

FROM THE STEPPE TO ASTANA:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF KAZAKH NATIONALISM

Zackary Thomas Slykhouse

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Master's Thesis Committee

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Marianne Kamp, Ph.D.

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Edward Lazzerini, Ph.D.

---

Gardner Bovingdon, Ph.D.

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Zackary Thomas Slykhouse

From the Steppe to Astana: The Development of Kazakh Nationalism

Nationalist ideologies are a strong political and social force based on the principle of one sovereign nation's rights over a given national territory. These ideas may seem simple, but the arguments, symbol-making and historical revisionism inherent in such a matter need strong elaboration, active nation-building efforts, and are prone to interruption by transformative crises.

Kazakh nationalism is no exception to this rule. This paper shows the origins, competing nation-building efforts and the major transformative crises within this now one hundred-and-thirteen-year long tradition. In this paper I argue, following the theories of Miroslav Hroch, that Kazakh nationalism 1) begins in Orenburg periodicals under the Horde of Alash, 2) expands to the status of a mass national movement via Soviet nation-building and by reactions to that process under the tenure of Dinmukhamed Kunayev, 3) is greatly transformed during the 1986 Jeltoksan riots in Alma-Ata, which engendered a hard cleft between Kazakh national activists and the USSR center, and 4) is a common feature of Kazakhstani politics in the post-independence period, used when and where the narrative supports state projects or state legitimacy. Taken as a whole, we see a tradition built to be national in form but Soviet in character then realized as Soviet in form but national in character. Thus, this work serves as a guide to the major elaborations, transformations, and conjurations of Kazakh Nationalism through history by synthesizing the works of many scholars of Kazakh national movements, historians, and various primary sources of national character.

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On December 16, 1991, the world's largest landlocked country, Kazakhstan declared itself an independent nation, the last of the soviet republics to leave the USSR. Of all the theoretical territorial, political and social crises that might have caused general strife, territorial annexation, or ethnic conflict- none occurred. Nor did a supra-national organization, such as an alternative to the USSR come into place. In these early days of independence, Kazakhstan did not conflagrate into ethnic civil war as its contemporaries Tajikistan or Yugoslavia did. Despite a series of economic collapses, international financial scandals, and the early years of runaway inflation, the Republic of Kazakhstan remains to this day, and Nursultan Nazarbayev is still President. As Kazakhstan celebrates 27 years of independence, and questions of succession remain, it becomes more critical to understand holistically the social and political forces which sustain both nation and state, and those which threaten future stability. A key item in both of these categories, is Kazakh nationalism.

In 2014, a notable debate erupted over on whether to change the name of the Republic of Kazakhstan to *Kazakh Yeli* [Қазақ Елі]: a change away from the norm of post-soviet Central Asian Republics.<sup>1</sup> In the Kazakh language this phrase is more akin to “Country of the Kazakhs”, and *Yel* can be used with many nations, but *Kazakh Yeli* was initially conceived by Kazakh intellectuals within the Horde of Alash [Алаш Ордасы], a nationalist movement nearly 100 years earlier, and therefore has a secondary, deeply nationalist context. This phrase was used, in conjunction with novel phrases like *Atameken* [Атамекен] (fatherland) and *Atajurt* [Атажұрт] (motherland) to articulate ideas of a Kazakh national and primordial homeland.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, applying a Kazakh language word to the name of the country was, in and of itself, regarded as a

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander C. Diener "Imagining Kazakhstani-stan: Negotiations of Homeland and Titular Nationality" 131

<sup>2</sup> Steven Sabol. *Russian Colonization and Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness*. 26

Kazakh nationalist movement by the many other ethnic groups of the predominately Russian-speaking country. The 2014 *Kazakh Yeli* initiative, proposed by Nazarbayev and supported by many national-patriot organizations, was defeated.<sup>3</sup> For observers of Kazakh politics, however, this conflict functions as an important signifier of modern relationships between Kazakhstan's autocratic government, Kazakh nationalist groups, and the realities of being a multiethnic, multicultural state.

The government of Kazakhstan claims legitimacy both through Kazakh nationalism (the belief in ethnic Kazakh sovereignty over a primordial Kazakh homeland), and multiethnic civic nationalism - the belief in fair representation of all ethnicities within a state, and a guarantee of welfare and representation of those ethnicities. In this way, the state co-opts support from (or at the very least, attempts to co-opt support from) the entire population. It is a peculiar system, kept in constant tension as demographics continue to shift and change. Ethnic Kazakhs are *primus inter pares* within state discourse, having a noted state-making, peace-keeping responsibility.<sup>4</sup> The Kazakh ethnic group, once an ethnonymic plurality at the time of independence, is now a thin demographic majority. This is partially a result of the exodus of over 2 million Russians since 1991, the Kazakh repatriation from other states (the *Oralman* program) and a high Kazakh birthrate.<sup>5</sup> Kazakhstan is also a richly multi-cultural and multiethnic state, with over 100 different ethnic groups represented within the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup> It would be impossible for Kazakhstan to have a government, similar to say Latvia, wherein a popular monoethnic nationalistic hegemony is translated into a potent

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<sup>3</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism" 167

<sup>4</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism" 155

<sup>5</sup> Marth Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* 52

<sup>6</sup> Malika Orazgaliyeva. "Assembly of People of Kazakhstan Seeks to Strengthen Interethnic Harmony." <https://astanatimes.com/2015/04/assembly-of-people-of-kazakhstan-seeks-to-strengthen-interethnic-harmony/>.

political platform.<sup>7</sup> As Nazarbayev himself has said, “God Grant that no one should stir up Kazakhstan on ethnic grounds; [sic] it would be far worse than Yugoslavia!”<sup>8</sup>

Kazakh nationalism is instrumental to state legitimacy. It co-opts popular Kazakh support, while granting and elaborating a state history. The homeland narrative also provides international legitimacy, as ethnic Kazakhs from China to Mongolia seek repatriation. At the same time, Kazakh nationalism is the language used by national extremist parties, who critique the government’s reforms, stage protests, and threaten the future stability of the country. It is thus possible for many Kazakhs to feel owed the idealized ethnic homeland elaborated in state discourse, but never given. In areas such as the recovery and primacy of the Kazakh language, the government has made promises since 1991, yet has not delivered the economic, legal, or human capital for such a national transformation to occur.<sup>9</sup>

In any cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic civilization, the action of extreme nationalist politics can breed irrational behaviors, fascism, and creation of tiered citizenship systems based upon national ethnicity. When one segment of the population is mobilized, it can be mobilized against other groups, leading to security issues or ethnic strife in the worst of situations. Miroslav Hroch writes that a true nationalist is “one who gives absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests.”<sup>10</sup> In his study of European nation-building efforts, Hroch finds that “in conditions of acute stress, people characteristically tend to over-value the protective comfort of their own national group.”<sup>11</sup> Kazakhstan is not immune to strife, having many years

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<sup>7</sup> See: Diana Kudaibergenova, "Nationalizing Elites and Regimes: Nation-building in Post-Soviet Authoritarian and Democratic Contexts"

<sup>8</sup> Alexander C. Diener "Imagining Kazakhstan: Negotiations of Homeland and Titular Nationality" 131

<sup>9</sup> Laruelle, "Which Future for National Patriots?." 161

<sup>10</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe" 62

<sup>11</sup> Hroch, 71



of economic issues- namely inflation- with which to contend. Yet the state still, in many ways, promotes the agenda of Kazakh national groups. State symbols, from the flag to the national anthem are all based on Kazakh culture, and have a meaning rarely translated into Russian.<sup>12</sup> It is further clear that Kazakhstan will always treat the Kazakh ethnicity with greater privilege. As President Nazarbayev has declared, “A nation cannot exist without a state, it vanishes, it is appropriate if in some cases the interests of the indigenous nation, the Kazakhs are given special emphasis in this state.”<sup>13</sup> He leaves observers to wonder: if Kazakhstanis are put under broad social and economic stress, what will happen between Kazakhs and the many other ethnic groups within the state?

Little occurs in a vacuum, and the nationalistic ideas of a sovereign Kazakh-ruled territory over the land of the Kazakh SSR did not merely appear when convenient in 1991. Hroch writes (after his broad survey of national movements within Europe, for the broad majority of nationalisms) that there is a period of intellectual elaboration, followed by a a period of political agitation, and a final ‘awakening’ of a nationalistic consciousness in a broad segment of the target demographic.<sup>14</sup> To understand the modern realities of Kazakh Nationalism, we need to appreciate how its foundational ideas were conceived, how they changed over time, and how they were reiterated by the subsequent generations. We need to understand its initial genesis, the key figures and operators of its elaboration, the actions of those who continued to elaborate it, and the key incidents and actors in Kazakhstan’s history which broadened public understanding and appeal. This document attempts to answer the question: “What do we talk about when we

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<sup>12</sup> Martha Brill Olcott. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* 59

<sup>13</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* 31

<sup>14</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe” 62

talk about Kazakh Nationalism?,” by providing a social-political-historical framework which maps Kazakh nationalism at the time of its genesis within the Horde of Alash [Алаш Ордасы] movement, through Soviet history to independence, and to the modern era. It pays special attention to the national importance of the 1986 *Jeltoksan* (December) [желтоқсан] Riots.

### Theoretical Considerations

As Alexander Maxwell writes, the scholarly literature on nationalism is “unsurveyably vast.”<sup>15</sup> Defining “Nationalism” is one of the hardest and most contentious issues within current scholarship. One possible definition: a political, social and economic movement characterized by the interests of a particular group of people who define themselves as a nation, usually with the goal of national self-governance over a national homeland, supported by the creation of a national identity. Yet, if a group only advocates independence, or only creates documents to support a national identity, are they inherently nationalist? When a nationalist sleeps, is he still a nationalist? Can nationalist works, upon being revived in a future where the nationalist imperatives have largely been lost or changed, still be considered nationalist? Are there good or bad nationalisms? Is ethnic pride inherently nationalist? Extensive taxonomies of differing kinds of nationalism have been written, though, in the opinion of the author, these tend to be as flawed and contentious as they are helpful. Even Anthony D. Smith’s thirty-nine-fold taxonomy of nationalism comes with the caveat that any given case of a nationalism probably fits under multiple taxonomic headings as a result of sheer complexity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander Maxwell "Typologies and phases in nationalism studies: Hroch's A-B-C schema as a basis for comparative terminology." 865

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell, 866

Because of this ongoing intellectual debate among scholars of nationalism and nations, we need to articulate *our* working definitions of “nation” and “nationalism” as it pertains to *this* project, and to identify where, in this broader debate, our definitions lie. It would be impossible, or at least theoretically unsound, to model Kazakh nationalism without undertaking this effort. At the barest level, we are in conceptual agreement with Ernest Renan; that a nation is a form of spirit, rather than a discrete object. It is something understood, but not necessarily wholly articulate. An element of popular simplification of complex ideas and systems is thus crucial, as Ernst Gellner recognizes, “Nationalism revolves around attempts to convert the intrinsically ambiguous and controversial into the conventional and seemingly natural, imposing a normalized order on a much more complex cultural community.”<sup>17</sup> Expanding on this, Harun Yilmaz describes Nationalism as a “fundamentally romantic narrative,” a story which answers the common questions: “who were our ancestors?,” “What were their borders?,” “Who are our leading figures?,” “Who are our historical enemies?,” “How were we reborn into modernity?”<sup>18</sup> These narratives determine what popular national history is and “what is not history.”<sup>19</sup> For the nation, the intended audience of this narrative, it answers loudly the key questions of, “Who are we?” and “Who were we?”. For the purposes of this document we define nationalism as a politically influential and instrumental narrative which advocates for higher degrees of sovereignty, promotes the nation, reinforces cultural attributes, and creates easily understandable hierarchies of values within history, politics, and society.

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<sup>17</sup> Diana Kudaibergenova, "Nationalizing Elites and Regimes: Nation-building in Post-Soviet Authoritarian and Democratic Contexts" 119

<sup>18</sup> Harun Yilmaz. *National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin*. 4

<sup>19</sup> Diana Kudaibergenova *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives*. 15

With regards to this work's working definition of nation and nationalism, Miroslav Hroch posits the following: The nation is a group of people who together (or at least in a large core constituency) hold (i) a memory of a common past, and a belief in a common group destiny, (ii) a density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication and expression within the core group, (iii) conception of equality of all members of the group when civilly organized.<sup>20</sup> Core to his argument is the concept that nations are not primordial, though the connections which allow nations to organize tend to be based on common histories and traditions. A people is not automatically a nation- by Hroch's definition, they need to elaborate and communicate ideas of their distinctiveness, connectiveness and community, a process either separate, political and distinct, or less distinct within other cultural and social processes called 'nation-building.'<sup>21</sup> Both the academic and literary elaboration of ideals and the action of articulating a 'nationalism' to its target population, will be our "nation-building". The term national consciousness will also be used when describing salient and powerful ideas within Kazakh nationalism at various historical points of development.

Kazakh Nationalism never was, and is not a discrete, monolithic, permanent set of values and principles which have been unanimously upheld in the national consciousness by all Kazakhs through all time. There are areas of the narrative that are quite popular, and areas which never have been. There are greatly elaborated ideas, and ideas held in contention. These formations shift and change with each new author, new activist, new crises and new generation of Kazakh nationalists. As Hroch writes, three types of crisis can bring about a sudden necessity for nation-building, as well as a transformation of a given nationalism. These are: 1) a social or

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<sup>20</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe" 62

<sup>21</sup> Hroch, 60

political crisis of the existing order, accompanied by new tensions or new destinies, 2) an emergence of significant discontent across large parts of the population, and/or 3) a potent loss of faith in traditional or current religious or moral systems.<sup>22</sup> Such transformative crises are historically visible in the actions of the Horde of Alash at the time of the Russian Civil War, in the years of the Kazakh SSR up to the 1986 Almaty protests, and through the transition from post-independence to modern Kazakhstan, and will be detailed extensively in their respective sections below. Each of these moments ‘built’ the Kazakh nation and Kazakh nationalism through the elaboration, politicization, and greater salience of a Kazakh nationalist ideology, as Kazakh individuals sought to use the nation as a rallying point to converse about and resolve various critical issues.

