlements and involuntary relocation.

Evidence of resistance is fragmentary and it will be some time before the scale and effects are fully understood, particularly as sensitive parts of the archives remain closed to researchers. However, the author's own experience of teaching university students in Bishkek suggests there is a growing interest among the first and second post-independence generations to build on the somewhat sketchy information offered in school history lessons, and a desire to piece together family stories about past injustices that were previously undisturbed. The war in Ukraine, a re-evaluation of Soviet-Russian occupation and rule in other Central Asian states (see for example Bekmurzaev, 2023), and concerns about the re-Sovietising of Russia, have brought a new urgency to such a rediscovery of the past.

The analysis is to some extent shaped by the author's work over the past two decades on rural livelihoods, development-induced displacement and involuntary resettlement (Cernea and McDowell, 2000; McDowell and Morrell, 2010; McDowell and Bennett, 2013). Having observed first-hand the national and internationally funded development schemes in Asia and Africa involving large scale land acquisition and population relocation, and in his capacity as an adviser to international development banks and NGOs evaluating success or failure in the planning and execution of such schemes, it was instructive to apply that knowledge to this study of collectivisation

and its legacy in Central Asia. For state-led projects involving land and asset acquisition or seizure, and the forced relocation of individuals and communities, the stated motivations of governments and lenders—improved connectivity, power generation, clean water supply, anti-poverty, environmental protection, or as steps towards economic progress and modernisation—are mostly assumed and unquestioned. However, important scholarship from James C Scott (1999) on the hubris of planners, James Ferguson (1994) on underlying intent, Michael Cernea (2000) on the risks of impoverishment generated by engineered social change, Anthony Oliver-Smith (1991) on resistance to resettlement, and Thayer Scudder (1993) and Elizabeth Colson on its long-term impacts, obliges us to examine closely the intended and unintended consequences of large-scale modernisation schemes, and the preconditions that enable them to go ahead. This literature encourages us to rethink collectivisation as a developmentalist colonising strategy.

States pursuing projects of high modernity, which Scott argues includes twentieth century Soviet collectivisation, are motivated by an ideological certainty that their endeavours are justified and achievable. State powers, including those occupying territories beyond their borders, hold firm to the belief that scientific planning and the latest technology will deliver development and modernity, that for the citizen forced displacement and relocation is a noble sacrifice. Where there is resistance, politicians feel justified in resorting to force to complete their projects. Scott further observed that a compliant, prostate, and disorganised civil society serve to minimise opposition to rapid and imposed change, with mute complicity providing a clear path for planners, engineers, ideologues and local enforcers. James Ferguson, in his classic '*The Anti-Politics Machine'*, urges us to look beyond the modernising narrative of states to identify, in addition, the unstated though significant consequences of modernisation projects as they serve efficiently to extend and consolidate state power in to formerly unreached areas. Cernea and McDowell (2000), and Scudder and Colson focus on the human consequences of development-induced involuntary resettlement, challenging researchers to consider processes of societal disarticulation and impoverishment, that may, or may not, be manageable or avoidable outcomes.

This study contends that the twentieth century political, economic and social transformation of Kyrgyzstan—an outcome of large-scale immigration, displacement and settlement, necessitated and enabled by mass rural collectivisation both in the north and the south of the country, and the compulsory all year round settlement of pastoralists—made possible the

occupation, colonisation and Sovietisation of the territory, engendering changes that shaped the country's post-socialist transition, and ongoing struggles for political and social stability. The analysis builds on the important work of Loring (2008) on state-building, governance and leadership in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, Schoeberlein (2000) on the contemporary reverberations of Soviet resettlement in Central Asia, and Roy's understanding of the post-Soviet transition in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (1999; 2011). The study additionally learns from Brill Olcott (1981) and Pianciola's (2004) insights into processes of post-Soviet change in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