Despite these transformative crises, it would be incorrect to assume that all qualities of Kazakh nationalism altered throughout history. Though there are large transformations, there is a connective through-line between each major transformation. In a time of crisis, intellectuals often look to the past. As Hroch writes, “more generally, the legacy of... [prior] ...nation-building processes, even if failed or abated, often left significant resources for the [latter].”<sup>23</sup> For example, simply because the Horde of Alash failed to produce a successful, independent Kazakh nation-state does not mean the memory of the attempt and the crisis which precipitated it vanished from the national consciousness or the Kazakh national narrative. As memories of battles reiterate the nature of ancestral enemies, and the concept of a national identity, so too do lands held by previous national polities. Thus the memory of the Horde of Alash as a Kazakh

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<sup>22</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe” 66-67

<sup>23</sup> Hroch, 65

ethnic polity is a strong nationalizing force, despite the actual nature of its scope or potency. Further still, unless the written materials used to convey and elaborate the nationalism at that time are to their fullest extent totally lost, (which in our case never happened, not even to the Horde of Alash) those materials are, and will continue to be, an potent part of nation-building, and a component of the overall nationalism-narrative.<sup>24</sup>

Miroslav Hroch's three chronological phases in the creation of a nation, a three phase A - > B -> C theoretical framework of nationalism lend a strong, if greatly simplified framework for understanding Kazakh nationalism through a historical lens.<sup>25</sup> In Phase A, nationalist movements are first elaborated by intelligentsia and national-activists striving for a national identity. The foundation of this effort is in historical, linguistic, ethnogenetic and cultural research. Such groups usually focus on the development of a national culture based on a local language, and the role of that language in education, political administration, and economic life.<sup>26</sup> Phase A can be undertaken with an imperative for political sovereignty, but that is not a requirement of this early stage. Phase A can also occur with or without great, purposeful nationalistic organization or imperatives. In Phase B, a new group/order of activists attempt to popularize the ideas articulated in Phase A among co-ethnics attempting to "patriotically agitate" or "awaken" a national consciousness, calling the population to action on some topic, usually national independence. Such attempts can succeed or fail. Finally in Phase C, a mass national movement occurs, wherein a major part of the population is mobilized, and identify themselves

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<sup>24</sup> For the historic treatment of Alash and its publications under the Soviets, see: Amanzhalova, *Kazakhskii Avtonomizm i Rossiia: Istoriia Dvizheniia Alash*

<sup>25</sup>For a lengthy interrogation of Hroch's A-B-C theory and it's reception in academic literature, I recommend. Alexander Maxwell "Typologies and phases in nationalism studies: Hroch's A-B-C schema as a basis for comparative terminology." 865-880

<sup>26</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe" 62

as members of the nation. At the end of phase C, national actors are present in every branch of society and every ideological camp must react to it. Phase C does not have to be a singular movement by a single organization, nor must the nationalistic ideas, or even the actors of Phase A and B need to survive, rather Phase C is a realization of the movement, and broad reactions to it. To greatly simplify this, nations and nationalisms are first elaborated by intellectual elite, moved by national provocateurs, and then broadly recognized in a “We are this nation, we are owed X, we demand Y” type social and political movement.

This is not the first work to apply Miroslav Hroch’s three phases to the subject of Kazakh nationalism. Steven Sabol, in his book *Russian Colonization and Genesis of Kazakh National Consciousness* does so directly. In his work, Sabol argues that the Horde of Alash intellectuals were beginning a Phase A to Phase B transition when the 1917 Russian Revolution forced the movement into a haphazard Phase C (the creation of the independent government), which was co-opted by the Soviets and their creation of the Kazakh SSR.<sup>27</sup>

Steven Sabol’s framework seems problematic as it infers that there is a natural continuation of actors and ideas between the Horde of Alash movement, and the Soviet development of the Kazakh SSR. In fact, The Horde of Alash government was disbanded by the Red Army in 1920, and both the scholarly actors and political leaders were arrested, largely purged (shot in the head) as dangerous, “bourgeoise nationalists” in 1928.<sup>28</sup> Attempts to write the history of the Horde of Alash were then greatly handicapped at every turn. From the first comprehensive study by A.K. Bochagovim in 1927, which attempted to understand Alash as a national movement, to the works of T. Toghzhanov in 1932, which attempted to paint Alash as a

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<sup>27</sup> Steven Sabol. *Russian Colonization and Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness*. 4-5

<sup>28</sup> Amanzhalova, *Kazakhskii Avtonomizm i Rossiia: Istoriia Dvizheniia Alash* pg. 6, translated by Z. Slykhouse

“fully reactionary” movement- all were gravely censored.<sup>29</sup> Stalin’s directives on what Soviet history was to be, turned out to be ruinous for the study of Alash; by 1935, it had become the normative standard to discuss Alash without referencing a single primary source, or even compilations of primary or secondary sources. Writers and historians would base argumentation upon previously approved definitions and essays which elaborated a ‘proper’ theory which followed the party line. Amanzhalova, through her surveys of archival sources, discovered that although many primary sources of Alash survived, such as issues of the newspapers “*Kazakh*” and “*Ai Qap*,” as well as records of their initial congresses, such documents were left unsourced in archives for most of Soviet history-making.<sup>30</sup> A resurrection and widespread reprinting of Alash documents began in 1982, but since, for the most part of the history the Kazakh SSR, Alash and its documents were strictly controlled through academic censure, it is best to segregate and identify Alash as a different movement from the development of the Kyrgyz ASR or Kazakh SSR. Thus, it is hard to say this enforced cauterization of Alash was a “co-optation”.

The Soviets conducted their own Kazakh nation-building process. The Leninist nationalities policy and Soviet ethnographical research were critical components of Kazakh nation-building. This must not be conflated with the nation-building undertaken by the Horde of Alash as the Soviet construction of a Soviet-Kazakh nation, in tandem with the state-building projects of the KASR/KSSR, were undertaken by different actors (initially largely non-Kazakh actors), for differing purposes, and differing end goals. Kazakh nationalism is hence developed and articulated by two parallel, and oft-competing nation-building processes, one which begins with native Kazakhs in the Horde of Alash at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and one which begins

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<sup>29</sup> Amanzhalova, 6-7

<sup>30</sup> Amanzhalova, 13



with the collapse and Soviet censure of the Horde of Alash, and which is initially articulated by non-Kazakhs. The Kazakh nationalism of today is a mixture of these two nationalizing forces.

### Literature Review

Our sources include histories of Kazakhstan, which help give historical context for various national developments and crises, the work of other scholars of Kazakh nationalism who have mapped developments in Kazakh history and literature from Alash to the modern era, and who are supported theoretically by scholars of nationalism and state legitimacy. There is another category, that of Kazakhstani state media, and oppositional media which can provide an additional context for the current national landscape. Such works are inherently biased, but their bias is used to make analytical points rather than to support an argument as fact.

Our historical background mainly originates in broad histories written by Shirin Akiner (*The Formation of Kazakh Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State*), and by Martha Brill Olcott (*The Kazakhs and Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*). Dr. Akiner is a research associate at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. She faced some censure roughly twelve years ago for her work *Violence in Andijan*, which was criticized for being biased and propagandist towards the Islam Karimov administration. However, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity* was published a full twelve years prior to this controversy, and does not appear to be a work of biased history. Dr. Martha Brill Olcott is now retired, a professor emerita at Colgate University. Her work *The Kazakhs* was foundational for a time, and *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* may be seen as an extension of that work. Many raw facts and points of argumentation from both authors will be supporting our argumentation throughout this thesis.

That is not to say this work relies only on these comprehensive works of history. As we move through specific frames of time, we will rely more on scholarship written about those time-frames by historians and scholars of Kazakh nationalism within the period.

Starting with the Horde of Alash (Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century), we utilize the work of Dr. Dina Akhmetzhanova Amanzhalova (*Kazakhskii Avtonomizm i Rossiia: Istoriia Dvizheniia Alash* (Kazakh Autonomism: The History of the Alash Movement), Dr. Adeeb Khalid (*Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire and Revolution in the Early USSR*), Dr. Steven Sabol (*Russian Colonization and Genesis of Kazakh National Consciousness*), and Dr. Harun Yilmaz (*National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin*). Dr. Amanzhalova was a professor at the Semipalatinisk Pedagogical Institute, and her work focuses on how various Soviet authors have attempted to write comprehensive histories of the Horde of Alash within a fairly toxic scholastic environment, defining precisely how the KSSR tried to remember the movement, as well as how Alash was recovered in the 1980s. Dr. Sabol, professor at the University of North Carolina, continues to study history and national movements within the post-Soviet Space. His work, a history of Alash, is the first to use Miroslav Hroch's A-B-C schema of national agitation, and thereby is both historically and argumentatively useful in that regard. Dr. Harun Yilmaz, currently a research fellow at Queen Mary University of London earned his doctorate at the University of Oxford. His work is an extremely useful reference for historical Soviet state- and nation-building projects under Lenin and Stalin. Dr. Adeeb Khalid, a professor at Carleton College, writes about the transition between Turkestan to the modern nations of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. By and large, Khalid's work has little to do with the Horde of Alash, but reactions between Turkestani leaders and Alash leaders are explored within.

For the broader “Phase B agitation” section of this thesis, which documents efforts of both Kazakh and Soviet-Kazakh nationalists in the period between 1930 and 1986, we also rely on a plethora of supporting works. Harun Yilmaz’s aforementioned text *The Rise of Nations Under Stalin* is useful in the earlier areas of this period. Dr. Diana Kudaibergenova, a postdoctoral researcher at the Lund University of Law, brings us *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives*, which shows the actions of Kazakh nationalist authors within a period starting in the 1950’s to the modern era. Critical to this task are the works of Dr. Michael G. Stefany, an Assistant Professor at Penn State University, who is a nearly unparalleled scholar of the 1986 Jeltoksan riots, given his variety of archival sources from multiple factions and personal interviews with subjects on many sides of the ordeal, from managers of the security response, to retired security officers, to witnesses and demonstrators of the ordeal. It is hard to find accounts of Jeltoksan which are given without gross politicization of the event, that is: without a bias toward proving a ‘correct’ interpretation history, without assigning blame, or without a usage of facts considered politicized by other sides. Even works by the supposedly neutral Shokhanov Commission or the laborious interrogation of archival materials by the Kazakh scholar Makmud Kozybayev tend to have strong bias. In *Ethnic Battleground: The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea*, Stefany puts forward information from three different sides, and takes no side of his own, trying to explain how this division in interpretations occurred rather than proving one side’s veracity above others or showing one side as a victim. In his *Kazakhization, Kunaev, and Kazakhstan: A Bridge to Independence*, Stefany explores how differing interpretations of the Kazakh nation took on a center versus periphery and a Kazakh versus Russian orientation, and how the actions of

*glasnost*’ and *perestroika* actually led to ethnic conflict, as well as a re-ignition of Kazakh nation-building across the KSSR.

For the Soviet period after 1986, through independence and into the modern day, we rely on a variety of sources. The influence of Soviet-Kazakh nationalists has greatly waned, and the young state itself needs to wrestle with the creation of its own national symbols and national history. Stability is perhaps one of the largest questions given to all the young states of Central Asia, and therefore, we also include the work of many scholars focused on the intersection between Kazakh nationalism, the Kazakh state, Kazakhstani society and the political math of legitimacy. Such authors include Dr Alexander C. Diener (“Imagining Kazakhstani-stan”), Researchers Eva-Marie Dubuisson and Ana Genina (“Claiming an Ancestral Homeland: Kazakh Pilgrimage and Migration in Inner Asia.”), Dr. Diana Kudaibergenova (the aforementioned *Rewriting the Nation* and “Nationalizing Elites and Regimes: Nation-building in Post-Soviet Authoritarian and Democratic Contexts”), Dr. Marlene Laruelle (*Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols and Social Changes*), Dr. Sebastien Peyrouse (“The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime: Balancing Uncertainties...”), and Dr. Assel Tutumlu (“The Rule by Law: Negotiating Stability in Kazakhstan..”). Diener is an Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Kansas. In his article he writes about ongoing Kazakh ‘ethnonationalization’, (what we call nation-building efforts), from the modern controversy over the name “Kazakhstan”, the salience of the “Kazakhstani” identity, as well as the slowly nationalizing character of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Diener uses surveys, polls and interviews to draw his conclusions. The Dubuisson-Genina article illuminates the history of the *Kazakh Oralman* policy, as well as efforts to promote Kazakhness within the state by the endorsement of religious and cultural sites. Kudaibergenova continues to articulate motions

within Kazakh literary movements in the aforementioned *Rewriting the Nation*, as well as the role of President Nazarbayev as head of the Kazakh nation. Dr. Marlene Laruelle is the Director of the Central Asian Program at George Washington University. Her cited works observe and interrogate modern Kazakhstan, mapping the role of national groups, both political and apolitical from 1986 through 2016, and are established through careful study and interviews. Dr. Peyrouse is a current Research Fellow at George Washington University. In the cited article, he explains the role of Nazarbayev's soft power through the accretion of business roles for the presidential family. While not necessarily critical to the explanation of Kazakh nationalism, the role the Nazarbayevs play with regards to the control of state media is very telling towards the current role the state plays in nation-building efforts. Dr. Tutumlu is an assistant professor of International Relations at Gediz University. His article is a thorough explanation of how the government of Kazakhstan establishes control and responds to critical issues, which provides important context for a later discussion of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, namely how an institution created at first for the obtainment of state legitimacy across all ethnic groups is now at the forefront of the 'Kazakhization' process.

Theoretical considerations are supported by work of general theoreticians regarding the Nation, such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and Miroslav Hroch's "From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation". As Hroch is a key source of theoretical framework for this piece, Alexander Maxwell's "Typologies and Phases in Nationalism Studies", which strongly reviews Hroch's theoretical impact on the field of nation studies, is also cited for further context.

In addition to the work of general theoreticians, we include the work of other regional scholars, in particular those who speak to the development of national symbols and national histories in Central Asia. This includes Dr. Gardner Bovingdon's *Autonomy in Xinjiang*, which details nationalist imperatives in a border province of China, and Viktor Snirelman Aleksandrovic's *Who Gets the Past*, which details the many ways various Soviet-Nationalizing groups reclaimed historical figures for one modern ethnicity or another.

Aside from these secondary scholarly sources, a wide variety of primary publications in English, Kazakh, and Russian are included. All Kazakh and Russian sources have been translated by me. For the most part, these are articles produced by the government of Kazakhstan or by Nazarbayev-owned media companies, such as history.kz, The Astana Times, KAZINFORM, government articles such as enbek.gov.kz, akorda.kz, AlmatyTV and the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The representations, therefore are politically biased, yet it is this very bias which we wish to discuss. Useful too, are the biographies of Kunaev, Gorbachev and Nazarbayev (both his own autobiography, and the sponsored biography by Johnathan Aitken), as each leader tries to reclaim the past for his own ends. Such devices play a limited role, being accepted as a flawed and biased account.

Such biased accounts, to be sure, do not occur in a vacuum, and we would be slightly remiss if we did not include counter-points from other national organizations and opposition groups. This includes articles on the role of Jeltoksan as put forward by the Jeltoksan party and RadioFreeLiberty. and an article by the opposition newspaper *Respublika*. Again, these documents' only role is for the analysis of their bias for academic points, rather than to support a factual argument.

The Horde of Alash's Phase A & B,  
and the Imperial-era Transformative Crisis.

The appearance of the Horde of Alash, and the resultant Alash Autonomous government was a truly novel event. Unlike previous Kazakh autonomy movements during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the first to organize a Congress and an elected governor, western style institutions reflecting the education many of the activists had. It was the first attempt by an organized group of Kazakh activists to better articulate Kazakh nationalism and the Kazakh national consciousness for political purposes. For these reasons, it is considered a strong point for the genesis of modern Kazakh nationalism. Alash's nationalist effort provided resources for later Soviet actors to build upon, as well as foundational ideals which were very inspirational for later national movements. Despite many factors contributing to the Alash Autonomous government's failure, its very existence created a lasting and powerful legacy for others to follow. Extremists seeking to advance a particularly virulent version of Kazakh nationalism (wherein the Russians were, at all times in history, heinous 'invaders' of a Kazakh motherland) invoke Alash as martyrs. They construct a narrative wherein the Alash government fought valiantly to repel the Russians, but were 'crushed' by the Soviets, thus devising a national equation solved by a very irrational and dangerous conclusion that all Russian influence (be it social, economic, or cultural) is 'alien' and harmful and therefore needs to be purged to correct issues in modern society. For the state of Kazakhstan, it allows for a legitimacy argument based upon the Alash Autonomy's boundaries. By these remembrances, be they destabilizing or legitimizing, both the Horde Alash and its works continue to hold influence.

Despite the many novel firsts accomplished by the Horde of Alash, it seems unlikely that they achieved Phase C of Hroch's A-B-C schema. As Hroch proposes, Phase A, the phase of

theoretical elaboration requires that a group of intellectuals devote themselves to scholarly enquiry into, and a dissemination of an awareness of linguistic, cultural and social attributes of the ‘would-be’ national group. With its many publications at Orenburg, the Alash movement, before it became an autonomous government, seems to meet Hroch’s requirements for Phase A. Phase B, the period of ‘patriotic agitation,’ is where a new range of activists emerge, seeking to win over as many co-ethnics as possible, specifically to create a future nation.<sup>31</sup> Yet, Phase B requires vast communicative abilities, both technologically, and socially. Phase B actors must be able to spread their message effectively, and the target demographic must be receptive to the actors, that is, the target audience must both be capable (in terms of literacy) and willing (in terms of social, class and religious dynamics) to accept the nation-building efforts of the actors.<sup>32</sup> The Alash organizers lacked these capabilities, (and perhaps even the will to make such an effort with the general Kazakh public) even as the Alash autonomous government lacked the capacity to resist the Red Army. In other words, despite its strong legacy, the Alash Autonomous Government really was as Sir Olaf Caroe writes, “little more than a committee which held congresses and issued manifestos.”<sup>33</sup> It is hard for the Alash Autonomous Government to be considered as a Phase C mass national movement, as it ultimately was neither mass (never truly pulling support from Kazakhs across the entire territory or all classes), nor national (Kazakhs joining based on a jointly-held notion of Kazakh nationalism) in character, despite the goals, claims and achievements of the group.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe” 63

<sup>32</sup> Hroch, 66-67

<sup>33</sup> Steven Sabol. *Russian Colonization and Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness*. 2

<sup>34</sup> Here, we are not arguing that Alash was insignificant, in fact, most of the following document will elaborate their importance. Their administration and proclamation of a national space, however, should not be confused with large-scale demographic-intensive national movements as are seen in other nations, or later in Kazakhstan’s history.



The Horde of Alash formed in response to what members depicted as a crisis in the steppe that they felt threatened the social, cultural and economic lives of all ethnic Kazakhs. This was the result, in their estimation, mostly to the evils of Russian Imperial policy. The origins of this crisis lay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the immigration of 2 million migrants from western Russia into the Kazakh steppe greatly reduced the amount of traditional pastureland available. This led to strife and rapid loss of livestock.<sup>35</sup> The immigrants were encouraged by large imperial subsidies, that were often not forthcoming. The rather rudimentary Russian cities and fortress-settlements rarely had enough resources to house or feed them, or to assist them in the development of European-style agricultural communities. Many arriving in Semipalatinsk and Akmolinsk had to resort to begging or starve.<sup>36</sup> This migration and subsequent suffering reinforced the concept among local immigrants and their imperial administrators that the Kazakhs, by and large pasture-land nomads native to the region, were using the steppe lands inappropriately. Clashes began occurring regularly between many Kazakh groups, and non-Kazakhs immigrants who had settled in traditional Kazakh-tribal summer or winter pastures.

As the power of traditional Kazakh leaders (the Khans), slowly deteriorated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire tried harder to resolve the ongoing food and land crisis. In an effort to turn the Kazakh population into sedentary farmers and resolve land disputes between immigrant farmers and Kazakh herders, the 1865 Steppe commission assigned land on the steppe, giving Kazakh families 4-7 desiatins (a unit of land) each. This merely alleviated the issues of non-Kazakhs while doubling pressure on the traditional herders. Firstly, it was no easy measure for the Kazakhs, who had previously held land in common by tribe, to divide land into

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<sup>35</sup> Sabol, 26

<sup>36</sup> Sabol 36

parcels held by families. Secondly, and most importantly, it made the act of herding livestock impossible. For a single sheep needs 5-7 desiatin of pasture to survive annually, and a single horse needs 15-24 desiatin.<sup>37</sup> Families, should they let land they have never worked continue to lie as pasture, could therefore only hope to raise one or two animals. The intent was to force Kazakh nomads into agriculture, but the Steppe commission made no effort to provide the knowledge, skills or sufficient equipment for this. They did not even provide seed, let alone adequate arable land to plant it on. As a result of the starvation and destitution that ensued, a great many uprisings and out-migrations followed; most famously the flight of 10,000 Kazakh families in 1876 from the Mangyshlak peninsula into eastern Turkestan and beyond. These families decided they would rather face the unknown than let their animals starve or be taken as a tax.

This crisis of economic transition was also a crisis of culture. The Kazakhs of this period were a people who had 40 different nouns for camels across different conditions, whose general greeting was to ask about the other's livestock. As famous Kazakh author Abai Kunanbayev (Абай Құнанбайұлы) wrote, "[for Kazakhs] religion is livestock, people is livestock, knowledge is livestock, and influence is livestock". Yet, Kazakhs in the era of Alash no longer kept such sweeping herds of livestock, and were strongly disincentivized from doing so.<sup>38</sup> Thus, although this was essentially an economic crisis, for the Kazakhs the crisis was sweeping and general.

The Alash authors were not conjured from the steppe, but were greatly influenced by an already extant Kazakh literary tradition, from 19<sup>th</sup> century Kazakh authors like Abai Kunanbayev, and Ibrahim Altynsaryn. These men wrote new literary works in Kazakh and

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<sup>37</sup> Sabol, 36

<sup>38</sup> Martha Brill Olcott *The Kazakhs*. 20

translated many Russian and European novels. Many also wrote down the oral histories and epics of their own people. The pre-Alash authors struggled with themes still prevalent in the age of Alash, such as the tension between secularization and Islam and between doctrinal Sunni Islam and nomadic steppe traditions, and the incorporation of western advances in cultural, technological and educational institutions upon the steppe.<sup>39</sup> They wrote what they could in a language that saw its first book only in the year 1807, and wrote mostly for a very small audience of other teachers and scholars.<sup>40</sup> Although both the Horde of Alash and these other authors worked to promote the Kazakh language, to form a more cohesive Kazakh ethnic identity, and in response of social and economic imperatives on the steppe, Alash was different in two ways: the Kazakh printing press and Kazakh literacy.

In character, the academics and writers that formed the Horde of Alash were of a new generation of Russian-educated, fully literate, Kazakhs. Many were either wealthy merchants, had strong ties to the tsarist administration of the steppe, or were sons of such men.<sup>41</sup> Typically they were located about Orenburg, Semey and the northern frontier. They were literate in both Kazakh and Russian, as most had been educated in a then-burgeoning network of local schools. In 1854, for example, only 8 schools accepted Kazakhs in the entire oblast of Semey, for a total of 850-1000 students. By 1894, this had expanded into 134 schools and 29,000 Kazakh students in that oblast alone.<sup>42</sup> At the time, many saw this movement, led by Alikhan Bokeikhanov as a group of “self-styled Kyrgyz”, which is to say, a group of individuals capable of following Russian cultural norms due to close contact and/or education with the center of Russia, who

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<sup>39</sup> Sabol, 53

<sup>40</sup> Sabol, 56

<sup>41</sup> Amanzhalova, *Kazakhskii Avtonomizm i Rossiia: Istorii Dvizheniia Alash* pg. 4, translated by Z. Slykhouse

<sup>42</sup> Sabol, 53

chose, in dress and action, to behave as what they considered Kazakhs behaved. Amanzhalova found that those involved in the movement fell into two categories: 1) the aforementioned Kazakh intelligentsia, who focused on national revivals of Kazakh literature, and 2) Kazakh officials of the pre-revolutionary administration and the children thereof, who wished for a greater degree of liberalism, regional autonomy and a greater level of equality with their Russian peers. Kazakh peasants, though lured to the appeal of Kazakh autonomy, were rarely a target audience for Alash, even during the failed attempt at an autonomous government.<sup>43</sup>

As Benedict Anderson wrote “print languages lay the foundation of the National Consciousness.”<sup>44</sup> The Kazakh nationalists who officially formed the Horde of Alash published prolifically, and often with little censorship in their Kazakh works. Their abundant publication resulted partially from the events of Bloody Sunday and the 1905 Revolution, which weakened tsarist power throughout the empire, and a general laxity of censorship as well as Imperial coercion of groups previously seen as troublesome, such as Central Asian Muslims. In 1905, in the city of Orenburg alone there were over thirty registered Kazakh language newspapers.<sup>45</sup> The most popular were *Ai Qap* (The Monthly Package), and *Kazakh*, which argued for more Kazakh education, more trained Kazakh teachers, and a standardized, codified Kazakh language.<sup>46</sup> These elites were able to quickly respond to a large variety of Kazakh media, form collaborations and organizations, and elaborate ideas in a way that former Kazakh authors could not. They even

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<sup>43</sup> Amazhalova, pg 4.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 44-45

<sup>45</sup> Sabol, 66

<sup>46</sup> Sabol, 68

produced newspapers solely for this organizational task like *Ultshylgha* [Ұлтшылға] (“for the nationalist”).<sup>47</sup>

Organizing the diverse society of the Kazakhs into a singular ‘nation’, even theoretically, proved to be difficult and in many ways Alash’s solutions were novel. The critical concept of Kazakh nationalism - that all Kazakhs were, or should be, civilly equal was one of the most tense and perturbing factors that separated the Alash movement from common Kazakhs with whom, as Amanzhalova writes, “the absence of any differentiation between Kazakhs was immediately rejected.”<sup>48</sup> This problem of the Kazakh nation was also an issue with Kazakh history itself. It was a legendary oral history, with a paucity of contemporary sources.<sup>49</sup> The origin of the name Kazakh is still a topic of academic discussion to this day.<sup>50</sup> This was not as problematic as the recent centuries, where the Kazakh people had been divided by horde, by clan, by tribe and by family. No great state had ever held feudal power over the entire steppe, and therefore did not provide strict boundaries as a resource upon which the Alash movement could build an ancestral national homeland. Leadership among the Kazakhs was a deeply ceremonial role, meant to be used instrumentally rather than constantly. Although Kasym Khan in 1518, and Khan Tauke in 1680 had reportedly drawn respect from all Kazakhs, this did not equal a totalitarian or monarchical control over all of Kazakhkind, nor indicate a Kazakh ethnic hegemony over the would-be Kazakh motherland.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sabol, 66

<sup>48</sup> Amanzhalova, *Kazakhskii Avtonomizm i Rossiia: Istorii Dvizheniia Alash* pg. 4, translated by Z. Slykhouse

<sup>49</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs* 1

<sup>50</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs* 4 and Akiner, 16 alone show two differing conceptions of the word.

<sup>51</sup> Sabol, 17

Socially, the Kazakhs were divided by kin and clan. The three *juz* [жүз] (horde, lit: hundred), or largest clan networks had historically warred with one another, or did not provide aid when one came under threat. They were often disunited. In 1734, Khan Abulkhair of the *kishi juz* [кіші жүз] (Little Horde) swore vassalage to Russia in order to gain protection from the Bashkirs (a group of nomads who were Russian vassals), gifts and tribute from the Russian crown, as well as support and prestige against their neighbors, the *orta juz* [орта жүз] (Middle Horde).<sup>52</sup> Abulkhair, though a Khan, drew so little respect from the *kishi juz*, that he frequently could not protect Russian emissaries from gangs of his own clan's *aq-saqals* [ақсақалдар] (Elder, Lit: White-Beards). In 1748, Ablai Khan of the *Orta Juz* also swore allegiance to Russia, and then proceeded, despite the fact that they were both Russian Vassals, to behead Abulkhair in a raid on the *Kishi Juz*.<sup>53</sup> For the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *Uly Juz* [Ұлы жүз] (Great or Senior Horde) did not have a single Khan.<sup>54</sup> This of course is a gross oversimplification of a large swath of history: the main point being that Kazakh society did not consider itself as a whole, division-less, frictionless or modern nation. Furthermore, due to a Russian policy wherein Russian courts only resolved Russian-Kazakh disputes, and not Kazakh-Kazakh ones, much of the violence within Kazakh society until the 1860s had been Kazakh-Kazakh internecine strife.<sup>55</sup> There is also strong evidence that the three *Juz*, the very basis of Kazakh political identity, had only come into existence as recently as 1713.<sup>56</sup> Because of this, the history of leaders of the Kazakhs gave little aid toward answering the basic questions: "Where did we come from? Who are our ancestors? Who are our historic enemies?" and seemed to stand in the way of a platform

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<sup>52</sup> Sabol, 28

<sup>53</sup> Sabol, 29

<sup>54</sup> Harun Yilmaz. *National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin*. 47

<sup>55</sup> Sabol, 31

<sup>56</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 31

of Pan-Kazakh harmony and equality. Alash, in its nation-building needed to convince all the members of the various *juz* that being Kazakh was an identity superior to, and more meaningful than, that of clan and familial ties, whilst writing a history that was neutral to inter-*juz* politics - a great challenge indeed!

Using history as a basis for Kazakh nationalism caused a further problem as it pertained to Russian Imperialism. In many historical moments, Kazakh leaders had sought Russian patronage, including requesting for Russian support against enemy tribes, such as the Dzhungars. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, leaders had welcomed a defensive alliance with the Russian Tsars.<sup>57</sup> Kazakh khans and other leaders had even asked for the construction of Russian forts along certain key rivers and points, such as Semey and Verny.<sup>58</sup> Then these same leaders did little as Russian troops raided and conquered Turkestan, and did little as these forts became the center of growing Russian influence. With this in mind, what we appear to have is a history of co-opted Russian colonialism, which, while banal and harmless during the period between 1905 and 1917 when the movement was mostly focused on Kazakh liberalism, and nation-building as a means for greater civil rights, becomes problematic when the goal is to qualify the Alash Autonomy and/or to reduce Russian influence on the steppe.