Three broad themes are therefore examined, the promise of Soviet modernisation and its reality, nation building and identity, and the embedding of violence in everyday politics. In doing so, it links the politics and practice of collectivisation and its undoing following independence, to the continuing destabilising struggles for power among old and new elites. The transformations discussed are further understood as elements of the wider historical processes of colonisation, the imposition of Soviet rule by force, and resistance to tumultuous change. It is found that a settled national identity was in place in the late-Soviet period both as a consequence of the processes of Sovietisation, as well as out of opposition to Soviet rule. Furthermore, the bases and formation of this national identity had its roots in Kyrgyzstan's rural social organisation and rural politics, which themselves were in part products of the experience of displacement and collectivisation. It will be argued that the unravelling of an imposed Soviet order magnified the challenge of resolving disputes over land, water, pasture use and access to infrastructure, and coalesced in ways that have compounded Kyrgyzstan's instability, and remain a factor in its inability to forge a strong and coherent political identity, or to maintain institutions that are capable of substituting for the divisive and corrupt politics that continues to mar the country's independence, and threaten its border security.

The questions raised in this study are therefore of wider contemporary importance. Russia's war in Ukraine will alter the politics of that country, and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, and Central Asia for decades to come. In many of the states formerly occupied by Soviet Russia, the events of 2022 and 2023 have led to a profound reassessment of those countries' historical relationship with Russia and the Soviet Union, and also of the legacies of that relationship for the immediate and longer-term future. For the people of Ukraine, the ghosts of Sovietisation and the purges of the 1930s returned with deportations of Ukrainian citizens by Russia, many of whom including children were sent to "rehabilitation camps" in eastern

Russia reviving chilling historical memories. Russia's ability in providing security guarantees has been severely diminished as a result of the war in Ukraine, and border tensions, not least between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have once again surfaced and threatened larger confrontations. It is therefore timely to revisit the transformations brought about by Russian Soviet occupation and how this history will, in interesting ways, shape the future of Central Asia and its populations.

The organisation of the book

The following chapter provides context for later descriptions of the collectivisation-led Sovietisation of Kyrgyzstan, and the continuities and disruptions it brought. It explores the method and process of first establishing the basis for collectivisation (in the 1920s), enforcing (in the early 1930s) and consolidating collectivisation (from the mid-1930s and 1950s) as a process of socialist transformation across the Soviet Union. In so doing the chapter draws out the far-reaching impacts of collectivisation, economically, politically and socially, and reveals why it is so effective as a colonising strategy. It will be shown how the collectivisation and mechanisation of agriculture as set out in the first two Five Year Plans enabled the Communist Party and its press to declare in 1939:

> "We have fully adopted a socialist system ... we have liquidated the peasant, the industrialist, the merchant, and the unshakeable foundation of the socialist economic system is collective mechanised agriculture (which has) put an end to unemployment (and) abolish(ed) the exploitation of man by man" (quoted in Guins, 1952:138).

The chapter describes Russian collectivisation as, arguably, the largest ever, and most sustained, state-initiated (if not entirely state controlled) population displacement, eviction, migration, relocation, return and containment endeavour in human history. The numbers remain in dispute, but collectivisation could not have taken place without the transfer and resettlement of millions of citizens of the Soviet Union. In Kyrgyzstan, as later chapters will describe, this immigration and settlement was on a scale which, by 1959, and within only two generations of Soviet rule, transformed the Republic from one where more than eighty per cent of the population were indigenous Central Asians, principally Kyrgyz, to one where roughly half the population were recent immigrants from across the Soviet Union (but predominantly from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) (Medish, 1963).

An argument developed in Part One, and explored throughout the book, and building on ideas advanced by Schoeberlein (2000), is that Soviet collectivisation can be analysed as a case of involuntary resettlement, in the sense that the displacement and resettlement of populations was initiated by a central authority with the intent of bringing about planned processes of political, economic and social change. It is understood from the wider literature that such changes are not always controllable, but furthermore that the effects of displacement and resettlement-induced transformation can be very immediate, but so too can they last over generations. It is argued that the decollectivisation and privatisation that took place in the 1990s, and is indeed ongoing, can also be understood as a later phase of the forcible displacement of the preceding half century; specifically in the sense that its' unravelling in the context of the former *kolkhozy* of Kyrgyzstan contributes to the complexities of the issues that now confront the country.