The basics of any Nationalism claim, “These people together comprise nation X, and they are therefore entitled to Y.” For this claim to be plausible, some traits or characteristics need to be held in common, be they ancestors, religions, languages, or other notable distinguishing markers. As the Horde of Alash moved towards creating this common character, Kazakh society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved to be an obstacle. Although many Kazakhs (far fewer than the

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<sup>57</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, xxi

<sup>58</sup> Akiner, 13

previous generation) engaged in pastoral nomadism, the economic techniques, imperatives, and cultures of high mountain horse and sheep herders varied widely from those of oasis-bound desert camel herders. When we look at the taxonomies of pastoral nomadism written by Wolfram Eberhard, we see that all four economic types exist among the Kazakhs, which is to say, their economic models, though pastoral nomadism was highly dissimilar.<sup>59</sup> To be sure, the Kazakhs had developed a culture with its own distinctiveness, but this culture was dispersed across a huge territory with few meaningful centers, leading to a host of differing social, cultural, linguistic, and religious practices, which varied “aul to aul, clan to clan, and juz to juz.”<sup>60</sup> If there were specific unifying features to this pre-Alash Kazakh identity, they are difficult to find.

Thus, when the Alash activists wrote of “being Kazakh” they wrote this distinct from nomadism. In their writings, “being Kazakh” meant much more.<sup>61</sup> They conjoined the term *Tah’elsuzdik* Тәуелсіздік [To be masterless, independent] with the idea of Kazakh historical nomadism. This was a novel creation as historical Kazakh society was not so “much independence, but a shifting hierarchy” of obedience and respect among familial, clan, tribe and horde relationships.<sup>62</sup> This largely appealed to what A. K. Bochagovim called the ‘main nutrient medium’ of Alash supporters, that is the literate, city and town dwelling Kazakh working class, who felt a certain disconnection to their past, and a certain chagrin toward Russian employers, courts, and judges.<sup>63</sup> For this audience, Alash continued to elaborate a Kazakh identity via the publication of popular poems, oral histories, and reprinted works of famous Kazakh authors. Indeed, their reproductions of the works of Abai Kunanbayev popularized the recently deceased

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<sup>59</sup> Sabol, 11

<sup>60</sup> Sabol, 7

<sup>61</sup> Sabol, 7

<sup>62</sup> Sabol, 7

<sup>63</sup> Amanzhalova, 5



author as a national hero across the urbanized steppe, causing a Turkestani governor, Nazir Töreulov to comment: “A lot has happened in the past ten or fifteen years. Turkestanis have grown a great deal in this period. Everyone has recognized himself and his companions. The Uzbek has found Amir Navoi [and] the Kazakh has caught hold of Abay!”<sup>64</sup>

Politically Alash members formed what we might call today a social-leftist political organization, advocating a social state, with healthcare and education: solutions for the broad problems of the Kazakh public.<sup>65</sup> Before the Autonomous Government, their primary focus was upon the codification and standardization of Kazakh, with the elimination of Russian and Persian linguistic influences, as well as the usage of the Kazakh language as a primary language within local schools - something widely supported by the larger Kazakh populace.<sup>66</sup>

The Alash actors not only needed to construct a political and social identity within Kazakh nationalism, but also needed to answer historical questions: “Where did we begin?” “Who were our historical enemies?” To do this they needed an interpretation of history benefitting the conclusion of a primordial Kazakh identity, with civil equality, whilst upholding the virtues and identity constructed in other areas of their movement. For their construction of Kazakh history, the Horde of Alash proceeded in a fashion described by Viktor Aleksandrovič Šnirelman:

“History is a rich field for a search for glorious ancestors and their great deeds. It is a truism that the past is never objectively given; the traditions are always selective. But it

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<sup>64</sup> Khalid, Adeeb, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution In the Early USSR*. 267

<sup>65</sup> Sabol 114

<sup>66</sup> Sabol, 68

is true that the limits of a historical framework may be crossed in order to invent a desired past.”<sup>67</sup>

For the ‘desired past’ of the Horde of Alash, the Kazakh nationalists leaned heavily on mythologized history. Their history conjured the image of a primordial Kazakhstan, wherein the nation has always existed within similar confines of its geographic area and wherein Russian Imperialism was, at the very least, a peculiar feature in an overall atemporal political ethnic continuity.<sup>68</sup> This promoted an image of the Kazakhs without ethnic division, clans or tribal rivalries, no clear beginnings or end, and which incorporated Scythian and pre-Scythian cultures as part of their history.<sup>69</sup> For the actual ethnogenesis, the authors elaborated upon the mythical hero “Alash” as the father of all the Kazakh people.<sup>70</sup> They propagated and elaborated terms of nationalist theory in Kazakh, such as the aforementioned *Kazakh Yeli*, *Atameken*, and *Atazhurt*.<sup>71</sup> In the works of history that these intellectuals did create, they attempted to conjure a historical past to solve their contemporary social and cultural ills.<sup>72</sup> In particular, they tried to pivot away from overwhelming European supremacy, by focusing on eastern origins, an east which was powerful and threatening, writing that the Kazakh people were “the son of the Hun.”<sup>73</sup>

These east-born narratives also allowed Alash writers to oppose Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic movements, which the Horde of Alash bemoaned, as Russian imperial officials often did. For Alash, these were either non-Kazakh or ‘backward’ where Alash wanted to be progressive.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Viktor Aleksandrovič Šnirelman. *Who Gets the Past?: Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia*. 58

<sup>68</sup> Akiner, 2-3

<sup>69</sup> Akiner, 8-11

<sup>70</sup> Sabol, 17

<sup>71</sup> Sabol, 26

<sup>72</sup> Diana Kudaibergenova *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives*. 4

<sup>73</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation...* 8

<sup>74</sup> Sabol, 140

This could also be seen as a form of competition: Alash wanted to solve the crisis among the Kazakhs through Kazakh nationalism, while other groups (for example the Turkestani ulama) advocated other popular identities as a basis of socio-economic action. This tension is perhaps best shown at the 1914 All Russian Muslim Congress, where the denunciations by Alikhan Bokeikhanov, the man who would lead the Congress of the Alash Autonomy and by other Alash leaders against the current ulama had to be interrupted by a stern defense from the Chair. After this fierce argument, Bokeikhanov demanded further administrative divisions between the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly, the Steppe Krai, and the rest of Turkestan.<sup>75</sup>

On December 13, 1917 The Horde of Alash's Kazakh Congress, chaired by Bokeikhanov, declared the approximate territory of the present-day Republic of Kazakhstan to be a new state, the Alash Autonomy. There were multiple causes, but this was largely owing to the conscription of Kazakhs in 1916.<sup>76</sup> The new state's capital was at Semipalatinsk (modern day Semey) and called Alash Kala (Alash City). The initial action was one of neutrality in the Russian Civil War, even though the previous regional administrator, Vasile Balabanov was fighting with the anti-communist White Army, and had forces throughout the territory. Consequently, this stance of neutrality could not last long, and in June 11<sup>th</sup> 1918, the Alash government "agreed to invalidate all decrees issued by Soviet authorities on the territory of the Alash Autonomy." A. Kenjin, one of the first historians to analyze the Horde of Alash starting immediately after their 1920 dissolution by the Red Army, criticized Alash as having "a major short-sightedness in the leadership of the Alash Autonomy," This leadership, in his estimation, tried to protect national resources by the means of autonomy and neutrality while surrounded by

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<sup>75</sup> Khalid, 269

<sup>76</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 108

superior forces fighting in the very lands they declared autonomous. Kenjin theorized, as Amanzhalova reaffirms in her work, that the Horde of Alash's greatest weakness was that it "could not lean" on the nation it intended to rule – outside of Semey, the government had little power.<sup>77</sup>

A.K. Bochagovim (one of Kenjin's peers before the era of intense censorship) later elaborated on this as the "Apex" failure of Alash.<sup>78</sup> Most of Alash were literate elites with strong ties to Russia who preferred the Whites over the Reds. They had spent years elaborating Kazakh nationalism to a class of urban, literate Kazakhs. Despite the vast gains in education over the past fifty years, in the period of the Russian Civil War, Kazakhs were a mostly illiterate (93%) population.<sup>79</sup> This means the broad population of the Kazakhs was disconnected from the Horde of Alash, its literature, and its influence. Thus, as Alash moved from a political group towards a weak state government, its core argument for support was that of Kazakh autonomy, yet the shift in allegiances and political orientations in regards to the Russian Civil War, combined with the general lack of state-building resources, and the hopeless military and security situation, meant that the Horde of Alash could not retain the support it had, nor could it ever hope to pose a threat to the encroaching Red Army.<sup>80</sup>

In 1920 the autonomous government surrendered, and for a time, members of the movement and government joined the new Soviet administration. By 1928 almost all members of the Horde of Alash movement, as well as their Kazakh nationalist contemporaries had been

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<sup>77</sup> Amanzhalova, 5

<sup>78</sup> Amanzhalova, 6

<sup>79</sup> Akiner, 41-51

<sup>80</sup> Amanzhalova, 6

purged, and the majority of their literature censored or archived.<sup>81</sup> Historical discussion was handicapped through the 1920s by attempts to paint Alash as a purely “bourgeois” party against efforts by others to show their “national-reactionary” stance. Both sides distorted the role of Alash for various political imperatives. In 1931, Josef Stalin’s open letter “On the unusual question of Soviet History” condemned discussion of Alash as it was a “politically harmful” topic of discussion. Thorough historical interrogation ceased in favor of approved secondary and tertiary sources.<sup>82</sup>

After Alash, the Soviets, through their nationalities policy and construction of the Kazakh SSR began their own nation-building strategy, elaborating their own construction of Kazakhs and creating a sovereignty ruled, at least regionally, by Kazakhs. This was a process that went through all three phases of Hroch’s Nation-Building stages, with a Soviet intelligentsia coordinating the development and co-optation of Kazakh national support for a national Soviet Socialist Republic. Yet, as this process continued, friction formed between the Muscovite center and the Kazakh periphery, and at each of these moments, many Kazakhs were put into crisis, or reminded they were subordinate to the Russian center. In this way, the legacy of the Horde of Alash, of which there was little accurate history, grew as a Kazakh state ‘heroically defeated’ by the Russian Soviets, as did their novel notion of Тәуелсіздік – that the core of traditional Kazakh identity was to be without master. Kazakhs stirred by Alash’s attempt will grow a national consciousness as a “people who were prisoners on their own lands.”<sup>83</sup> These parallel processes will erupt in the 1986 Jeltoksan riots, Alash will be transfigured into a symbol for various

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<sup>81</sup> Shirin Akiner. *The Formation of Kazakh Identity: from Tribe to Nation-State*. 30-33

<sup>82</sup> Amanzhalova, 5-17

<sup>83</sup> Sabol, 1

groups, and a new modern conception of the Kazakh nation will be formed – the Phase C of both the Horde of Alash and the Soviet nationalities policy.

## Crises and Kunayev:

## The Results of Soviet-Kazakh Nation-Building

As the previous section sought to define the general crisis leading to the formation of the Alash Autonomy and the Horde of Alash, this too seeks to define a transformational crisis of the Kazakh nation: The 1986 Jeltoksan Riots. Unlike the Horde of Alash, there was no novel nation to construct here: the divisions of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kazakh society will have been sealed by some fifty years of Soviet and Kazakh nation-building efforts. Indeed, these riots begin with the assumption “We are the Kazakh Nation, and therefore We are entitled to X, and the USSR has failed to provide such” and the reasoning behind that demand originates in the construction of the Kazakh nation within Kazakh nationalism. With that we will begin by establishing how the Kazakh nation was constructed in Soviet ideology, through all three of Hroch’s phases, and how through repeated instances of socio-economic strain, the Kazakhs of the KSSR became disillusioned with the Soviet center, Soviet history, and began to question all Soviet and Russian influence on their ‘national motherland.’

The Socialist nations of the 1930’s consolidated national identity groups into local and federal political entities.<sup>84</sup> The USSR had a desire for national self-rule (at least in a limited form) from national-republics within itself, as Lenin had determined. To legitimize these local governments, the Soviets set about defining the nationalities as primordial and durable groups within history. This primordialism administratively divided relatively similar ethnicities from each other, and also provided local strongholds of soviet-nationalists to resist Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamic movements, a morbid fear the Soviets had inherited from the past administration.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Yilmaz, 47

<sup>85</sup> Šnirelman, 8-12

A new cadre of Soviet-Kazakh activists set about recovering Kazakh history, and defining a Kazakh homeland in a mode very similar to that of Alash, but with an end goal of creating modern Soviet citizens under USSR control rather than a truly sovereign Kazakh state.

The difficulties of writing a history about the Alash Autonomy in the Soviet period have been well described, but this was but one feature of an over-arching issue in Soviet Historiography. With history so politicized, it was extremely difficult for any sort of comprehensive Soviet-Kazakh history to be written. The abortive 1943 edition, the *History of the Kazakh SSR (Istoria Kazakhskii SSR)* by A. Pankratova and M. Abdylkalykhov was hotly debated as it incorporated the work of Alash in hopes of “recovering and disseminating a lost chapter of national history.” The authors had hoped this would be permissible as the rest of the text promoted a view of pleasant Russian-Kazakh popular friendship through history, barely mentioning any historical riots or uprisings. Yet, the authors were decried as nationalist, and the entire document had to be rewritten.<sup>86</sup>

For their nation-building efforts, the Soviets had to wrestle with the same divisive Kazakh history as the Horde of Alash did. As the years turned, a successful and popular type of Kazakh history was found within the ‘recovery’ of the Kazakh *Batyr* [батыр](folk hero). Soviet historians found these figures extremely egalitarian and invaluable, as anyone of any class could become a batyr through heroic action and noble deeds on the steppe. In these narratives, the batyrs fought against noble-bourgeois aggression as symbolic heroes of a steppe proletariat. In many ways, Soviet-Kazakh history was a mythic compilation of batyrs creating history, rather than history as a series of revolts, clashes of civilizations, incidents and revolts against Russian

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<sup>86</sup> Yilmaz, 87



Imperialism.<sup>87</sup> Far preferable to the internecine strife and Kazakh-Kazakh battles over livestock and land, these narratives showed an “imaginary united steppe,” which translated some historical objects, like Kenesary Xan of the *Orta Juz* and the revolts of the *Kishi Juz* as Pan-Kazakh narratives, rather than heroes or heroic moments of a singular clan.<sup>88</sup> In this we can see how a certain legacy of historical “recovery” of Kazakh figures begins as far back as Abai and continues through Alash, through the Soviet Era and into independence.

In order to promote Kazakh national consciousness, Soviet elaborators attempted to extol empty signifiers of a Kazakh identity – yurts, native dancers, storytellers on a dombra, all with a certain Disney-like artificiality.<sup>89</sup> It is not that these symbols did not have meaning, but that the context of national symbols was meant to be sanitized of any potential non-Soviet or problematic meaning. The Soviets wanted the people of the KSSR to be National in form (so that a modern nation could be built with buy in from the local masses) but Soviet in character. Thus, the Soviet-Kazakhs were surely Muslims, but were not meant to practice or to hold a religious identity greater than the Soviet one.<sup>90</sup> Kazakh cultural eating habits, burials and a strong cultural respect for elders occasionally clashed with this effort to produce a modern Soviet identity, and as the Soviets did not incorporate these elements into their efforts, they continued to be a significant reminder of Kazakh difference, “otherness” and strong sense of a Central Asian self.<sup>91</sup>

Early in the Soviet era, propagandists began describing the awful “backwardness” of the Kazakh people, from their poverty, to their cultural gender roles and traditions. This was a top-

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<sup>87</sup> Yilmaz, 85-90

<sup>88</sup> Yilmaz, 99-101

<sup>89</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 34-36

<sup>90</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 34

<sup>91</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 35

down attempt to reinforce desired Soviet characteristics over the previous Central Asian identities. In a way, this carried on the work of Alash and Abai-era writers: writers who struggled with how best to educate and modernize Kazakh society. Alash and earlier Kazakh authors had advocated for Kazakh pedagogy, and articulated modern institutions for other Kazakhs, moving in a coercive, prescriptive way. In contrast, these Soviet “backwardness” ideologies in the early Soviet Period often lamented everything about Kazakh personhood and culture, painting the entire body as an unnatural and evil lifestyle. A rescue from this ‘fell’ state of being was a key excuse for Soviet colonization and the state-building enterprise across the KSSR.<sup>92</sup> Cadres of Soviet-Kazakh authors such as Seifullin wrote to “bare the horrors of the Kazakh Dark Age,” and Orientalized Kazakh historical figures (particularly Kazakh women) in such a fashion that it often appeared that only Sovietization could save the Kazakhs from their backwardness.<sup>93</sup>

Such depictions were a critical spark for many future Kazakh historians, authors, singers and poets in the Soviet era, who wrote not only to elaborate the Kazakh national identity but to ‘save’ their ancestors from the darkness imposed by early Soviet authors. The backlash to such depictions, and to the constant incarceration of Kazakh historians, slowly fomented a new generation of Kazakh nationalists against Soviet censorship. Here, the Soviets came to fulfill the theories of historian Viktor Snirelmen, that ethnogenetic research itself promotes a dangerous centrifugal nationalism and is always inherently destabilizing, and that those political institutions

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<sup>92</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation* xvii

<sup>93</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Kazakh Nation* 22

which abuse and mythologize history, limit long-term trust within themselves, within history and within truth.<sup>94</sup>

As we have stated in the previous section, the Soviet era of Kazakhstan was deeply instrumental to the development of modern Kazakh nationalism. This development occurred in two ways, by the Soviet development of Kazakh ethnogenesis, Kazakh history and Kazakh nationalism, and by reactions both to those nation-building programs and to conditions of living in the USSR.

The crisis leading to the 1986 Jeltoksan Riots can best be identified by disastrous policies seen as clear Russian colonialism within the Kazakh SSR. Even before the Soviet period, more humans and livestock died on the territory of Kazakhstan than in any other area of the Russian Civil War.<sup>95</sup> Under Stalin, there was the Great Terror, which saw many Kazakh activists, scholars and politicians imprisoned or worse. Collectivization led to an end of traditional herding for many Kazakhs, and more than 80% of Kazakh livestock died between the years of 1917 and 1930.<sup>96</sup> Due to collectivization-related famine, the Terror, the Russian Civil War, various small incidents, and the events of World War Two, the period between 1917 and 1945 saw nearly one quarter of the Kazakh population die from violent ends. Later harmful events include the nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk Polygon site. Beginning in 1947 the Soviet Ministry of defense conducted without evacuation or notification of local Kazakh herders or treatment of resulting illnesses, over 470 nuclear bomb tests. This was near the birthplace of Abai and the old seat of the Horde of Alash.<sup>97</sup> The nuclear fallout contaminated the soil, air,

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<sup>94</sup> Šnirelman, 1-8

<sup>95</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 20

<sup>96</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 21

<sup>97</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*

water, milk, and fruit of an entire oblast, and birth defects continue to plague the descendants of the victims.

In his term, Krushev led an “indiscriminate purge” of the Kazakh Party apparatus while it was led by Brezhnev, which briefly led to the displacement of Kunaev and Kazakh political figures throughout the KSSR.<sup>98</sup> When Brezhnev became General Secretary of the USSR in 1964, Kazakhstan came to suffer environmental catastrophes from heavy industrial waste and failed attempts to fertilize the Kazakh steppe.<sup>99</sup> In 1979, when a group of Germans in Tselinograd, asked for their own autonomous territory, riots broke out over the concept of territorial division. Protestors held signs reading “Kazakhstan is 1 land, indivisible.”<sup>100</sup> In any case, these situations were socially and economically traumatic, and could easily be interpreted as a Moscow-based elite moving with a certain degree of carelessness or superiority toward the Kazakh people.

For example, the result of the failed 1953 Virgin Lands Project was the large-scale observation that Moscow had no trust in the Kazakh SSR, its leadership, or Kazakh agriculturalists. The Project itself was an attempt, through modern agricultural techniques and irrigation, to turn the northern part of Kazakhstan, around the city of Akmolinsk (modern-day Astana) into a bread basket of the Soviet Union. The land chosen however, was poor in character, and thus used traditionally as pastureland. At the same time as the VLP was pushed, Moscow planners also demanded a massive increase in the number of livestock, grown both around Akmolinsk and the Kazakh SSR as a whole. The Kazakh SSR Oblast governors were the

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<sup>98</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 13

<sup>99</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 1-2

<sup>100</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 108

first to protest, as the introduction of modern “sovkozy” had displaced many Kazakh families working at traditional kolkozy. These leaders were all replaced by Russian Muscovites in 1953, as large numbers of Russian settlers came to the project. Despite the effort put into the region, the VLP project was only producing lower yields in both livestock and grain. The then- Kazakh SSR first secretary Shaiakhmetov protested the project, reporting to Moscow that “in Kazakhstan, to grow wheat, one cannot grow livestock, and to grow livestock, one cannot grow wheat!” This led to his replacement by Brezhnev in 1954. As the VLP continued to flounder, Moscow created a new administrative unit, the “VLP special zone,” which only had two Kazakhs among eleven commissioners.<sup>101</sup> All in all a million Slavic settlers migrated to Akmolinsk and the VLP special zone, being given special equipment and material previous Kazakh farmers had never been able to access, and the memory of this, of Russians being chosen over Kazakhs, and of Kazakhs being ‘tossed aside’ on their own territory will remain.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps not necessarily a wish for independence was formed, but a wish for greater local power and decentralization began to be articulated.

In *The Kazakhs*, Martha Brill Olcott lists three reasons why the Kazakh nation did not ‘disappear’ during the various disastrous situations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: (1) Non-Kazakh migration to the region was temporary and transient in nature. (2) A massive increase in Kazakh birthrate in comparison to all other ethnic groups began in the late 1950s and continued into the post-Soviet era. (3) The national leadership of Dinmukhamed Kunayev, in his role as First

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<sup>101</sup> Martha Brill Olcott *The Kazakhs*. 224

<sup>102</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 13

Secretary over the KSSR from December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1964 until his dismissal on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1986 – a thirty-two-year career as the most powerful politician in the KSSR.<sup>103</sup>

To be sure, Kunayev did not have some magical properties which whisked away all the problems on the steppe; in fact, much had nothing to do with the man at all. A wide series of beneficial factors- economic, political, and demographic- occurred during his tenure. Partial credit must be given to Kunayev, however, as his longstanding alliance with Leonid Brezhnev, the “most important and durable political alliance” in the USSR at the time, allowed the KSSR to operate with greater autonomy than in any past administration.<sup>104</sup> Kunayev had shielded Brezhnev from internal criticism of the Virgin Lands Project, never once criticizing it, and once he was the head of all KSSR agriculture, his administration saw a steadily increased grain and livestock harvest year after year – a fact that gave him great legitimacy. Kunayev used his powerful position (as most officials would in the subsequent period of “high Brezhnevism” and stagnation) to enrich himself and his family. He made his brother Obkom secretary, and used the executive powers granted to him by the VLP to remove troublesome politicians from oblast and raion in the name of “scientific agriculture.”<sup>105</sup> That is to say, Kunayev’s reign was no less corrupt, no less nepotistic than other contemporary leaders. He built a system of political patronage via cronyism and he used his power over the legal system and his political connections to protect that system.

Yet, this system was also a system of national, Kazakh patronage. Kunayev preferred Kazakhs over Slavs for most political positions. The KSSR chapter of the Communist Party

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<sup>103</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs* 243

<sup>104</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground* 49

<sup>105</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground* 55-60

during Kunayev's term had a record-breaking average of 10,000 new Kazakh members per year. By 1981, 51.9% of the KSSR Central Committee was Kazakh, and 60% of the council of ministers was Kazakh (compared to 33% in 1964). This proportion is remarkable given that the 1979 census shows Kazakhs making up only 36% of the total population. As many Russians in the KSSR were career-based transients to the region, very few joined the KSSR Communist Party. In addition to political gains, the regime also tripled the budget for the KSSR between 1960 and 1985, building over 400 libraries, 7600 hectares of parks, 16 colleges, 176 schools and a novel Kazakh State University with 11,000 employees.<sup>106</sup> Despite this, the economic stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s led to more fierce competition among more people over a smaller pie, and this reinforced a perception that the KSSR was a zero-sum political and economic game among different groups and ethnicities. For the Kazakhs though, things had been better under Kunayev than under any other administrator.

This 'semi-autonomy' of Kunayev also provided a greater degree of freedom for the Kazakh press. This is perhaps best exemplified by the career of Ilyas Yessenberlin, a renowned geologist, poet and musician. While he was the director of the Kazakh State Philharmonic, he published a series of Kazakh poems, for which he suffered political repression on the charge of not conforming to the standards of "social realist" literature. Yessenberlin was sent to prison for two years, and censored for another eight. He did not begin publishing again until 1967 during the Kunayev administration – well received socialist-realist novels at first. In 1969 he pivoted to historical novels of the Kazakh steppe. His *Koshpendiler* [көшпенділер] ("Nomads") trilogy would come to be the number one bestselling works of Kazakh fiction in all KSSR history.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground* 89

<sup>107</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation*, 108

After Kunayev loosened censorship, even authors of considerable nationalist character, such as Olzhas Suleimanov found not only an audience, but prestige in the KSSR. His most controversial work *Az-i-ya* was published in 1975 as a Turkestani retelling of the Russian national epic *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* from a Central Asian viewpoint which literarily confronted the narrative of the Russians as “Big Brothers” among the other nations of the USSR. For this Suleimanov was charged with ‘national chauvinism’ in *Pravda* and KSSR political figures, including Kunayev defended both Suleimanov and the text. It seemed that the more criticized the work became, the better it sold in the USSR. There was no prison nor censure for Suleimanov. In fact by 1983 he would be the head of the Kazakh Writer’s Union, and go on to a successful political career.<sup>108</sup> This remarkable difference between the careers of Suleimanov and Yessenberlin is indicative of the rise of Kazakh national thought in the KSSR under Kunayev.

We can understand the years of Kunayev’s tenure as the Phase C of the process of Soviet-Kazakh nation-building. The Kazakh nation now had disproportionate (in demographic terms) control over the economic, social and political powers of the KSSR. The Soviets had set out to build a nation in form and Soviet in character, but instead had created a Soviet republic in form with a Kazakh national character. As stagnation reinforced the perception of a zero-sum game, and Kunayev’s administration was clearly beneficial to the Kazakhs, the erosion of Kunayev’s patronage networks were seen as a national threat, no matter if a Kazakh agreed with Soviet-Leninist theory regarding national republics, or a more primordial Kazakh national identity which saw Russians as colonizers over the Kazakh motherland. “Kazakh” was now an identity of politically actionable value – the Horde of Alash’s goal was finally met.

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<sup>108</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 38



By 1982 Kunayev was in decline, Brezhnev's successor Yuri Andropov frequently attacked him and his cadres in a show of power. Nursultan Nazarbayev (perhaps positioning himself for the future position of 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary) continued such attacks, and Kunayev's government was assailed in *Pravda* almost weekly as a show of corrupt governance. Three Obkom secretaries, including Kunayev's brother were removed from power under Andropov.<sup>109</sup> Gorbachev continued these 'attacks' on Kunayev's power structure in the name of *perestroika*. In his memoir, Kunayev expresses shock at his dismissal on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1986, as 1986 had been a record year for KSSR grain and livestock production, and he wonders what "problem" Gorbachev was attempting to fix.<sup>110</sup> By this point, only 3 of the 20 heads of the Kazakh SSR were now ethnic Kazakhs, showing the extent of both Andropov and Gorbachev's restructuring of the Kazakh national patronage system.<sup>111</sup>

Gorbachev, Kunayev and Nazarbayev disagree as to whose idea it was to put Gennady Kolbin, a Russian with no ties to the KSSR in charge of the territory. If we presume that Gorbachev, Kolbin and Nazarbayev were attempting, as they claim, to eliminate Kunayev's patronage networks and replace his 'cronies' with other incorruptible 'soviet citizens of merit' (namely non-Kazakh SSR bureaucrats) we can see how the center might consider its action a positive one, whilst many Kazakhs observed an "ethnic purge" of their political and economic centers.<sup>112</sup> These observers felt that the only political system beneficial to the Kazakhs the KSSR had ever known was now being dismantled by a Russian center for seemingly ill-defined

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<sup>109</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 65-68

<sup>110</sup> Dinmukhamed Kunayev, *O Moem Vremeni*, 8-10

<sup>111</sup> Kudaibegenova, *Rewriting the Nation...* 180

<sup>112</sup> In particular, this is best summarized by Johnathan Aitken, page 114-120, though Gorbachev in *Mikhail Gorbachev: Memoirs* shows a similar stance. This should only be interpreted as hearsay. For the scope of this project, it is not necessary to understand with absolute certainty why (or even if) Nazarbayev and Gorbachev worked to dismantle Kunayev, but rather the reactions the displacement of ethnic Kazakhs inspired in the broader masses.

reasons. The riots following Kunayev's dismissal preceded similar national riots in Georgia and the Baltics – all brought forth by Gorbachev's emphasis on merit instead of cronyism being locally received as a "Russian Invasion" of the other republics. This spreading center-versus-periphery national conflict became a centrifugal component in the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battlefield*, 2, 76

### The Second Transformational Crisis: The 1986 Jeltoksan Riots

Hroch's model of a Phase C, which ends with members of the nationality permeating every aspect of the state, seems to be a description of Kazakhstan shortly before these Gorbachev-led shapeups, as Kazakhs filled most of the government's staff and the idea of a Kazakh nation was unquestioned. By the time of the Jeltoksan Riots, there had been eight decades of various nation-building efforts in Kazakhstan. Kazakhs had an identity and territory that the people valued. In the later days of the Kunayev era, writers like Olzhas Suleimanov began to question aspects of Soviet identity and character – namely the role of Russians as an elder brother of the other Soviet nationalities. Over time, this Kazakh-Russian question grew as Kunayev's power waned. Yet the two traditions were still immutably linked. What followed the Jeltoqsan Riots, an event which sealed in many minds that the Kazakh and Soviet/Russian destinies were separate, was a boom of Kazakh national-political groups questioning (rather loudly in the era of *glasnost*) everything from the KSSR's future in the USSR, to the veracity of nation-building efforts under the Soviet Union, to the future of Kazakh-Slav relationships. These perturbations permanently alter the micro- and macro- political and social environment in Kazakhstan. Thus, this crisis alters the nature of Kazakh nationalism.