In Russia and some other republics, the process of Sovietisation was partially revealed to scholars through the decrees and instructions that were issued to build the underlying structure of cooperativism and collectivisation, and through media reports, filings from *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* chairmen, and the literary works of rural fiction from writers including most famously Mikhail Sholokov, Chingiz Aitmatov and the memoirs of Unto Parvilahti among others. By the late-1980s, state and local archives were becoming much more widely available to national and international scholars, and a mass of detail about the process of collectivisation was widely circulated and discussed and a small publishing industry grew up around, in particular, the Stalinist nature of collectivisation and its contribution to totalitarianism.

The chapter takes advantage of material which has become available in the past three decades and from which researchers are piecing together the everyday lives of those who were socialised through the structures of the *kolkhoz* system. There is a growing body of oral testimony and anthropological studies on *kolkhozy* as sociological entities, as well as records of trials, letters of complaint and newspaper reports. However, there is very little material of this kind on Kyrgyzstan, and this study has had to piece together the history and experience of collectivisation through official documents, interviews and a relatively small but growing body of post-independence academic literature.

Renewed interest in collectivisation coincided with the revisioning of Stalin, the man and his reputation. The naked power of enforced and rapid social change dominated much of this historical reinvestigation centring on

the role played by state terror, political purges, and the system of Gulags in creating the conditions that allowed for the Soviet control of the countryside through force and the bureaucratic machinery of the command-administrative system. Numbers became important as evidence in support of a history of Soviet totalitarianism. Nikolai Shmelev, at the time a member of the Soviet Parliament, fired the debate in 1987 with a lecture in which he quoted semi-official statistics, which suggested that 17 million Soviet citizens had been sent to labour camps as political prisoners between 1937 and Stalin's death in 1953; and a further five million peasants were deported during the forced collectivisation of the farmlands in the late-1920s and early-1930s. While internal politics may have been the main motivation, in 2006 the Government of the Ukraine appealed to the United Nations for the 1930s famines and purges in their country to be recognised as genocide. The academic debate about the responsibility for the deaths in Ukraine and in Kazakhstan, and their links to collectivisation was the subject of important works by Fitzpatrick (1993, 1999) and Figes (2017), and indirectly Conquest, and a balance-sheet type discussion by Ellman (2007) of the accusations levelled against Stalin published in the journal *Europe-Asia Studies* in 2007. Further numbers of mass deaths as a consequence of political famines that were themselves a consequence of collectivisation, or as a result of the failure of the authorities to anticipate and respond to food shortages and disease in the 1930s and 1940s, have been further scrutinised as archival material has become available (see Rosefielde, 1997).

Chapters Three and Four document the first attempt at what became partial collectivisation, large scale land confiscation and the redistribution of formerly European settled land to native Kyrgyzstan populations between 1918 and 1922. This gave way to state-supported co-operativism, and a mixed rather than command economy (from 1922-1927) before mass collectivisation under Stalin (from 1929-1933), which had four significant impacts that are relevant to Kyrgyzstan almost one hundred years on. These are, first, the formulating of the intent, and the shaping of a programme to achieve the permanent year-round settlement of Kyrgyzstan's pastoralists, and to bring an end to transhumance pastoralism on any significant scale; second, the creation of the first wave of co-operative and collective farms; third, the violence that marred Kyrgyzstan's "birth as a nation"; and finally, the problem of two distinct national entities in the new Republic.

These themes are further explored in Chapter Five through an examination of the dismantling of collective and state farms, and the privatisation of farm land, events which together completed some of the tasks of social transformation that began under Soviet rule almost a century

earlier, while other structural changes were reversed. It will be shown how the reforms were responsible for reversing the historic consolidation of Kyrgyzstan's farms into a sector dominated by large-scale enterprises (an outcome eagerly sought by twentieth century Soviet agrarian planners who remained deeply suspicious of family farms) resulting instead, as described above, in the creation of a sector in 2008 in which almost all arable land and agricultural and livestock production was in the hands of small peasant farms, and those who maintained household plots.

Chapter Six explores these continuities in Kyrgyzstan following the dismantling of the *kolkhoz* system, and in so doing argues that despite the erosion of the physical landscape of the collective farms, and the new mobility which has dispersed farm populations, the *kolkhozy* have left a social and spatial imprint on people's lives that influenced the course of economic and political development since independence. This chapter charts some of those social continuities by focusing on the emerging of the *kolkhozy* as increasingly independent economic and political entities in the later Soviet period, led by a professionalised cadre of chairmen who emerged as effective actors in post-Soviet politics. The chapter prepares the ground for a later exploration of the legacy of collectivisation with a focus on the country's faltering steps towards democratisation, and the search for a cohesive national identity, the disunity and violence that threatens cohesion.

The final chapter draws together the main findings of this study on the socio-political impacts and legacies of Soviet collectivisation and decollectivisation in Kyrgyzstan, with the violent events in Osh in 2010 providing a case study that illustrates those legacies, and identifies the historic roots of the deep fissures that define contemporary Kyrgyzstan. It was shown in previous chapters the critical role that collectivisation and the forced displacement, relocation and assimilation of a diverse population played in the creation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic. The conclusions return to the three broad themes examined in this book: the promise of Soviet modernisation and its reality, nation building and identity, and the embedding of violence in everyday politics. In doing so, it links the politics and practice of collectivisation and its undoing following independence to the continuing destabilising struggles for power among old and new elites, and helps explain how the legacies of past violence, injustice and unresolved disputes became interwoven with toxic nationalist politics, discrimination and authoritarianism.

PART ONE

WHY COLLECTIVISATION?

CHAPTER TWO

COLLECTIVISATION AND THE "CONSTRUCTION OF SOVIET SOCIALISM"

"Soviet power rests on the mute complicity of an entire society
in pretending to believe what everyone knows is false"
(Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago, 2, 1975*).

Why collectivisation?

The purpose and significance of collectivisation to the Soviet socialist project remains a matter of historical debate among academics of Russia and the Soviet Union. Maynard, writing a decade after mass collectivisation began in earnest in 1930, regarded the pooling of land and the elimination of small producers as a wholly rational, and benign plan to "facilitate the collection of the states' dues, whether in cash or kind", and to speed up the introduction of mechanised agriculture (Maynard, 1941 quoted in Millar, 1982:61). Some sixty years later, and having studied the process and consequences of collectivisation in Kazakhstan, Pianciola reached a similar conclusion:

> "From its outset, the reason for collectivisation had been to concentrate rural resources in a relatively small number of points, so that wealth could be more easily controlled and taken by the state" (2004:162).

The mechanisation of agriculture and the organisation of labour into larger productive units made sense when one considers that the rural population decreased in the 1930s for a range of complex reasons. According to Volin (1943), between December 1926 and January 1939, when censuses of the population were taken, the rural population dropped from 120.7 million to 114.6 million people, with the number actually engaged in agriculture falling further. During the same period, the crop area increased by roughly one-fifth meaning that fewer people, and certainly greater numbers of women, were working more land, and doing so more intensively. Against the objective of mass industrialisation, collectivisation

and mechanisation were both a cause of these population changes, and what might be regarded as a rational reaction to demographic pressure.

As for the scale of collectivisation, a number of authors look to international parallels, drawing connections between the thinking that was taking place in Moscow in the 1920s, and ambitions being realised on the Great Plains of America to consolidate small holdings and open up new lands in the creation of truly enormous industrial farms producing wheat and cattle on an unprecedented scale to feed America's fast growing urban industrial population. Fitzpatrick (1993), among other historians, was also of the view that the primary motivation behind collectivisation was to dramatically increase grain production, and in turn state grain procurement to both feed and fund Soviet industrial growth at home, and increase its prestige abroad. Indeed, throughout Soviet history domestic agricultural production targets were entangled with Soviet-US superpower rivalry, *rattrapage* (catching up with the capitalist west), and the projection of Russian power and pride.