On the morning of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1986, the Jeltoqsan protests began small, as the MVD reported, with only 250-300 student protestors in Brezhnev square.<sup>114</sup> Some of the signs read: "The Kazakh Nation deserves a Kazakh Leader," "Return our Leader to Us" and "Kazakhstan belongs to the Kazakhs."<sup>115</sup> As the event continued, it began to lose focus and coherence, and some hooligans (whether or not they were the initial protestors) used the disruption to damage or

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<sup>114</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battlefield*, 110

<sup>115</sup> Bruce Pannier "Kazakhstan: Jeltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later" <http://www.rferl.org/a/1073453.html>

steal property, and in the resulting security force crackdown, there was violence. Because of this, there are many versions of the event. In *Ethnic Battleground*, his analysis of the riots, Michael Stefany presents detailed accounts from three different sides of the event, from the initial MVD security report, to the later Soviet interrogation of the event, to the accounts and historical work of the protestors. The initial MVD report downplayed the scale of the event and the number of injuries inflicted by security forces, while underlining in great detail damage done during the riots in order to legitimize the ‘minimal force’ used. The later Shokhanov Commission under Nazarbayev presented a differing account that depicted Kolbin an actively anti-Kazakh figure, distanced Nazarbayev from control of the situation, and underlined the initial protestor’s demands as practical, while abhorring and downplaying the ensuing ‘hooliganism’. The protestors themselves provide differing accounts of the event. So too does the government of Kazakhstan, and in the thirty-two years since the event, Jeltoqsan’s meaning and statistics have continued to be debated to such an extent any new ‘search for truth’ can only be received with a prejudicial political bias towards one of the various parties.

One of the reasons the Jeltoqsan riots have continued to be nationally traumatic is the ethnic visualization of the crackdown. Despite their advances in the political and economic fields of the KSSR, very few Kazakhs were members of the security forces. Kazakhs had never been a large part of CPSU Military, at the very highest point 1.2% with 4273 Kazakhs.<sup>116</sup> Although there were some Kazakhs among the forces sent to Brezhnev Square, this already low number became proportionally even less, as Kolbin brought 5000 extra support staff from Moscow to Almaty, and even more support from Moscow came as the KGB and other special forces advisors arrived

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<sup>116</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground* 94

for “Operation Metel”, the supervised response to the protest. It is unclear exactly how many troops were brought into Almaty from abroad, but the MVD only fielded 7,869 local troops with some 6457 *druzhniki* volunteers and reports of the total response vary between 18,118 men and 23,000.<sup>117</sup> This means that the visual of the riot was of Kazakh protestors versus an overwhelming force of armed non-Kazakhs. These numbers are also useful for another reason – they appear to disprove the MVD’s initial report of rather minor estimations of protestors. If the Protestors had truly never bypassed the 2000 or 5000 person maximal mark, as the MVD claims, then why did the initial force of nearly 8,000 already supported by Kolbin’s 5000 require the enlistment of nearly 7000 additional volunteers including the fire department, and the local military school cadets? The scale of the response does not seem like a careful response inasmuch as it seems like the MVD brought in every available body and resource they could to resolve the situation. In fact, the troops brought in from abroad remained in Alma-Ata for nearly 18 months preparing Operation Typhoon – a successor to Operation Metel should riots form again, which if the riots were small and easily dispersed, as the MVD claimed, would have been a seemingly pointless endeavor.<sup>118</sup> This disparity also lends a slight credence to otherwise unbelievable claims, such as that of the exiled Jeltoksan Opposition Party, which claimed between 32,000 to 60,000 protestors took to the streets of Alma-Ata during the riots.<sup>119</sup> Serik Beysembek, minister of transportation at the time, reported that at least 50,000 more people used the buses than usual on the days of the riots. If that was buses alone, one wonders at the scale of the riots.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battleground* 117, 135

<sup>118</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 34

<sup>119</sup> Bruce Pannier. “Kazakhstan: Jeltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later”, *RadioFreeEurope / RadioLiberty* December 14, 2006. Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://www.rferl.org/a/1073453.html>

<sup>120</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 116

Aside from the obvious awkwardness of non-Kazakh security forces facing off against Kazakh protestors over the removal of Kazakh administrators, the Jeltoqsan Riots became more openly nationalist as they continued. On December 17<sup>th</sup>, the students demanded a reversal of the plenum decision to remove Kunayev, and shouted nationalist slogans, arguing for the right of Kazakhs to decide their own national leader on the basis of the Soviet Nationalities policy, for Kunayev to be restored, or for him to be replaced by another Kazakh. They were extremely frustrated that “out of 6 million Kazakhs [the center] could not find one to lead the KSSR.”<sup>121</sup> As the protestors in Brezhnev Square grew in number, by some accounts to over 5000 by the end of the first day, their complaints grew broader. For example, Amanjol Nalibaev, one of the leading protestors loudly complained, “Kazakhstan is rich, but we are poor; [sic] Where did it all go? [Kazakhs] produce meat, milk and bread, but we have nothing to eat... There is not one Soviet Republic with a first Secretary of a Foreign Nationality... The Center does not consider us free to find a leader in our own midst!”<sup>122</sup> At 2 pm on this first day, Chairman of the KSSR Supreme Soviet Mokashev addressed the crowd, telling them their demands were “groundless” and “illegal” but this had no effect.<sup>123</sup>

The second day of the protest was a bit wilder, as the protest began losing focus, and became more of a general riot. Gangs of “hooligans” began slashing tires and causing trouble about the site of the protest, which by this time had been moved from Brezhnev Square and had been separated by the MVD into ‘four manageable areas.’<sup>124</sup> People started coming to protest a laundry list of complaints, from things such as nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site and the

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<sup>121</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 114, 160

<sup>122</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 156

<sup>123</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 113

<sup>124</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 117

failures of the VLP project. By the end of the day, a food store was broken into, and a small number of cars were set on fire. Nazarbayev and four other secretaries went to speak to the protestors, who began chanting his name, as well as the name of Kunayev and other Kazakh or Kazakhstani-born politicians as alternatives to Kolbin. When the speakers insisted that the protestors disperse, these speeches to the crowds broke down. Nazarbayev, as quoted by Aitken, claims he was sliced across the face with a rock, while the secretaries in general were pelted with snowballs.<sup>125</sup> Openly Anti-Russian placards began appearing at the protests.<sup>126</sup> At 6:30, seven ‘leaders’ elected from the protestors were taken for talks with KSSR heads, and after a supposedly fruitful conversation came back to the crowds but could not get them to disperse. That night was extremely bloody, though it would be unclear which side began the violence: 122 automobiles and taxis destroyed, two fire trucks flipped, ninety public buses having their tires slashed, and 11 buildings burned to the ground as security forces tried to clear the four sectors with fire-hoses. At 11:50 the first death of a member of the security staff was reported, and a storm of at least 4,000 protestors retook Brezhnev Square.<sup>127</sup> People began reporting that Kazakhs were arriving from the country side to support the riots, and as security forces arrested, maimed and in a few cases killed protestors, this appeared to draw more support.

At roughly 7 a.m. on December 19<sup>th</sup>, it was finally over. The MVD, KGB and Prokratura revealed different numbers of arrested, tallied by the Shokhanov Commission at roughly 6,000, of which only 200 were charged.<sup>128</sup> There were three mysterious “suicides” of students who somehow ‘decided’ to hurl themselves from their dormitory, as well as the hanging of a student

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<sup>125</sup> Aitken 83

<sup>126</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 154-156

<sup>127</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground*, 119

<sup>128</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 153

awaiting trial. The student, Rusylbekov somehow strangled himself with an electrical wire that could not support his weight. The MVD reported 733 injuries, although Michael Stefany's review of hospital admissions found that number closer to 1700.<sup>129</sup> 264 were ejected from institutions of higher education, 1164 members of the Almaty Komsomol were reprimanded and another 758 expelled.<sup>130</sup>

Had he been so inclined, Kolbin, might have been able to heal the wounds between the two groups inflicted by this violence, but he decided instead to double down. He loudly blamed Kunaev for organizing the riots (despite little evidence to this claim), for putting too many ethnic Kazakhs in charge of the government, as 52% of total party membership at the time was ethnic Kazakh (though this was not represented in the higher echelons of the party.)<sup>131</sup> Kolbin ejected 6,643 ethnic Kazakhs from the KSSR Communist Party by the end of 1987, and 5,073 ethnic Kazakhs the following year. In the Kazakh SSR, a popular hatred continued to fester against Kolbin and Gorbachev, with large nationalist cadres openly upset at what they called "Gorbachev's 18 month attack" on the Kazakh nation, from what many observed as a dismissal of personnel simply on the basis of Kazakh ethnicity.<sup>132</sup> Other non-Kazakhs were becoming frustrated with Kolbin's paranoid nature. He bombastically declared in March of 1987 that "antisocial manifestations" were now spreading across the entire KSSR. Without Kunayev's patronage systems, tension at all levels of governance, and the ejection of so many bureaucrats and technocrats, it became extremely difficult to manage the KSSR.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 164

<sup>130</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 162-166

<sup>131</sup> Martha Brill Olcott *The Kazakhs*. 240

<sup>132</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs* 245

<sup>133</sup> Stephany, *Ethnic Battleground* 227



By early 1989, Kolbin had been promoted to a higher office, or as some scholars write, “kicked upstairs”, - a time-honored tradition in the USSR and modern China wherein troublesome individuals were given ambassadorships or positions of lofty titles but of little actual consequence, and the party as a whole saved face.<sup>134</sup> Nazarbayev replaced him as a winner of a ballot election in the Kazakh Communist Party.

Nursultan Nazarbayev’s administration attempted to regain legitimacy for the Kazakh SSR by incorporating many Kazakh nationalists into the government, (such as the aforementioned Mukhtar Shahkhanov, who went on to become a lawmaker and Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, and Olzhas Suleimanov who joined the Congress and later become an Ambassador to Rome).<sup>135</sup> The administration allowed Mukhtar Shahkhanov to form an independent Commission to investigate the events of Jeltoksan in 1989. This Commission was headed by a renowned Kazakh nationalist. Under Nazarbayev, the KSSR’s administration’s Prokratura, and all its Komsomol groups in all its nineteen KSSR chapters released open letters to Pravda either condemning or expressing dissatisfaction with Kolbin’s rule.<sup>136</sup>

Outside of politics, Nazarbayev’s administration reinstated Kunayev’s legacy of promoting and protecting Kazakh nationalist literature. This includes the rehabilitation of works by the Horde of Alash, and other national works, through *glasnost*’ and personal support.<sup>137</sup> This included the text *Aldaspan*, which reprinted many Kazakh oral histories, stories and poems. It included items banned in the 1970s as well as works by Bokheikhanov and the Horde of Alash. In his role as first secretary, Nazarbayev spoke openly of safeguarding the eternal heritage of the

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<sup>134</sup> Gardner Bovingdon. *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*. 7

<sup>135</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism" 161

<sup>136</sup> Stefany, *Ethnic Battlefield*, 236

<sup>137</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation...* 176

Kazakh people.<sup>138</sup> This rehabilitation and incorporation of Kazakh nationalists within the government continued into independence, where 1992 saw the first reprint of the Kazakh author Yessenberlin's extremely popular *Koshpendiler* trilogy, a literal ethnogenetic text and creation mythos of the Kazakh people in a three part novel. The new state commissioned Tursynbek Kakizhev to write a *History of Kazakh Literature*, promoting it as an independent field of study.<sup>139</sup> Nazarbayev praised Yessenberlin and other authors for the glorification of Kazakh culture, raising a good many into the role of national heroes.<sup>140</sup>

We move from here into the Independence era, with a new government responding to national imperatives provoked by Gorbachev and animated through the crackdown of Jeltoksan. The riots revealed to many that the Kazakh periphery and USSR center had differing opinions, destinies, and a distinct divergence in the political interests of the two groups. Had the Soviet Union continued, it would be interesting to see where this new version of Kazakh nationalism led. Once the frictions and disagreements between the Russians and Kazakhs became public, and with agents of the Soviet state cultivating the work of pre-Soviet Kazakh nationalists and modern cadres of nationalists, the path of political development would have likely been sharply different. Instead, we came to the period of independence, where the struggle for legitimacy of an independent state over a multiethnic territory had vastly differing imperatives, and for the first time an independent Kazakh had to must manage its own nation-building processes.

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<sup>138</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation* 108

<sup>139</sup> Laruelle, "Which Future for..." 162

<sup>140</sup> Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation* 84-90

## The Transitional Crisis of Independence, the “Kazakhstani” Identity, and the Mapping of Modern Kazakh Nationalism.

The modern era of Kazakhstan can be further broken down into three periods, based on actions and imperatives the state of Kazakhstan faced. What we are looking for here is how the creation of independent Kazakhstan altered Kazakh nationalism, the Kazakh national consciousness, and the role such national forces played within the Kazakh state. Initially, there was a pivot away from *glasnost*’ era Kazakh national groups and an emboldened effort to begin multi-ethnic, multi-national state-making. Kazakh nationalists were censured, repressed or driven from the political field. Yet, a new type of nationalism, one in which Kazakh nationalism served the state, began to be elaborated as Kazakhs once again occupied larger quantities of government roles. Here, we see another cycle of processes where a state attempts to build the nations within its borders, and redefines what aspects of the Kazakh character are valuable, what forms of Kazakh nationalism are acceptable, and what aspects of national history are valued in the new ‘history of Kazakhstan.’ Beginning as a multinational state, we soon see the emergence of Kazakhs as the “big brother” nation. Kazakh language, and cultural characteristics will become considered a standing model for others to assimilate to.