For Solzhenitsyn, however, collectivisation wasn't simply a misguided and hubristic plan for technologically driven agrarian reform, or a copy-cat example of economic "giantism" (Katz, 1977), it was instead something far more sinister. Eight years in correctional work camps and later "special camps" for political prisoners in southern Kazakhstan, led Solzhenitsyn to conclude that the collectivisation of 1929 was in fact overwhelmingly political. He termed it the "Great Peasant Plague" believing it marked the beginning of the "Age of the Gulag". For conservative writers such as Malia (1977) and Conquest (1968), and more recently in the work of O'Keefe (2022), the significance of collectivisation has to be read alongside the history of totalitarianism, of the persecutions and massacres of the *kulaks*, deliberate starvation, deportations, purges of enemies and reactionary elements, and the political imprisonment of the Stalin era. For these writers, collectivisation was a product of and a vehicle for delivering terror, and a direct outcome of the abandonment of the rule of law and employing extreme force for political gain. Brower (1977) agrees seeing the war on the collectives in 1932 and 1933, in particular, as setting the scene for the "exploitative police state" that was to come (1977:166). While acknowledging that land reform and land seizures have been an almost perpetual feature of late Tsarist Russia, "no previous state reform" Fitzpatrick argues "had been conducted so violently and coercively, involved such direct and all-encompassing assault on peasant values, or has taken so much while offering so little" (1994:4).

While agreeing that collectivisation can be viewed as a manifestation of escalating state and bureaucratic violence against parts but not all of the peasantry, it was not necessarily the result of a grand plan on the part of the Politburo. Lewin (1985) believes it may have been a reactive institutionalisation of a 1928 campaign which saw thousands of urban workers and Party officials travelling from the towns and cities into the countryside to collect grain who simply stayed and commenced the collectivisation process. Rather than driving this, the Politburo and the Party was forced to keep up with events as they developed on the ground. As Millar pointedly comments, when seen in this way, collectivisation was less a revolution from above, as Stalin believed it to be, and more a crusade (Millar, 1982). Sovietologists intrigued by the internal politics of the Communist Party and so highly attuned to the seating arrangements of officials in key conferences and the staged directions of applause, analyse the ways in which the collectivisation policy worked to concentrate power in the hands of those who immediately surrounded Stalin, and was in that sense narrow politicking rather than happenstance. Furthermore, Berchin-Benedictoff noted that in political terms the policy of collectivisation was not risk-free for Stalin, in particular there was opposition from soldiers in the Red Army themselves drawn from the peasantry and some senior members of the military high command, and potential threats to Stalin, were thought to share the anti-collectivisation sentiments of their soldiers (1942:15). Other authors have questioned the commitment of the rural Communist Party to Stalin's plans in the 1930s.

Perhaps there is also a convincing set of historical and structural explanations for the emergence of collectivisation as a cornerstone policy of Soviet Communism. Both Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), or what was termed "state capitalism", which dominated Russian economic and social planning for most of the 1920s, and Stalin's First Five Year Plan of 1929, which launched his programme of total collectivisation and the later opening up of "Virgin Lands", need to be understood against the battle for the peasantry that took place from the Revolution of 1905 and the "agrarian disorders" that followed until 1918. Of particular relevance were the land reforms introduced by Stolypin, Prime Minister from 1906 until his assassination in 1911, which sought to modernise Russian agriculture and fundamentally challenged the agrarian regime and social relations on the predominantly communally-owned lands managed under the *mir* or *obschina* system. Under that system each communal village received an area of land allotted to its members as a communal holding under a system of collective responsibility for the redemption of payments by all its members. The commune itself then divided the land for tilling among its

members according to the size of the families, leaving some aside as communal allotments, and fresh subdivisions took place every few years to keep up with population changes. The system was characterised as one where there was very little inducement for a communal farmer to improve the land, and no sense of Western-style private ownership which drove the rural economy in Europe and the US and motivated investment.

Kerensky (1945), served as the second Prime Minister of the Russian Provisional Government immediately before Lenin's election following the October Revolution, a political opponent of Stolypin he argued that his reforms "became a weapon of political and class struggle", effectively encouraging well to do peasants to separate themselves from the communes, being allocated the best communal lands, and by their actions were accused of unravelling the fabric of social relations that bound producers together into associations of collective responsibility and pitted neighbour against neighbour. To accelerate the process of reform, Stolypin passed the Resettlement Act of June 1904 which included incentives to migrants to take advantage of the opportunities opening up to them through exemptions from taxation and subsidies to farming and building materials (Katsunori, 2000 quoted in Schmidt and Sagynbekova (2008:112). Wolfe agreed that Stolypin's plan was mainly conservative, aimed at stabilising the Tsarist regime through the fostering of "capitalism in agriculture, to promote class differentiation in the village ... to break down the *mir* system" and replace it with a new class of property-minded peasant proprietors as a rural support for the existing order.

Though, some of the changes introduced were arguably more "progressive" and found favour with Lenin as he formulated his NEP. For example, the much resented "Land Captains", the representatives of the "gentry" in the countryside, were abolished, a code of civil rights was established giving peasants the same entitlements as others in society, and loans were made available to peasants who agreed to convert their plots of land into private property. Less than reliable statistics on the take-up of Stolypin's land privatisation scheme left commentators to make their own assessments of its success or otherwise. Committed opponent, Kerensky, argued in a 1945 article for the journal *The Russian Review*, that the hostility to the reforms on the part of the peasantry could be seen by the fact that only 2,729,000 peasant families has sought to covert communal land to private ownership by January 1915. Whilst Wolfe (1958), writing in the same journal two years later, argued that by January 1916, 6,200,000 out of an estimated 16 million eligible families, had made an application for separation, suggesting a fast-growing enthusiasm for private land ownership and markets. Had the

conversions continued at this rate for another generation then Stalin's 1930s land expropriations, and the forced consolidation of those lands into collectivised villages, would have been an altogether different task. The opportunity for Stolypin to push through his reforms was fatally cut short in a Kiev theatre in 1911, but given the opposition to his reforms from liberals and conservatives alike, Macey (1994) argues, it was always going to be difficult for him to achieve such radical changes on the truly grand scale that he sought.

In the dramatic and violent upheavals of 1917 and 1918, the Russian Revolution that overthrew the Tsarist order and brought the Bolshevik's to power under the leadership of Lenin, an altogether different land redistribution took place, including, alongside land owned by the state and wealthier privileged classes, land that was held by those peasants who were beneficiaries of Stolypin's reforms. The new "black repartition" was more than an act of "social justice", it was "a revolt of the village against the towns, as one of the last attempts by humble country folk to halt the process, a seemingly inevitable concomitant of 'modernisation', whereby authority comes to be wielded by an urban elite unsympathetic to the needs and values of poor farmers" (Keep, 1977:405). One of the consequences of these events, according to Keep, was the "rusticisation" of Russian society which in turn shaped the nature of the Soviet political order, to which one would add, beginning the process of collectivisation that would become identifiable from the late-1920s. Lenin's NEP was forged by the social forces and changes that were unleashed by the Revolution in the countryside. While it is always difficult to know for sure what revolutionaries are seeking when in the act of revolution, the actions that were taken, the driving out of the countryside of landowners, the carving up of estate land and its redistribution to peasant smallholders, the establishment of committees of peasants (*kombedy*), and the collectivisation of farms, and the fact they were, according to Keep, carried out mainly by the peasants themselves with only minimal involvement or direction from central government or the Bolsheviks, points to the organised destruction of the traditional social structure in the Russian countryside and the levelling out of socio-economic differences; if not a socialist revolution entirely of the sort wished for by the Bolsheviks.

The civil war widened the gap and intensified hostilities between the town and the countryside, though Lenin believed that the revolutionary forces released in the countryside could be controlled through the political process and concessions and reforms that accommodated the kind of socialism being articulated by the peasants, despite the fact that it was a

form of socialism that diverted in significant ways from that understood by the Communist Party that had consolidated its power in 1918. "Lenin's provisional answer" according to Keep "was the New Economic Policy (while) Stalin's (answer) eight years later, was forced collectivisation" (1977:408).