Much of the scholarship on Kazakhstan, whether it is focused on politics, economics, society or nationalism describes Nursultan Nazarbayev as a key agent “threading a needle, engaging in a balancing act, and intentionally pursuing a course of strategic ambiguity” between countervailing forces.<sup>141</sup> He is the “key actor” in almost all Kazakhstani policy, and has the power to define, shape, and change the discourses of power, including that of state engagement with Kazakh

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<sup>141</sup> Alexander C. Diener "Imagining Kazakhstan: Negotiations of Homeland and Titular Nationality" 134

nationalism.<sup>142</sup> In many conflicts and arenas, this analysis is visible. The modern state engages in “soft authoritarianism,” wherein many legal powers are not held by the President, and wherein many democratic institutions exist on paper, but also where many economic and political institutions are owned by the president’s family.<sup>143</sup> When President Nazarbayev’s daughter Dariga owns eighty percent of the media, and her son owns the majority of other outlets, it is difficult for other political organizations to buy advertisements or further their own narratives.<sup>144</sup> When the rest of his family has monopolies on sugar, vodka, copper, uranium, petroleum, and the rights to court foreign investment, it strengthens his hold on the country’s economy whilst, paradoxically, these industries are not being directly tied to President Nazarbayev on paper. This is his soft power. When the only political organization is Nur Otan, which has an agenda written by the President, and the only opposition is run by a family member, this produces a strange system. For on paper, Nursultan Nazarbayev can be impeached or voted out of office. On paper, Nursultan Nazarbayev is not connected to any business interests, and on paper, Kazakhstan is a democracy with a free market. Yet, in reality, every single institution has been staffed and managed in such a way that the President (via proxies) has total coercive control over the legislative, judicial, executive, political and economic sectors of Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev has the power to frame the opposition in any way he wishes.<sup>145</sup> Because of his enormous and multifaceted influence on life in Kazakhstan, I focus on his actions in greater

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<sup>142</sup> Kudaibergenova, “Nationalizing Elites and Regimes...” 117

<sup>143</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes*. XI

<sup>144</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse. "The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime: Balancing Uncertainties among the "Family," Oligarchs and Technocrats." 33

<sup>145</sup> Diana Kudaibergenova, "Nationalizing Elites and Regimes: Nation-building in Post-Soviet Authoritarian and Democratic Contexts" 116

detail in this chapter as they relate to Kazakh nationalism and current power-politics in Kazakhstan.

Beginning with the Early Independence Period (~1990 to ~1997), Kazakhstan and Nazarbayev moved away from open collaboration with Kazakh nationalists, and towards firm censorship of National-Patriot opposition groups as fear of a territorial annexation or civil war (such as the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Tajikistan Civil War) began to grip the government. This was a time of turmoil, where multi-ethnic civic nationalism (much like the 1930s Soviet nationalities policy) trumped Kazakh nationalism as the state tries to obtain legitimacy and support towards a new stable state from all ethnic groups within its borders. Rather than support of local Kazakh national cadres against a central power, Nazarbayev suddenly needed broad popular support, and there is a harsh pivot from the *glasnost*’ era approval and co-optation of Kazakh nationalists to their condemnation.

In the Transitional Period (~1998 to ~2008), Kazakhstan grappled with the demands of a new generation; one coming into adulthood within Kazakhstan. The economic insecurity and unknown futures of the past period are now greatly diminished. This era shows a loosening of restrictions on nationalist newspapers, and academic organizations. Monuments were built to the Horde of Alash and Jeltoksan which told different national narratives to support state legitimacy, and Nazarbayev ejected many Russian officials from his cabinet, replacing them with young Kazakh technocrats. Here, the Kazakhstani government began a nation-building effort in earnest.

Finally, in the Period of the AKP Pivot (2009 until 2018), the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, a multi-ethnic democratic body representing all ethnicities of Kazakhstan began a

Kazakh national agenda, asking for many of the same reforms elaborated by National-Patriot organizations of the 1990s. This final 2009-2018 period witnesses the development of Kazakh national movements across social media platforms, and many Kazakh national reforms by the state. There is a new imperative: Kazakhs are a majority within their country for the first time in modern history, at 63 percent of the total population. Now Kazakh national support for the state is a more important political resource than multi-ethnic support, and even multi-ethnic institutions begin taking on a Kazakh nationalist character.

Before independence, *glasnost* ' allowed Kazakh national-political organizations such as Zheruyuk (1986), Jeltoksan (1988), Alash (1990) and Azat (1986) to begin operation within the SSR.<sup>146</sup> These groups advocated for many different things (from a Pan-Turkic multiethnic state, to Kazakh as a state language, to democratic or Islamic reforms), and were hardly in agreement with one another. They ranged from careful and civilian Azat, which retired after the fulfillment of its goals (an independent Kazakhstan), to the dangerous and virulent Alash (a notably different group from the Horde of Alash), whose leader would be exiled after leading a raid against the mufti of Kazakhstan in 1994, and then imprisoned after the death of a police officer in 2009.<sup>147</sup> These groups are the key subjects in the shifting political climate, showing how the crises of the early Independence period turned the comparatively liberal KSSR into a strict, limiting Kazakhstan. This is a hard pivot of the Nazarbayev administration from incorporation to the abolishment of these entities. Not one of these Kazakh national-political groups would exist beyond the year 1997. At the dawn of independence Kazakhstan utilized a state-based civic nationalism with a clear institutional antagonism toward Kazakh nationalists, shutting national-

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<sup>146</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism" 151-161

<sup>147</sup> Laruelle, "Which Future for National Patriots?..." 159

political groups out of the government, and using security forces to imprison or disband lingering groups.

Nazarbayev's goal in the Early Independence period was the stability and survival of Kazakhstan through a major political and economic crisis. He viewed his main enemies as the aforementioned Kazakh national-patriots and Russian nationalists. These groups could lead to sweeping ethnic violence in the former case, and the annexation of northern Kazakhstan to Russia in the latter case. For legitimacy and stability, Nazarbayev's administration co-opted parts of Kazakh nationalism which worked for the state, such as the writings of past Kazakh national authors, as well as Kazakh cultural symbols, now present in the flag and the anthem. The state co-opted Bata rituals, Kazakh nominal Sufism, poets such as Abai and Muktar Aueyzov, as well as Batyr and Khan narratives elaborated during the Soviet period.<sup>148</sup> As Marlene Laruelle wrote, the state engaged in a policy of legitimacy by "Kazakhness" and "Kazakhstanness." From the Kazakh nationalist movements and Kazakh nationalism, "Kazakhness" gave the state a concrete identity and historical genesis. By the adoption of certain nationalist imperatives, such as the promotion of the titular language and policies of ethnic repatriation, Kazakhstan became regionally distinct, and gained legitimacy as a Kazakh ethnic homeland, both internally and externally. Elaborations of "Kazakhstanness," brought on a growing civic identity, wherein all ethnic groups could be treated equally under the law, and co-opted their support whilst allowing them to remain distinct.<sup>149</sup> This brought about an odd paradox, wherein the Kazakh nationality and others continued to be distinct, yet Kazakhs were

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<sup>148</sup> Eva-Marie Dubuisson & Anna Genina. "Claiming an Ancestral Homeland: Kazakh Pilgrimage and Migration in Inner Asia." P. 469-85

<sup>149</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism" 155

*primus inter pares*, and the state achieved legitimacy from two orthogonally aligned national ideologies. The Soviet Russian Big Brother was traded for a Kazakh one. It led to a “repression of nationalism, yet an agreement that Kazakhstan is a Kazakh homeland.”<sup>150</sup> At the same time, this homeland narrative could radicalize certain Kazakh groups, who either believed they were owed something from the government, or owed a debt from non-Kazakhs, and non-Kazakhs never truly became “Kazakhstani”.<sup>151</sup>

When Kazakhstan became independent in December 16, 1991, it did so amid a flurry of economic and social problems. Independence was massively unpopular, with 62 percent of the population thinking it was a “great misfortune”.<sup>152</sup> During this period, Nazarbayev himself tried to strengthen the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to reduce the economic and political impact following the break-up of the U.S.S.R..<sup>153</sup> He also tried to create a Eurasian Union consisting of Kazakhstan and the southern Central Asian Soviet Republics. Neither a Eurasian Union nor a strong CIS came to pass, and to Nazarbayev’s loud and public disappointment, Kazakhstan’s independence came within great economic turmoil.<sup>154</sup> There was rampant hyper-inflation of 2600 percent annually, a forced shift out of a collapsing ruble zone, and shifting price controls in Russia which forced market reforms in Kazakhstan. In addition, most of the money owed to Soviet pensioners and retirees had been kept in Moscow, which now refused to release the funds, forcing Kazakhstan, in a sense, to pay for access to the money of its

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<sup>150</sup> Martha Brill Olcott. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* 53

<sup>151</sup> See Alexander C. Diener "Imagining Kazakhstani-stan: Negotiations of Homeland and Titular Nationality"

<sup>152</sup> Martha Brill Olcott. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* 43

<sup>153</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan...* 38-45

<sup>154</sup> Peyrouse, 31 – see also Aitken, 106-112

<sup>154</sup> Martha Brill Olcott. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* 43

<sup>154</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan...* 38-45



citizens.<sup>155</sup> Most of these funds were held outside the country by private international firms until 2013, and a total of 15 percent of the total funds were lost.<sup>156</sup> Kazakhstan could not pay wages or pensions, could not refine its own underdeveloped oil reserves, and had a sweeping series of northern hydroelectric plants which only fed into Russian industry across the border, bringing about an energy crisis in an oil rich state.<sup>157</sup> Beyond this, there were fuzzy borders between Kazakhstan, Russia and China, and the largest protests in Kazakh history at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, now that the legacy of Soviet testing became public knowledge. Billions of dollars, and thousands of nuclear missiles now needed to be managed by a state which had little internal financial or security infrastructure.

Young Kazakhstan was truly a country where “internal issues were far greater than external concerns”.<sup>158</sup> Russia, as it seemed at the time, would have a future, and thus, a grand exodus of Russians left the steppe for their ‘homeland.’ After the exodus of two million Russians from across Kazakhstan, both rural and urban areas were left depopulated, and devoid of engineers, doctors, and skilled bureaucrats. Making matters worse, Russian mayors in northern Kazakhstan had been stirred up by Russian nationalists such as Solzhenitsyn and Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and demanded their oblasts be annexed to Russia as part of the Russian “ancestral hinterland.”<sup>159</sup> This led to widespread Kazakh nationalist counter-protests in Almaty. The fledgling government realized it needed to restrain this national-ethnic furor, before society destabilized, or Russia intervened.

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<sup>155</sup> Aitken, 116 – This event is also elaborated by Peyrouse, 31-35

<sup>156</sup> Assel Tutumlu. "The Rule by Law: Negotiating Stability in Kazakhstan." 11

<sup>157</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan...* 46

<sup>158</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 7

<sup>159</sup> See Aitken, 119 and Olcott, *Kazakhstan...* 25

In addition to gaining Russian-ethnic support, which was at a critical low-point with 88 percent of Russians expressing distrust in the future of Kazakhstan, the government needed to reign in radical Kazakh nationalists as well.<sup>160</sup> This was partially because these national movements tended to be deeply problematic for the government, calling for radical policies. For example, the Jeltoksan political party had originally formed only to demand release of prisoners from the 1986 riots, but then became much more virulent, advocating for Islam to be the center of a “new Kazakh society” and declaring a hatred of everything Russian. It adamantly opposed any and all capitalist market reforms, and urged that Cossacks, on the grounds of historical abuses, be removed from Kazakhstan.<sup>161</sup> Alash (not the 1917 Horde of Alash, but a new group using Alash as a symbol), was pan-Islamic, pan-Turkic<sup>162</sup> and extremely dangerous, as it advocated a new state of “Greater Turkestan” to ‘reclaim’ all Turkic lands of the USSR and expel all Slavic peoples. Azat, an opposition party which had only advocated for independence, a civic nationality based on Kazakhstani national-patriotism, and the Kazakh language, was also caught within the government response.

In response to these groups, the government both coerced them, through carefully considered appeals to their base, and through rule of law, restricting their ability to function. In order to appeal to the second largest demographic, Nazarbayev stacked many positions in the executive branch with Russian administrators.<sup>163</sup> He also maneuvered previous Kazakh nationalists out of power, mostly by granting them the role of Ambassador. Azat and Alash were forcibly liquidated by the government, and the government stopped licensing national-political groups

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<sup>160</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 81

<sup>161</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 159-160

<sup>162</sup> Note: This is a fairly odd feature, as the historical Horde of Alash distinctly advocated a path away from both Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, and the Horde of Alash’s documents were being circulated once more.

<sup>163</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan* 53

altogether, which conveniently precluded Russians from forming any such party. The comparatively popular Republican Party of Kazakhstan waited two years, and went on a hunger strike, but still was not recognized as a legal political organization. Their imprisonment in 1994 sent shockwaves through nationalist and opposition groups, which greatly hindered future demonstrations.<sup>164</sup> The repression continued with the 1995 constitution which reduced political liberties as well as opposition parties and created the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (AKP).

The AKP was a brilliant and timely innovation: as a multi-ethnic democratically elected organization which represented all the ethnicities of Kazakhstan, it gave re-assurance to non-Kazakh nationals that they would have a voice in the new government; it fulfilled the need for a bi-cameral legislature to placate foreign investors, and it allowed Nazarbayev further space to maneuver about the paralyzed Parliament, as the Assembly holds a veto power on all Parliamentary legislation, and is in some ways, a superior entity.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, the 1995 constitution speaks to the people of Kazakhstan, connected by a shared history; it omits all reference to ethnic Kazakhs or “special rights.”<sup>166</sup>

One of the other repressions of independence was the 1986 Jeltoksan riots. Before independence, the Nazarbayev administration had used Kazakh nationalists and this event to claim legitimacy, but in this early period of inter-ethnic turmoil, referring to the incident was harmful in many ways. It supported the radical notion that Russian-Soviet repression of Kazakhs was such that Kazakhs needed restitution, adding fuel to the fire stoked by Alash and other

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<sup>164</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 161

<sup>165</sup> Peyrouse, 32

<sup>166</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan in...* 59

radical nationalists. It was decided examination of the event would do nothing to quell the centrifugal forces within Kazakh nationalism. Further, as the opposition was quick to point out, Nazarbayev had been the second most powerful man in the Kazakh SSR at the time of that great tragedy, and was one of the few Kazakhs whom Kolbin had not fired. They thought that both he and most of the men in power within newly independent Kazakhstan were the same cadres as those during the brutal crackdown of Jeltoksan was inherently dangerous. During this time, the government delayed the report of Shakhanov's commission by two years, despite being the original advocates of the project, and officials went so far to say the event was "mere hooliganism" or some to even ask "what tragedy?"<sup>167</sup> Open discussion of Jeltoksan faded for a time, with a bill to assist victims (and families of victims) of the protest not appearing until 1997, where the atmosphere was beginning to change.<sup>168</sup> This also shows how the new state had begun to interrogate and revise its own national history.