Scott in his reading of Lenin's *The Agrarian Question*, written between 1901 and 1907, finds compelling evidence that Lenin's faith in high-modernism, while not given full reign in the NEP, nonetheless set the scene for the mass collectivisation that followed after his death. He traces Lenin's belief that gigantic, highly mechanised agriculture would inevitably, and indeed should, replace small-scale family farming (1998:164). Lenin denounced — and recommended "throwing overboard" —all the cultivation and social practices associated with customary, communal, three-field system of land allotments that still pertained in Russia at that time and which survived only, he argued, because the peasants worked themselves and their animals into the ground, together going hungry. Scott reminds us that Lenin was famous for claiming that "Communism is Soviet Power plus the Electrification of the whole countryside", and his faith in modernity and technology led him to believe that through transmission lines and the distribution of electricity, controlled from the centre, the agricultural process could be fully mechanised and the roots of capitalism, petite-bourgeois landholdings, could be once and for all driven from the countryside (1998:166-167). Lenin's modernising vision for the countryside, lighting the darkness of the people and the lanes, involved also bringing technical expertise onto the farms, enabling the penetration of the Party and the centralisation of authority and power. For Scott, it was clear that in:

> "Lenin's conception of agriculture, (one can already glimpse) the mania for machine-tractor stations, the establishment of large state farms and eventual collectivisation, and even the high-modernist spirit that would lead to such vast colonisation schemes as Kruschev's Virgin Land's initiative" (1998:167).

The NEP period has been characterised as one of "indeterminacy" in the sense that the course charted was not a predetermined road linking the Bolshevik Revolution to Stalin's First Five Year Plan. The NEP, in some senses, represented a more pragmatic and less ideological politics, a shift away from the militant socialist construction of what was described as "War Communism", rather encompassing the realisation that the socialist project would take longer to achieve than many in the Party were prepared to accept and the route to achieving it would be more circuitous. Siegelbaum (1992) believes that the NEP was far less coherently thought out than history has

subsequently suggested. Certainly, it had a clear overriding objective, at its heart, which was to intensify and rationalise production, most importantly of cotton, and the conditions imposed on workers (for example, the introduction of the seven-hour day) at the time were felt very directly and resulted in strike action and evidence that central government struggled to maintain the control necessary over the localities to drive home its reforms. Lenin's pragmatism, or what Scott preferred to call a "tactical retreat", led him to abandon his bolder ambitions of collectivisation during the period of the NEP in favour of encouraging small-scale production and petty trade which served to reinvigorate markets in agricultural and consumer goods. The scale of the retreat, according to Loring, was greater in Central Asia than it was in European Russia where the Bolshevik authorities recognised the need to appease local society, particularly in areas where Basmachi and other rebellions were a threat to food supplies and wider stability (2008:71).

As Macey (1994) later commented, in the midst of discussions in Russia after the 1989 land reforms, the organisational model of the NEP in which production was decentralised and the state played a relatively minor role—collecting and distributing a certain minimum output to guarantee food supplies to the cities and the military as well as raw materials to industry, plus experimentation with family farms and co-operatives—provided for some elements of a model that was used to guide Russia's, and indeed Kyrgyzstan's, post-Soviet transition.

The anticipated transformation of the countryside that was put on hold during the 1920s began with a new sense of revolutionary urgency under Stalin in 1929, and the establishment of a command-administrative system at the centre of which were state and collective farms. By the end of the NEP period, Russian rural life was little changed from the turn of the century with, Macey estimates, some 25 million peasant households engaged in what was essentially a communal system of open-field strip cultivation and compulsory crop rotation, using hand tools and horse-drawn technology (1994:167). While Stalin shared Lenin's high modernist enthusiasms, he was both a man and a politician of a different order – radical, ruthless and elitist. Numerous writers have cited Stalin's reply to the author Mikhail Sholokov—who appealed for help to save the peasants living along the course of the River Don and who were on the verge of starvation in 1932 as a result of poor farming conditions and collectivisation—in which rather than viewing the peasants as victims, Stalin deemed them to be enemies, fighting a war against Soviet power and the regime (see Conquest, 1968; Scott, 1999), and who would, in return for their perfidy, be met with a "war of starvation". The historical evaluation of

collectivisation and its human costs continues, and Stalinism is a potent national political issue in Russia, and also for many citizens in states of the former Soviet Union as they seek to come to terms with the famines and deaths that, particularly in Ukraine, are remembered as genocide, and a source of historical trauma.

As stated previously, Ellman (2007) summarised well some of the issues being debated about the scale, causes and complicity in the violence associated with mass collectivisation, colonisation, the forced settlement of pastoralists, the purging, killing and deportation of enemies of the "class struggle", and in deliberate acts that led to famine and the failure to provide humanitarian aid to those at risk or to permit out-migration from famine affected areas as a survival strategy. Stalin viewed collectivisation and its risks as risks worth taking for the greater cause. The peasants themselves, Stalin believed, were to blame for any famine conditions that accompanied total collectivisation and *kulaks* who were accused of using the collective farms to launch offensives against the regime, and the so called "idlers" who refused to make "sacrifices", were blamed for trying to starve the army and the workers. Ellman notes that the early stages of mass collectivisation involved "multi-pronged state terror against the population of the USSR, in particular the peasantry" through judicial repression; charges, arrests and detention by OGPU, the State's secret police responsible for the Gulag system; procurement of grain by force; and by banning the flight of people from some areas of famine while engaging in mass deportations of peasant in other parts of the Union (2007:689-691). According to Brower, police actions had the dual purpose of controlling both the peasantry and the Communist Party through campaigns directed against the Party's own cadres in addition to collective farm officials in the countryside (1977:160).

As a mechanism for achieving the centralised control of the economy, collectivisation involved the setting of production targets for *kolkhoz* collective and *sovkhoz* state farms as revealed in the Five Year Plans. The first of these, issued in 1929 to run until 1933 and therefore covering the most intensive period of collectivisation, was the model product of Soviet planning which, as Leontief described so perceptively in 1946, did not treat the economy as an organic unit but rather envisaged a series of quite separate silos of industry and agriculture each of which was assigned its own programme of production. Thus, production, distribution and consumption were "unbalanced" with products and raw materials in some branches of industry being in plenty, held in reserve and wasted, while in other branches the necessary resources were scarce resulting in serious shortages of goods, empty shelves and queues (Leontief, 1946, see also

Katz, 1977). The economic, social and human costs of this bureaucratic maximalism and failure were extremely high, however, such costs were hidden and kept secret at all levels of reporting. The literature is replete with examples of the absurd lengths that collectives were forced to go in order to satisfy the targets they were set. Parvilahti (1960), an exile in the United States in the 1950s, describes in his memoirs, *Beria's Garden*, his first job in a Baltic coast fishing *kolkhoz,* and how a week before the end of the fishing season, with a shortage of eleven tons in their fishing quota, the *kolkhoz* had good luck and captured a half-grown whale, at a single swoop filling their quota by 101.1 percent.

In practice, collectivisation involved the seizure by the state of all rural land and the transformation of the peasantry from small holders engaged in private farming, communal farming or more commonly a combination of the two, into what Scott describes as a "disciplined proletariat" working for fully mechanised collective farms ("grain factories") covering between 125,000 and 250,000 acres (1999:210-211). Private enterprise was barred with the exception of the very limited trade in produce grown on garden plots on the condition that it was surplus to the quota of milk, eggs and meat that they were required to surrender. Private ownership of land was abolished, the bulk of private housing, major industrial and commercial enterprises, the means of transportation, banks, stocks and bonds as well as private bank accounts were confiscated. Membership of a collective farm was on an individual basis and collectively obtained income was shared out to individuals in proportion to the personal contribution of their labour. Housing with garden plots were assigned to the household or the family rather than to the individual meaning that personal ownership was limited only to articles of consumption (Gsovski, 1947).

The *kolkhoz* was ideologically and functionally part of the wider Soviet economic and ideological system, described by one contemporary critic, as "a gigantic state trust, in which everyone, with a few insignificant exceptions, works for some state or public authority and, in theory at least, receives a wage or salary proportioned to the value of his work" (Chamberlin, 1942). For urban workers in state factories or those employed on state farms, wages were fixed in advance while the income of collective farmers depended on the fluctuations in the annual income of the farm of which the farmer was a member. Furthermore, as Kulski has noted, *kolkhoz* farmers were not included in any system of social insurance whereas those on state farms were, and who, therefore, were less of a financial burden on the state (1956:160). This resulted in clear disparities in living standards and opportunities for those living on state farms when compared to the more