The Transition period between 1998 and 2008 was a period of not-quite-stability. Many of the difficulties of the post-independence period had been dealt with, or at the very least had long-term plans to resolve. National borders were stabilized, the economy and the Kazakh Tenge were stabilizing, and Nursultan Nazarbayev began building his informal apparatus of "soft authoritarianism" which he is known for today. The Russian exodus slowed from a dangerous flood to a steady trickle, and between the high Kazakh birthrate and Kazakh *Oralman*

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<sup>167</sup> Joanna Lillis "Kazakhstan: A Look Back at the Zheltoksan Protest a Quarter-Century Ago." <https://eurasianet.org/s/kazakhstan-a-look-back-at-the-zheltoksan-protest-a-quarter-century-ago>

<sup>168</sup> It should be mentioned that this program dealt out nearly 6 billion tenge in aid over its lifetime, but now only has a budget of 4.7 million tenge for its 35,000 applicants (for a total of 46 cents each), reflecting the general trend within Kazakhstan for sweeping programs to be made, but poorly implemented with neither the human or financial capital. Source: "Press release on the day of remembrance for victims of political repressions." MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN OFFICIAL SITE. <https://www.enbek.gov.kz/en/node/337597>

repatriation both the total population and Kazakh proportion of the population was and is to this day steadily rising.<sup>169</sup> With this demographic change, a new generation of Kazakhstan-born technocrats came into adulthood. Many were trained in the US and Europe, and could fulfill tasks in a modern financial world. Due to this, Nazarbayev began filling the ranks of the executive branch with young Kazakh professionals, an action sudden and sweeping which left the opposition newspaper *Respublika* to exclaim: “The President has decided to bet on a bunch of thirty year olds!,” as it correctly foresaw a complete rotation of Nazarbayev’s personal cabinet, all the way up to prime minister.<sup>170</sup> This also matched the development of the Nur Otan political party, which quickly put a new, young generation of Kazakh politicians below Nazarbayev.<sup>171</sup>

This new generation of elites were met with a new generation of Kazakh nationalists and organizers, as the national movements became aware that engaging with politics led to censure, but national groups outside of politics, particularly in the literary field, found excellent support. Despite the crushing of Azat and Alash, national dissidence continued unabated in the academic world and the literary world.<sup>172</sup> Within this more open atmosphere, Azat was reconstituted as a non-political organization in 2005, and Kazakh language organizations, from *Ana Til Qogami* [ана тіл қоғамі](the mother language society), the *Qazaq Til* (Kazakh language) association, to the Kazakh State Language Movement and many other organizations in a similar vein promoted Kazakh as the Republic’s primary language.<sup>173</sup> Kazakh nationalist newspapers such as *Kazakhskaiia Pravda*, *SolDat*, and *Tribuna* began publication, sometimes with articles as virulent

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<sup>169</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan...* 52

<sup>170</sup> Adilov, Mukhametzhah. "Cadre Devaluation." *Respublika* (Almaty), December 03, 2004. Trans: Z. Slykhouse

<sup>171</sup> Peyrouse, 35

<sup>172</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 156

<sup>173</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 161

as post-independent nationalists, bemoaning the very existence of other ethnicities within the Kazakhstan.<sup>174</sup> Some new nationalist groups began to form such as *Ult Tagdyry* [Ұлт тағдыры](Fate of the Nation), which focused like many other groups on the primacy of the Kazakh language, but also encourages non-Kazakhs to “take the opportunity” to leave the country.<sup>175</sup> Other organizations have this duality, such as *Ruhaniyat*, which promotes Kazakh national literacy and environmentalist, but also a staunchly conservative view of Kazakh culture and Islam.

During these years, the state supported movements in Kazakh literature, as well as in modern Kazakh history. Via the *Alash Orda* Fund, works about the Horde of Alash founders, as well as Kazakh historians, are recovered and rehabilitated.<sup>176</sup> One such historical phenomenon thus liberated were the 1986 Jeltoksan Riots. In 2006, “The Dawn of Independence” (Тәуелсіздік таңы) monument was unveiled as a memorial to those who died at during the riots. The context of the riots was heavily altered however, as Nazarbayev said at the dedication ceremony:

“..our young people expressed their protest, as heralds of our independence. State authorities tried to exhibit those events as having nationalistic basis. Some people tried to call those events a collision between different nations, but it was not so, and history has demonstrated that. All what our young people wanted at that time was justice and Kazakhstan’s independence.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for...” 165

<sup>175</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 162

<sup>176</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 161

<sup>177</sup> "President Nursultan Nazarbayev Attends the Opening Ceremony of the 'Tauelsizdik Tany' Monument Devoted to the Events of 16 December, 1986 in the City of Almaty" <http://www.akorda.kz>

This new interpretation of the riots is useful as it provides independent Kazakhstan with a firmer origin, but also hides the years of repression of those events in the Early Independence Period. Further, it alters Jeltoksan in two ways, (1), in that it denies the protestors the content of their protest, away from local sovereignty to independence, and (2) in that the nationalistic furor carried forth by the riots is denied. Nazarbayev's role in the Jeltoksan events has largely been altered as well, with modern portrayals within state media which show him as a "hero and leader of the protest."<sup>178</sup> This stands in stark disagreement with various retellings of the period, from the biographical accounts of Gorbachev, to Kunaev, to two of Nazarbayev's own biographies as well as accounts from various protestors, and should be considered a modern invention of history.<sup>179</sup>

The year 2009 began with what I find to be one of the most striking and peculiar permutations in Kazakhstan's political history – the Kazakh nationalization of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The APK attempted to write an elaboration of its principles in a grand "Doctrine of National Unity." This was to be a great culmination of Kazakhstanness and the Kazakhstani identity. In response, many of the new 'apolitical' nationalist movements went on a hunger strike. Unlike the 1992 hunger strike with Alash and Azat, this one actually worked, and the Doctrine was majorly rewritten. The word "Kazakhstani" was cut entirely from the final

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<sup>178</sup> "Телеканал Алматы. Алматыда Желтоқсан оқиғасына қатысушылар медальмен марапатталды." Almaty.tv: <http://almaty.tv/kz/news/news/almatyda-dgeltoksan-okigasyna-katysushylar-medalmen-marapattaldy>.

<sup>179</sup> See Gorbachev, Mikhail. *Mikhail Gorbachev: Memoirs*. London: Bantam, 1997, 330 // See Kunayev, Dinmukhamed. *O Moem Vremeni*, Almaty: Daur, 1992, page 8 // See Nazarbayev, Nursultan "Nursultan Nazarbayev. A Life Story of the first President of Kazakhstan." Главная лента страны. July 1, 2015. Accessed April 20, 2017. [http://www.kaz.inform.kz/en/nursultan-nazarbayev-a-life-story-of-the-first-president-of-kazakhstan\\_a2927292](http://www.kaz.inform.kz/en/nursultan-nazarbayev-a-life-story-of-the-first-president-of-kazakhstan_a2927292). Section 4 // See Aitken, Jonathan. *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*. London: Continuum, 2010. // See Pannier, Bruce. "Kazakhstan: Jeltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later", *RadioFreeEurope / RadioLiberty* December 14, 2006. Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://www.rferl.org/a/1073453.html> - all of these show categorically different descriptions of what Nazarbayev was doing at the time, and are in disagreement both with each other, as they are with this concept.

draft: the caveat ensuring the future of the Russian language within Kazakhstan was removed, and Kazakhs were called a “core consolidating center” of the country.<sup>180</sup> The APK rests on democratic legal principles, such that it is possible the Kazakh demographic now has greater political implications, or it is possible that the loosening of restrictions on Kazakh national groups, along with the introduction of uncontrollable media space, such as Facebook has created a stronger cadre of Kazakh nationalists. In any case, from this period forward, the APK has repeatedly pushed for goals originally enumerated by the Horde of Alash, by the *glasnost*’ National-Patriots, and by Kazakh opposition groups at the time of independence and their “apolitical” offspring – that of the primacy of the Kazakh language, and the noted primacy of Kazakhs within Kazakhstan.<sup>181</sup>

Through the vehicle of the APK, the state has wrestled with issues deeply nationalistic in character. This includes a shift away from Cyrillic toward a Latin script for the Kazakh language, an idea first put forward in the modern era by the virulent, Pan-Turkic Alash of the 1990s.<sup>182</sup> The concept of a change in the name of the country was hotly debated, both by the broader public and by nationalist groups. Diener hypothesizes it is possible that Kazakhstan did not accept the name *Kazakh Yeli* because there was strong support for an alternative: “the Kazakh Republic.”<sup>183</sup> This is a far more national name. In 2011, the APK stated that it would no longer focus on the “recovery of history” and focus instead on the development of the

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<sup>180</sup> Diener, 139

<sup>181</sup> On April 24, 2013, Nazarbayev addressed the 20th APK session and stated, the above. Two years later, Nazarbayev asked the APK in its 20<sup>th</sup> session to mark March first as a “day of gratitude among ethnic groups toward the Kazakhs.” These and other documents can be found at <http://assemblykz/en/> and show an increasingly nationalizing character.

<sup>182</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 166

<sup>183</sup> Diener, 139



“Kazakhstani identity.”<sup>184</sup> On April 24, 2013, Nazarbayev elaborated this “Kazakhstani Identity:”

“The Kazakh land has united more than 100 ethnic groups. Of course, good cement is needed to turn all this multi-ethnic diversity into a united nation. Today, the main factor cementing the nation is the Kazakh language, the state language.”<sup>185</sup>

That is, the key component of a Kazakhstani identity is the ability to speak fluently in the Kazakh language. In 2015, Nazarbayev addressed the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the AKP. During the session, Nazarbayev proposed a national day of gratitude among ethnic groups toward the Kazakh people, and to mark it on March 1<sup>st</sup>, the anniversary of the founding of the AKP. If this trend continues, non-Kazakhs truly will be second class citizens within the state.

Social media has become a critical tool for Kazakh national groups, as it allows marketplaces of information outside of soft authoritarian control. In these spaces large audiences are able to engage in Kazakh nationalist discourse.<sup>186</sup> The phrases of the Horde of Alash are elaborated, and other phrases are used, such as *Nagyz Kazakh* (Real Kazakh) and *Shala Kazakh* (Half Effort Kazakh) to differentiate between rural Kazakhophile and urban Russian-speaking or ‘Russophile’ Kazakhs.<sup>187</sup> New groups, media outlets, and youth organizations continue to propagate in greater numbers as the government pivots more toward Kazakh ethnic hegemony.

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<sup>184</sup> Diener, 137

<sup>185</sup> Daly, John C.K. "Opinion: Kazakhstan's Unique Assembly of People Maintains Ethnic Harmony." UPI. May 04, 2015. Accessed May 25, 2018. [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Opinion/Outside-View/2015/05/04/Opinion-Kazakhstans-unique-Assembly-of-People-maintains-ethnic-harmony/5051430316093/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Opinion/Outside-View/2015/05/04/Opinion-Kazakhstans-unique-Assembly-of-People-maintains-ethnic-harmony/5051430316093/).

<sup>186</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 156

<sup>187</sup> Laruelle, “Which Future for National...” 157

This leaves Kazakhstan with a government that has become both national in form and national in character, one which allows for debate about the Kazakh national consciousness and which attempts, via the AKP to instill Kazakh characteristics in the non-Kazakh minorities of the state. One wonders where exactly this national shift will end. Will Kazakh nationalism lead to an expulsion of other groups? When Nazarbayev dies, will attempts at multi-ethnic restructuring lead to a second set of Jeltoksan riots? If Kazakh nationalism and the Kazakh identity are so politically potent, how will Kazakhstan interpret the burgeoning crackdown on ethnic Kazakhs in neighboring China? In any case, Kazakh nationalism has shown itself to be a resilient and powerful force within the region, one still used to co-opt legitimacy and build the state.

## Conclusion

Miroslav Hroch writes that a true nationalist is “one who gives absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests.”<sup>188</sup> This document has analyzed the development of Kazakh nationalism via the A-B-C schema of Miroslav Hroch, and has described key transformational crises which have altered Kazakh nationalism. We now see, by recent developments in the AKP and the work of national scholars who have mapped the modern Kazakh national landscape, a nationalism which supports the Kazakh state, and a Kazakhstani state which is actively engaging in nation-building. From once struggling to find a common national character in order to struggle effectively against a higher power, Kazakhs, a well-defined nation are now *primus inter pares* in their own sovereign nation-state.

One wonders to the extent this nation-state relationship will govern the future. Will Kazakhstan become akin to Latvia – an ethnic hegemony? Will non-Kazakhs continue to be treated fairly in the new order? Will this critical relationship lead Kazakhstan into conflict with its neighbors (particularly China) over issues affecting Kazakh populations in their borders? Kunayev showed how powerful Kazakh nationalism could be as a state-making political apparatus. 1986 showed just how powerful Kazakh nationalism could be as a centrifugal force and a foundation of protest. Even should this not fall to extremes, the history of Kazakh nationalism as a force is a potent one, and one which should not be ignored in the coming decades.

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<sup>188</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe” 62

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**Zackary Thomas Slykhouse**  
ztslykho@iu.edu

**Education**

B.A. – Saginaw Valley State University, University Center, MI, 2015  
History, Minor in English Literature  
M.A. – Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, 2018  
Central Eurasian Studies  
Non-Degree – Kimep University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2015-2016  
High School – Midland High School, Midland, MI, 2006-2010

**Work Experience (Academic)**

Saginaw Valley State University  
Research Assistant for Dr. Jennifer Stinson, Fall 2013-Winter 2014  
As a Research Assistant, I collected and analyzed a large swath of census information, 1830-1860 newspaper articles from microfiche, databases, and archival texts.

**Other Relevant Experience**

Member of Association of Central Eurasian Studies (ACES), 2016-2017  
President of Association of Central Eurasian Studies (ACES) Fall, 2017  
Vice President of Association of Central Eurasian Studies (ACES) Winter, 2018  
The Association of Central Eurasian Studies held international academic conferences, celebrated Central Asian holidays locally, and promoted the study of Central Asia on the IU campus. Working closely with faculty and other students, the organization provides an active core to CEUS student life.  
Secretary of Indiana University Baha'i Club, Fall 2016-Winter 2018  
Dzhungar Mountains Archaeological Project, Kazakhstan June-July 2014  
Spent 30 days along the Chinese-Kazakhstani border excavating a variety of Bronze Age (1800-3000 B.C.E.) nomadic sites, cleaning and cataloging more than 1,000 artifacts.  
Lived in tents under intense working, team and research conditions. Studied Russian and Kazakh while practicing both languages with local populations.  
Secretary and Founding Member of Phi Alpha Theta History Honors Society, March 2014  
Wrote the constitution and worked with faculty to form the first History Honors Society at Saginaw Valley State University. Helped students with papers, grants, and applications to graduate school.  
Dormitory President of Summit Dormitory at Michigan Technological University, 2010-2012

**Scholarships and Awards**

2014 Hoffman-Willertz Award for Excellence in the Field of History, \$1200 award.

**Language Skills**

Russian (Reading)  
Kazakh (Advanced)